

undertaken to consider a number of other recommendations contained in the commission's review of sedition laws that was released last week. But the most fundamental change is finished.

That having been said, I say it was a dishonest approach by the Attorney-General in the first place to refer the sedition laws to the Law Reform Commission. He basically should have stuck to his digs and said, 'I'm not changing and I'm not sending it off for review.' The review was an independent review and it showed that in effect there were some problems. This is what is said in the list of recommendations on page 22, under the heading 'Sedition and Freedom of Expression':

Peak arts and media organisations should provide educational programs and material to their members to promote a better understanding of:

- (a) the scope of federal, state and territory laws that prohibit the urging of political or inter-group force or violence; and
- (b) any potential impact of these laws on these activities of their members.

Under the heading 'The Sedition Offences' it states:

Section 80.2 of the *Criminal Code* (Cth) should be amended to provide that, for a person to be guilty of any of the offences under s 80.2, the person must intend that the urged force or violence will occur.

So it is imputing an intention. Again, under 'Urging Political Force or Violence', it states:

The word 'intentionally' should be inserted into s 80.2 (1) ...

What worries me is that the Attorney-General is becoming so obstinate in relation to some of these things that he is actually becoming quite a danger as Attorney-General to both the government and society at large. With the government controlling both the lower house and the upper house, it does not need minor parties' support, but it becomes a real problem if you have an Attorney who is just intransigent. I know that the backbench committee of the government is a good backbench committee in this area and that it challenges on a lot of areas. But that of itself is not sufficient to rein in the Attorney. I am not saying that the Attorney does not genuinely believe that what he is doing is in the best interests, but what I am saying is that his view alone should not prevail over all others.

I liked the approach of the former Attorney-General, the Hon. Daryl Williams, who I found was someone who was amenable to the opposition approaching him and having an argument on the merits, and who, where possible, was accommodating of those arguments. So at the end of the day most of the terrorism laws and the ASIO legislation passed with bipartisan support. I note that the Attorney is now talking about bringing in a longer period of detention of 28 days, so revisiting the scene of the crime.

I think that, in terms of this matter, the Attorney-General would be better served to accept the independent Law Reform Commission's view on sedition. I do not believe that the sky will fall in. I believe it is an improvement on the law as currently enacted and I am not alone in that view. It is not necessarily the weight of numbers, but as it was initially drafted and as it has been codified it is an anachronistic law. I think that the Attorney in this instance should be a little more willing, having commissioned a report, to accept the independent umpire. I think it is fair to say that many people thought that the Law Reform Commission would go further—and it did not—in relation to a number of recommendations. Those recommendations have, in the main, been accepted by the broader community.

I say this to the Attorney-General: being tough is not the only qualification required of an Attorney-General. There is an element of fairness, there is an element of balance that has to be brought into the equation so that you do not have an imbalance in our legislation that would see people wrongly picked up who are not the sort of people that we are after.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Neville**) adjourned.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Debate resumed from 13 September, on motion by **Mr Lloyd**:

That the House:

- (1) recognises that local government is part of the governance of Australia, serving communities through locally elected councils;
- (2) values the rich diversity of councils around Australia, reflecting the varied communities they serve;
- (3) acknowledges the role of local government in governance, advocacy, the provision of infrastructure, service delivery, planning, community development and regulation;
- (4) acknowledges the importance of cooperating with and consulting with local government on the priorities of their local communities;
- (5) acknowledges the significant Australian Government funding that is provided to local government to spend on locally determined priorities, such as roads and other local government services; and
- (6) commends local government elected officials who give their time to serve their communities.

upon which **Mr Albanese** moved by way of amendment:

That paragraph (1) be omitted and the following paragraph substituted;

“(1) supports a referendum to extend constitutional recognition to local government in recognition of the essential role it plays in the governance of Australia.”

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)—The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (5.19 pm)—I welcome the motion before the chamber today and the amendment that has been put by the member for Grayndler that would see a referendum for constitutional amendment to recognise local government. Local councils are an important part of our system of government and a vital part of our communities. As the tier of government closest to the community, they have the capacity to react quickly to changed circumstances, more closely represent the views and aspirations of their communities and provide better direct services. They do a great deal often with very limited resources. That is no more so than in regional and rural areas. Councils in regional and rural areas face all sorts of challenges that metropolitan councils do not even encounter. Small rate bases, a range of geographical challenges and diverse service requirements are but a few. Despite these challenges, local governments in regional and rural areas are out there delivering much needed services, infrastructure and development.

