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House of Assembly
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Commissioner for Kangaroo Island Bill

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:43 :54): I rise today to speak to the Commissioner for Kangaroo Island Bill 2014 which was introduced on 8 May 2014 by the Attorney-General, and I note that we certainly will not be supporting this bill in this place. This bill seeks to establish a commissioner to provide for the development of management plans in relation to the coordination and delivery of infrastructure and services on Kangaroo Island and other matters relating to Kangaroo Island and for other purposes.

What the minister believes is already happening is that matters concerning Kangaroo Island—and the rest of the state just misses out—do not reach the relevant ministers, and government departments do not consider the needs of Kangaroo Island residents and visitors when making decisions. I would say that is a pretty big failing of government departments and ministers alike.

The objective of the bill is to provide Kangaroo Island with a voice in cabinet via a responsible minister and supposedly to assist in streamlining infrastructure and service projects. Certainly, as a member in this house who has a regional electorate, I know these are problems faced right across country electorates. As I indicated earlier, it is interesting that the Attorney-General has singled out Kangaroo Island to establish a commissioner instead of working to fix the management of government so that all regions are better serviced. I note that we have not heard from the regional development minister on this bill.

Challenges obviously exist in the delivery of infrastructure and services to grow the economy. I note that Kangaroo Island has a small population of around 4,600 and a small ratepayer base of approximately 1,400. The Kangaroo Island Council struggles financially to deliver the necessary services and some 40 per cent of ratepayers do not live on Kangaroo Island. I note from my trips over to the island as a member in this place that the roads are in constant need of repair. There are many kilometres of roads and so much other work that can be done. I also note that in 2012-13, in regard to their rate base and their ability to raise funds, the Kangaroo Island Council recorded a net loss of \$1.8 million. I also note that one-third of Kangaroo Island consists of government owned land, which is non-rateable and does not contribute to council revenue.

In his second reading speech, the minister talked about the delivery of state government services and the fact that they suffer from three interrelated major problems from the Kangaroo Island perspective. Firstly, there is a lack of critical mass in any of these agencies

that can be devoted to Kangaroo Island issues. Secondly, the delivery of services tends to be Adelaide or mainland focused. (We all find out that they are Adelaide focused if we live in a regional electorate; there is nothing surer.) Thirdly, there is a lack of any one or more networks joining up services with a Kangaroo Island focus.

I really struggle that agencies, ministers and departments cannot reach out to Kangaroo Island. You can fly there in a plane quicker than you can drive from here to Mount Barker, way out in the regions of South Australia, where as we have heard cabinet had one of their country cabinet meetings the other day. It is just incredible. Whether it is a departmental head, working groups in departments or a minister and their staff, there is no issue with the time to get to Kangaroo Island.

The minister considers that establishing this commissioner for Kangaroo Island will better deliver for Kangaroo Island. What has the government been doing for the last 12 years? Not much. This bill will create a single Kangaroo Island authority that sits above the various state government bodies responsible for service delivery and is not answerable to them but rather to a minister. The stated position is that the commissioner would not replace local government but would sit alongside it. I think the local government has been sold a pup. They really need to rethink their position where they have been supporting the idea of a commissioner for Kangaroo Island.

I know local government is up for election and I know nominations have to be in by today, but talk about forecasting your own destiny. I think the Kangaroo Island Council, in endorsing this position, is forecasting its own destiny, in that it may not exist very long into the future at all. Why would you talk about supporting a commissioner when, if the council was doing its job and the government was doing its job, all the issues in focus on Kangaroo Island could be dealt with?

We also have the Regional Development Authority Board which is another body that is involved in decision-making and has plans for all the regions around the state. Certainly, the board in charge of Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island has plans in place. Why isn't the government already working with local government and the RDA to make sure that the infrastructure is in place, that the plans are put in place, and that there is action happening rather than just setting up another bureaucracy? With regard to the commissioner, the proposed role will supposedly:

- improve the management, coordination and delivery of infrastructure and services provided by government agencies on Kangaroo Island;
- assist improve the local economy, including the marketing of products and the development of the tourism economy;
- prepare and review management plans dealing with the delivery of government projects and services to the island; and
- have responsibility for coordinating and using existing public servants and programs to deliver outcomes in line with a regionalisation of policy formation.

I reckon that last one is a long way of saying, 'Get the public servants over there and have a look,' which they could be doing now without having to refer to a commissioner for

Kangaroo Island. We also see that the role of the commissioner would have the power to establish local advisory boards. How much more bureaucracy do we need? The role will also prepare and deliver to the minister an annual report on the operations of the commissioner and any local advisory boards in the implementation of the management plans.

