



29 October 2008

Council Employees Safe but Councils at Risk

Greg Piper, Member for Lake Macquarie and Mayor for Lake Macquarie, spoke in Parliament today against the Local Government Amendment (Legal Status) Bill, saying that while it would protect the rights of employees it could jeopardise councils.

According to Mr Piper the Bill is a two edged-sword as it ensures that council staff are protected from the former Howard government's Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) but it does this by changing the legal status of councils in a way that is likely to have unforeseen consequences.

Speaking in the Legislatively Assembly today Mr Piper said "My understanding is that local government employees' entitlements are preserved through to 2010 and this is certainly the case in Lake Macquarie." "On the other hand, it may well be that this Bill will create significant unforeseen impacts on local government."

"For example, re-defining a council as a 'body politic' rather than the existing legal status of a corporation could affect its ability to enter into contracts," said Mr Piper. "The fact is, there has been no consultation with councils and no explanation of potential legal implications. If new legislation creates new minefields they will be left to councils to fix through the courts."

The other effect of the Bill is to allow councils to appoint temporary staff for up to 24 months.

Mr Piper said "Councils would support increasing the maximum terms for temporary appointments from one year to two years as it will make it easier to maintain a stable workforce while staff are on maternity leave or other similar breaks."