In my own electorate I am lucky enough to have four outstanding local governments which support and enrich their respective communities at the grassroots level—the City of Ballarat, Moorabool Shire Council, Hepburn Shire Council and Golden Plains Shire. The City of Ballarat is the largest local government area in my electorate. Ballarat has a diverse and rich economy, which the City of Ballarat does an outstanding job in supporting. Manufacturing, tourism, health and community services, education and retailing are now the key industries in the city. These industries, along with the banking and finance sector and government services, are strengthening Ballarat’s role as a regional service provider. Ballarat has a proactive council which is continuously looking for ways to build a better Ballarat into the future.

The City of Ballarat does not just provide many of the traditional services associated with local government but has also adopted key strategic positions with regard to infrastructure, service delivery, planning and community development. You only have to look at some of the local projects that are currently underway in Ballarat to realise the breadth of work undertaken by the council and its officers. There is the Ballarat Aquatic Centre dry areas redevelopment. This includes upgrading the gymnasium and program areas of the facility, relocating offices, and creating new health suites and entrance and water play elements, valued at approximately \$1 million. Part of this development has seen the city very strongly promoting health and wellbeing within the community as well as providing a world-class facility for people within Ballarat to enjoy their recreation time.

The Delacombe and Wendouree West neighbourhood renewal projects are things that council has been actively involved in. These projects are supported by state government initiatives and they look at two neighbourhoods with high levels of public housing. Support has included the development of physical infrastructure including parks and community arts projects, holiday programs, youth events, facility redevelopment and community development projects with a range of community groups, schools and organisations within these two neighbourhoods. The Strengthening Generations program of the City of Ballarat and its local community services have also facilitated two working groups: Family Harmony and the Drug Education Working Group. This program targets key areas that impact on young people that the community has identified as social priorities through the research and evidence-collecting phase. To address these issues, coordinated community driven prevention plans have been developed.

The City of Ballarat not only supports the types of projects I have just been discussing but major events such as the Begonia Festival, the Royal South Street Competition and sporting events involving both local people and participants from a large district. These kinds of events are the lifeblood of regional communities and yet another example of how local government plays a fundamental role in supporting community life in regional towns. The mayor, Councillor David Vendy, and his council have a tough job: growing the local economy at the same time as preserving our unique heritage, balancing the needs of an increasing urban population at the same time as assisting the rural parts of the city grapple with loss of services, drought and population drifts. I wish to congratulate the City of Ballarat council and staff on their work and I also want to wish them well for the upcoming World Conference of Historical Cities that Ballarat has been lucky enough to be able to secure in just a few months time.

Moorabool shire, another local government area in my electorate, is a very different local government area. It has approximately 27,000 residents and combines country living with easy access to the city, being only 35 minutes from the heart of the city centre. It is packed with many small rural towns and a large commuter belt from

Bacchus Marsh right the way through along the Western Highway. It has wonderful orchards, deep gorges and forests.

The agricultural industry is still an important sector in the rural areas of the shire and employs a significant proportion of the rural population. But increasingly services, retail, hospitality and tourism have taken over as the main employment industries. Bacchus Marsh and Ballan's employment needs are supported by the community and town centre service sectors, whilst the construction industry is an important sector due to Moorabool's growing population, as many people from the western suburbs of Melbourne move out to find cheap land and cheap housing.

The range and extent of services Moorabool shire provides is impressive, especially in light of their relatively small revenue base, the huge geographical area they have to cover and the large number of small to large towns that come within the shire's gamut. The construction of the Deer Park bypass along the Western Highway is one of the largest and most important infrastructure projects in my electorate. It was the Moorabool shire and particularly the mayor, Councillor Peter Russell, along with the Western Highway Action Committee that led the campaign to secure federal funding for that bypass. There is no doubt that the continuous and passionate lobbying and campaigning of the Moorabool shire was instrumental in getting the federal government to finally commit to funding the bypass. Moorabool shire is the driving partner in the Western Highway Action Committee's work in securing the required funding for a second major infrastructure project along the Western Highway. Anthony's Cutting would deliver similar benefits to business and motorists as would Deer Park.