It is noted from the briefings given to the opposition that it is anticipated that the commissioner and any local advisory boards would have two full-time equivalent support staff based within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and at the time of the announcement the cost of having a commissioner was expected to be \$860,000 over four years, as outlined in a media release dated February 2014. That cost now appears to be far greater because the 2014-15 budget outlines \$5.6 million over four years for the Kangaroo Island commissioner and the Kangaroo Island Futures Authority.

Mr Pengilly: That would seal a few kilometres.

Mr PEDERICK: Absolutely right! The development and implementation of management plans is a key component of the bill, and the legislation supposedly provides the framework to enable the commissioner to prepare and implement management plans which take precedence over other state authority management plans. Management plans must be approved by cabinet and, if there are conflicting positions between two separate agencies in relation to a management plan, the commissioner will make the final recommendation to the minister/cabinet. What we are setting up is a little dictatorship, a little dictator, to take over Kangaroo Island and this person will have the ultimate say in the end on—

Mr Knoll: Is there a former Labor minister that you know of?

Mr PEDERICK: Yes—on what goes on. This is a bit of a ridiculous statement but if we considered the equivalent population density across the state of one commissioner for 4,600 people, we would need 304 commissioners. We would have one for every 4,600 people. I know that is ridiculous, but that is how ridiculous this is because that is what is happening. The government is setting up a grand bureaucracy to oversee Kangaroo Island. Kangaroo Island is a great place. I visited there as a kid and had friends go over there who used to be at Coomandook. Mr Harrison was the principal at Kingscote.

Mr Pengilly: You have been to the odd fire.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, I went to help clean up after the fires in 2007. I sought advice from the local member, the member for Finniss, while I was over there trying to sort out a few issues on where we were actually going on the Sunday—but that is another matter that we do not need to go into here today! It is a great place. I have gone over there for meetings on issues regarding the sawmill and plantation forestry and there are a lot of issues involved with that. I have met with the Fryars and others with regard to free-range eggs and the great work they do and the great opportunity they have over there because of the lack of foxes.

Mr Pengilly: I do not think the commissioner will unscramble that.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes. As the member for Finniss rightly said: fix the transport issues and the access to Kangaroo Island. So many people who I know, and even I myself think that if I want to take my family to the island it will cost so much and so you do not go.

There is so much opportunity, so many hundreds of kilometres of roads where this money could be spent. There needs to be work done on the power connection for the island to make sure that the infrastructure is kept up to speed. As the member for Finniss said, some of these people are living in almost third world conditions, yet we have a minister endorsing another level of bureaucracy to set up advisory boards under that, citizens juries and whatever else, when all of these matters could be sorted out through the bodies that are in place.

Time and time again, we hear in this great state and this great country of ours that some people think we are overgoverned because we have the three levels of government: local, state and federal, and here we are setting up another one under this bill. It is just crazy stuff. You would have thought that with 12 ministers and the couple of hangers on that they have employed, in ministers Brock and Hamilton-Smith, that we would get some decent outcomes and not just through those ministers and their ministerial staff, of which they have at least 10 each, but their departments, some with well over 1,000 people in the department (many departments) through the Public Service. But no, none of that seems to work. None of that has seemed to work for the last 12 years that this Labor government has been in power. So, we are going to set up one little dictator who can override everything and decide that, 'If these plans don't look like they're going to merge I'm going to settle on the recommendation to the minister and cabinet.' It just does not add up.

In times when things are tough we see the government reaching out with its land tax, the emergency services levy. This is a government that makes out that it is recognising the role that farmers and primary producers make in this great state and yet here it is raising this land tax, because that is what the emergency services levy is. We talked about it earlier today in question time: we have seen rises of 600 and 700 per cent, and I know there have been other rises of over 1,000 per cent, and it is going to kill off people's ability to grow food.

This government decided it was going to recognise growing food from our clean green environment because the Olympic Dam expansion did not go on but then all it wants to do is hurt the people who are growing this food. Today, we had the Treasurer, who has absolutely no idea, looking up the emergency services levy brackets for people who might have property worth over \$5 million or \$10 million and then saying, 'We are hitting the wealthy.' Obviously, he has not heard of asset rich, cash poor, which many people are, especially with regard to the primary production sector.

Many people do not have any spare cash to do anything else, or for any extra things or any niceties in life. Yes, they might have properties worth \$1 million or they might have properties worth \$10 million, but they all live their lifestyles in line with what they can earn off of those properties and the investment they have made to grow food for this great state and country. When you have people say, 'We're just taxing the rich'—basically it is a Robin Hood idea they have taken: tax the rich to help the poor—I do not take to that. Essentially,

what it is doing is putting a land tax on our farmers so that they cannot do well what they are already doing well into the future.

I am more than intrigued, I am a bit stunned that this bill has even come into this place. It seems extremely Mickey Mouse. I cannot understand, with all the bureaucracies that are in place, whether it be through local government, Regional Development Australia, the state government or federal government, how this is the best the state Labor government can come up with in 12 years.