While on the subject of Anthony's Cutting, I would like to reiterate my support for the project and once again urge the minister to fund its construction. VicRoads have informed me that the planning process is complete and ready to be implemented. The minister concedes that Anthony's Cutting is an extremely important project which will deliver a large number of benefits to the local community. The minister should now back up his convictions and show Moorabool residents that the government is not going to procrastinate, as it did with the Deer Park bypass, but actually fund Anthony's Cutting in the next round of AusLink funding. Now that all the plans are in place, the minister should act. I want to give my congratulations to Councillor Peter Russell, the Mayor of Moorabool Shire, and the staff at Moorabool Shire for the terrific work they are doing in balancing the interests of what is a very diverse shire.

The third shire in my electorate is Hepburn Shire. The natural beauty of the area and its period character have drawn a widening artistic community, providing visitors and the community with performing and visual arts by artists of national and international repute. It is a large tourist destination with Hepburn Springs and Daylesford within it, and 80 per cent of Australia's mineral water is within its district. That one district alone has over 3,000 bed and breakfast beds.

Whilst tourism plays a major role in the area's economy, many more traditional types of commercial enterprises abound, such as the Daylesford Abattoir, a highly modernised pork processing plant with an ever-increasing export focus. As a small rural shire, it has had to work to draw together the many wonderful towns in our area—Creswick, Clunes, Hepburn, Trentham and Lyonville, to name a few, and obviously the larger centre of Daylesford itself. It is a large tourist destination with work also in the hospitality, retail and tourism sectors.

Hepburn Shire has a tough job. It has to balance the very disparate needs of its community. It has a large traditional farming and agricultural sector within the shire—families that have been there for generations. And, of course, we have the tree changers. Many people who are attracted by the beauty of Daylesford and Hepburn Springs and district wish to move from the centre of Melbourne into the area, and they often bring in very new and very different ideas that challenge some of the existing ways of doing things. The council is faced with having to balance all of these. Along with the traditional farming population, Daylesford and Hepburn Shire have one of the highest gay and lesbian populations outside of Sydney and Melbourne, so it is often a tough job with some very differing views on different issues.

I would like to pay congratulations to the mayor, Councillor Heather Mutimer, who is doing a terrific job of balancing the many disparate needs of that community in sometimes very difficult circumstances. I also congratulate her staff. With a very limited small rate base and a large rural area to look after, they are obviously very happy with the government's Roads to Recovery program, but I know that the government could literally double that tomorrow and they still would not even scratch the bucket of the number of bridges and repair works that need to be undertaken within that area.

The fourth local government area within my district is that of Golden Plains Shire. I have only a very small wedge of Golden Plains Shire—the towns of Haddon, Napoleons, Ross Creek and Enfield are in my area. The rest of the towns within Golden Plains Shire are in the member for Corangamite's electorate. I know that sometimes he would like to pinch some of the areas that are in Golden Plains Shire off me.

Mr Neville—I bet he would!

Ms KING—He certainly does. But I am certainly very happy with the towns that have stayed within my district. Golden Plains Shire is quite unique and a great example of a local council area where, with council amalgamations that occurred in the Kennett era in Victoria, a large group of very small towns that had very little connection to one another were placed within one boundary. Some of them were very closely connected to Ballarat; the majority of them were very closely connected to Geelong, and this conglomerate of smaller towns was put together into Golden Plains Shire. They have done some terrific work trying to make sure that everybody within Golden Plains Shire feels a part of the shire while maintaining the unique identity of their town. They made sure that individual towns were allowed to have different signage and so, whilst the overall logo of Golden Plains Shire reflects all of the industries within the area, each of the local areas were allowed to have their own town signage, which enabled them to develop unique identifiers as people entered their districts.

The other thing that the council area has done quite well is to develop community plans and set up strong community advocacy groups within each of those small towns, which then work directly with local council to develop the infrastructure needs and the social service needs for each of those very many disparate towns within the district. I would have to say that, if anyone has a council area that has lots and lots of small towns within it that needs to work out how to work together, Golden Plains Shire is certainly one of those areas that is a very good case example.

Just this weekend I attended a council funded event in Haddon. They had funded the local community action plan committee to the tune of only \$1,000, which does not sound like a huge amount coming from local council, but it enabled the local community of Haddon to put on a three-hour event to thank the volunteers. That was very well organised by Richard Parsons and his hardworking team of people in Haddon. It was really the first time that any of the volunteers within the Haddon community had the opportunity to get together. The CFA talked together with the parents and friends council from the local Haddon primary school—the students of which are here, I understand, in Canberra this week—and were also able to talk closely with some of the 80 or so other community volunteers within the Haddon district.

Haddon is a town. It has a primary school and a general store, but that is pretty much all it has within its public infrastructure. So being able to get all of those volunteers together was a terrific credit to the Golden Plains Shire Council, who funded that local community plan group to put it together. Again I want to recognise the efforts of the Mayor, Councillor David Cotsell, and the staff at Golden Plains Shire for the terrific work that they are doing building and strengthening the Golden Plains district. Again, with a significant amount of growth in the commuter population from Geelong to Ballarat, they have really managed to pull that community together in a very strong way.

As I said at the start, local government is the sphere of government that is closest to the population, most able to adapt to change and to be flexible in its approaches to the community. It does a terrific job in working with local communities on projects and developing their needs. There are greater opportunities that exist for partnerships between the three levels of government, in relation to such things as population health. In particular the areas of environmental health and the development of health and wellbeing are a very important part of what local council does. There are opportunities that exist for funding to be directly given to local government around some of those areas. We do that already with a number of separate, different projects, but, certainly within the realm of population health, there is a long way that federal and state governments can go to make sure that we actually have a better and more diverse base for funding for population health.

I want to commend the motion that is before the chamber at the moment. I think it is a terrific initiative to be debating the role of local government here. I know, prior to the election of the Howard government in 1996, there was a very strong move to get local government actively involved within COAG. That stalled somewhat as COAG stalled, and I am very pleased that the government has now taken up that initiative and started to bring local government back to the table. But I also think that the idea of putting a motion before the Australian people to get them to recognise local government within the Constitution is a very sound thing to do as well.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (5.33 pm)—It is an absolute pleasure to be able to stand to speak on this motion, which recognises the incredibly valuable contribution of local government to the governance of Australia and particularly our local communities, and also on the amendment moved by the member for Grayndler that calls for a referendum to extend constitutional recognition to local government in recognition of the essential role it plays in the governance of Australia.

As the previous speaker, the member for Ballarat, said, it is great to be talking about local government in this place. It is particularly good given the incredible role that local government plays in community development, an area that is very dear to my heart. We have three local councils within my electorate—the local council of Hol-

royd, Baulkham Hills to the north and, of course, Parramatta in the heart of the electorate: three incredibly different local councils, each of which reflects closely the community that they represent.

When I was first elected to this place, I started building a database of community organisations in my electorate believing that, if you want to know what a community is thinking, you look at where the community puts its efforts. The choices that volunteers and people who are community minded make in their local communities are the best indicator of the needs of a local community. What I found was that right there with every volunteer was the local council showing incredibly strong support for the individual choices of community minded people within communities as they made decisions about what their local communities needed. What I found across those three local councils was three completely different kinds of community organisations—and quite different to the kinds of community organisations in the areas where I had previously lived as well.

In Parramatta, you find very strong business community organisations but you also find a large number of volunteer and community organisations and extraordinary local council support for organisations that service the homeless and the disadvantaged, who tend to congregate around large CBDs such as Parramatta. You also find extensive networks of individuals who work with people with disabilities. Because Parramatta Hospital was in its early years the main hospital site for disabled patients, there are an incredible number of community organisations that serve people with mental illness in particular, and again the local council support for those organisations dramatically reflects the community's focus on that.

To the north in Baulkham Hills, which is a slightly leafier and wealthier area, you find a lot more arts and environmental organisations than you do in Parramatta. These, again, are incredibly important, reflecting things that affect people in their daily lives—the things that they need from their community and that they themselves cannot provide as individuals. It is really quite remarkable. Down in Holroyd, where you find greater areas of public housing, a lot more Defence housing and larger migrant communities, particularly new refugee communities, again you find a larger number of community organisations and greater local council support for organisations that serve the needs of those communities.

Local government is at the closest level to our communities. It is at the closest level to what people feel they need to make their lives better on a day-to-day basis. I commend this motion to the House. It is a great one. It is great to recognise the contribution that local government makes, but it is particularly good to have an amendment before the chamber to recognise constitutionally the role that local government plays in the governance of this country. I commend this motion and the amendment to the House.

Mr CREAN (Hotham) (5.37 pm)—I thank the previous speaker for her eloquent speech in support of local government. The motion before us recognises the essential role played by local government in the delivery of services. However, important as the motion is, it does not go far enough. In essence, local government needs actions which support actual recognition, not just motions of support. Labor's amendment to this motion calls for a referendum to extend constitutional recognition to local government. That recognition is an important precursor to a better deal with the other recommendations made in the 2003 Hawker report into local government.

Local government is an established tier of government, yet it is not recognised in Australia's Constitution. This is an anomaly that needs correction. Labor's amendment would move to remedy that. To not support that amendment is to deny the legitimate role of local government in our society. Local government should be constitutionally recognised as a partner to state and federal governments in ideas and development. The constitutional change that we propose heralds an opportunity for a new vision for local government—to recognise local government as part of the governance of Australia and enable it to play a bigger role in determining essential infrastructure needs in our communities. So I support the member for Grayndler's amendment that was moved in the House and also moved in the Senate by the shadow minister for local government, Senator Carr. It is a motion which proposes a referendum to extend constitutional recognition to local government. We support constitutional recognition of local government and we call on the federal government to embrace it.

The problem is that the government has not given a clear reason for its nonsupport of a motion that would argue for constitutional recognition. The government says, as I understand it, that the time is not right. Well, when will it be right? Back in 1988 the then opposition, the Liberal-National Party, opposed a referendum that, amongst other things, would have given the recognition that we seek today. That referendum was tied up with a number of other issues in the context of terms of the parliament, and the opposition of the day, the Liberal-National Party, took a blanket decision to oppose all aspects. It is almost 20 years on, and it is time for a bipartisan position in support of constitutional recognition. Clearly, it failed on the last occasion because there was not that bipartisan support. Labor are proposing that we develop a commitment to that bipartisan support and take the issue on. Bipartisan support would give the electorate confidence to vote in a referendum to support the recognition that we have been outlining.

The government has rejected this new vision for local government and, in doing so, has failed to address the key challenges facing this sphere of government that it has now had more than 10 years to address. The motion we have before parliament is in part a response to the 2003 report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration chaired by Mr David Hawker, who is now the Speaker. Around the traps it is called the Hawker report. It is noteworthy that many submissions to the inquiry did call for the constitutional recognition of local government. This motion does not go far enough in responding to those calls. But, worse, the response by the government to that report, handed down as it was in 2003, also is inadequate. Not only did the government not respond for almost two years to the recommendations contained in the Hawker report, but of the committee's 18 unanimous recommendations—so here was bipartisan support: of the 11 committee members, six represented the government and five represented Labor, and there was good cross-representation of the parliament and the politics involved—the government has only implemented seven in full. The recommendations that it has adopted were essentially those which do not have any cost implications for the government or which fail to address any of the financial issues and structures for financing local government into the future.

It is important to remind the House that the report was unanimous in identifying a range of solutions to support local government, including ensuring appropriate funding for local government from the Commonwealth, saying that there was a need to address such issues as vertical fiscal imbalance and recognising the need to revisit the model used for the allocation of financial assistance grants. Those were all unanimous recommendations from the committee. They are issues that must be responded to. In our view, constitutional recognition would open up new opportunities to address the underlying financial difficulties, structures and parameters that surround the way in which local government is financed in this country. The fact is that councils raise revenue essentially through rates. They cannot access other direct sources of revenue from the Commonwealth. Constitutional recognition, on the other hand, would enable a review of financial arrangements and, if it were proven necessary, a streamlining of Commonwealth financial support to local government. It would also mean that continuing issues such as the fiscal imbalance and cost shifting could be properly considered and debated, and options to resolve those issues could be developed.

What I am pointing to is that recognition within the Constitution lays the basis for addressing the structural reform that is so sorely needed in this area of local government. Constitutional recognition would also enable the structure of Commonwealth-local government arrangements to be reviewed to ensure greater cooperation between the tiers of government. For example, it would enable local government to take part in discussions on critical infrastructure needs for their communities. Local government cannot currently take part in many national programs critical to their communities.

Local government in fact continues to plug many gaps in service delivery where other service providers have left town. This is particularly true in rural and remote areas. Local government has also taken a leadership role in fostering and coordinating regional development. In visiting many regional areas over many years, one cannot help being impressed by the tireless work undertaken by local government, often voluntarily, to drive their regional areas forward. It is time that we cement and recognise that role.

It is interesting to see that the President of the Australian Local Government Association, Councillor Paul Bell, has argued that parliamentary recognition in the motion is 'largely symbolic'. Councillor Bell, speaking on behalf of the local government sector, said that the motion is only one step in the right direction and that the government must go further and acknowledge the value of formal constitutional recognition of local government. Labor's amendment does that and I urge the government to consider adopting it.

As important as the role of local government is, it is also critical that there be a Commonwealth role in regional development. The remoteness of some regions and the diversity of others demands Commonwealth leadership and commitment. It is a role to not only address market failures and to provide services but essentially to empower regions to more fully realise their potential. The Commonwealth cannot work for the benefit of our regions in isolation. It must be done in partnership with local communities, with the stakeholders and with leaders in other levels of government.

Local government has already proven itself to be a driver of regional development in this country. It is often done, as I said before, voluntarily, with creativity and enthusiasm by local councils. We can point to many good examples of best practice, including the Cradle Coast Authority, which was created to coordinate and drive regional economic development across nine local government areas in north-west Tasmania. That was a great example of initiative taken by a range of local governments in that area. The Cradle Coast Authority is actually identifying the needs of its region and has developed agreements with both the Commonwealth and Tasmanian governments to develop positive outcomes.

Local industry is also being driven by local government in examples such as the proposal for the Ararat renewable energy park. The proposed park has the potential to establish the region as a centre for excellence for manufacturing components for the renewable energy industries, not only creating jobs—up to 700 of them—but also attracting significant new investment into the regions. Without that creativity, without that enthusiasm of local government, these new initiatives quite frankly would not be taken forward. So local government must be given the encouragement and support to continue to play that role by drawing on the commitment and expertise of their leaders. Constitutional recognition would legitimise that role, following through on the other recommendations contained in the Hawker report.

My colleagues and I have been engaged in consultation with regional and local stakeholders for a considerable period of time. What is clear is that regions themselves know what is best for them and how to make the most of their opportunities. The role for the Commonwealth is to support local enthusiasm and local solutions—but solutions which stack up. I support a broader mandate and wider role for the area consultative committees. They are ideally placed to develop strategic economic plans and regional priorities in partnership with local stakeholders including, significantly, local government. The ACCs are also ideally placed to build the networks and partnerships with all sectors, including local government, which are invaluable to meet regional development goals. It is not about creating another level of government but about supporting local government to participate in the development of their regions. It is about empowering local communities with access to national programs and implementing regional and local solutions and strategies without creating an extra tier of government. Local government is an invaluable resource, and the opportunity must not be wasted. Who better to know what the local needs of their communities are than those at the coalface?

So, in the context of a broader approach that could be developed in terms of regional development, this amendment that we are moving, in our view, is critical to move us forward. It is long overdue. It requires bipartisan support, but it lays the basis for genuinely involving more effectively the three tiers of government. That is the solution to regional economic development. It is a plan and a strategy that Labor will develop. This is but one component of developing that agenda.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (5.52 pm)—I am pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the debate on this motion in support of local government. This motion goes some way to giving local government the recognition it has been striving to achieve for many years, and I hope it is the start of a stronger and more direct relationship between the federal government and local governments around the country. That goal was certainly one of the messages that came out loud and clear from local governments throughout the inquiry in 2002. It is certainly the message that I get when I talk to mayors and councillors from the councils within the electorate of Capricornia. Those councils know the challenges and opportunities that exist in their communities and how much they could achieve if their role was properly recognised and resourced by the federal government.

Considering the level of support for the motion coming from the speakers from both sides of the House, one wonders why it has taken so long to bring it before the parliament. After all, this motion comes from the inquiry into local government and the report from that inquiry that was tabled in parliament back in 2003. So it is a little disappointing that it has taken so long for the government to bring this motion before the parliament, particularly when the local government sector cooperated so constructively with the Hawker inquiry. From reading the report, it is obvious that the local government sector right across the country, through its peak body representatives, put in a concerted effort to raise its concerns. The sector also made it very clear that local governments are more than ready to work in full partnership with the federal government to solve issues in their local communities. Local government just needs the other levels of government to get on board.

This motion is part of that process. Even so, the recommendation in the report that this motion be put to the parliament was something of a compromise, and less than the full constitutional recognition that local government deserves. It appears that the committee took the pragmatic view that, while constitutional recognition is desirable, the adoption of this motion by the parliament has been accepted as a more achievable option. I note that my colleague the member for Grayndler has moved an amendment to this motion calling for a referendum to amend the Constitution and formally recognise the place of local government within our system of government. I agree, and I join with the member for Hotham in his comments that we should be using this debate to further that argument. And I want to place on the record my support for the member for Grayndler's amendment.

I also want to use this speech to pay tribute to the councils within the electorate of Capricornia and the work they do to serve the communities of our region. The motion refers to the rich diversity of councils around Australia reflecting the varied communities they serve. That rich diversity of councils is apparent even within the boundaries of Capricornia. There are 10 councils contained within Capricornia and they range from the beaches of Livingston shire on the Capricorn coast to the proud old town of Mount Morgan and the booming coal communities of the Daringa, Banana, Broadsound, Nebo, Bowen and Belyando shires. In between is the major regional

centre of Rockhampton and the Fitzroy shire, which is at the very heart of the beef industry. There is certainly plenty of diversity in that list.

What these councils all have in common is that they are at the forefront of dealing with the rapid population growth and development that is sweeping through central Queensland, thanks to the booming demand for our coal. Throughout the Hawker inquiry report there are quotes from councillors saying that they are in the level of government which is at the coalface of serving community needs and meeting community expectations. Nowhere is that more literally the case than in Central Queensland, where the coal boom is forcing councils to accept responsibilities beyond their traditional roles and frequently beyond their resources. While the federal government pockets—or some would say squanders—the dividends of the resources boom, the local councils of Central Queensland are dealing with the demands that the boom is placing on regional infrastructure, both physical and social. Councils are dealing with the enormous challenge of finding accommodation for the thousands of workers and their families who are pouring into the region to keep the mines cranking up production. Councils are trying to find ways to meet the social and recreational needs of all these extra people.

When the federal government thinks of the coal industry it thinks only in terms of the multinational mining companies, their development plans and the export revenue involved. But it is not that way for the councils. Of course, local councils have relationships with the mining companies and they are intimately involved with the developments that are going on in the Bowen Basin. But councils worry about more than just the mines; they also see the people. They see the people who work in the mines and their families. Importantly, they also see the rest of the community that supports the mining industry and its workers: the nurses, the computer technicians, the small business people, the cooks at the single persons quarters—and the list goes on. Where do all those people live? Can they find houses? If they find houses, can they afford to pay the rent if they are not earning a miner's salary?

It is not easy living in a mining town if you are not working in the industry or some associated business. If you are a receptionist at one of the motels or an apprentice chef at the local pub, you still need a roof over your head and you are still paying the high prices for fuel and groceries without the salary that can compensate a little for the high cost of living in a mining town. The councils in the Central Queensland coal towns are stepping in to try to address the shortage of housing and, more particularly, the shortage of affordable housing. They have to do that to make sure that their towns can stay viable and to make sure that staff can be found to maintain all of the other services that a community needs to flourish. They also want to address the housing shortage so that they can preserve the communities that many of the councillors have been building for several decades.

The boom has brought with it many benefits and opportunities for the coal towns but also tensions over the influx of the hundreds, or possibly thousands, of short-term workers who fly in and fly out of the towns or, more often in Central Queensland, drive in and drive out between the coast where their families live and the mining towns where the workers are employed. Is it possible to maintain a sense of community in a town when there are hundreds of strangers coming in and out, with no connection to the place other than a job which requires them to work 12-hour shifts? When you are working 12-hour shifts and catching up on vital sleep in between, there is no time to make the social connections that used to characterise the mining towns of the Bowen Basin in the 1970s and right up to the early 2000s. Again, councils are dealing with those questions and trying to find ways to strengthen their communities in the face of the boom rather than allowing them to become no more than dormitories.

This brings me back to the point of the motion and the findings of the inquiry. We in the federal sphere of government have to do more to acknowledge just how much local government brings to our democracy and to our system of government. Local government is right where the action is, meeting the most basic needs of the community and often becoming aware of problems and responding to them much faster and more effectively than the more powerful and cashed-up counterparts at federal and state levels. The partnership between the federal government and local councils has to be made stronger and more equal, so that when councils identify the services and infrastructure that are required there is a quicker and better targeted response from federal government. I seek leave to continue my remarks when the debate is resumed.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 6.01 pm