

# Glenn CHURCHILL

Federal Candidate for Flynn



## Submission to the Inquiry into the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007

The right to vote is sacred, as is the freedom of speech in our democracy.

The Queensland State Labor Government has attempted to imprison the right to vote and silence free speech through the imposition of draconian and tyrannical state legislation crafted by the Queensland State Labor Premier and the Labor State Minister for Local Government.

Amendments to the Queensland Local Government Act which were passed into law were designed to obstruct any Council from conducting polls as to whether their electors support Labor's forced amalgamation of their local Council, by threatening elected members of Councils with fines and dismissal.

This State legislation was purposefully designed to stop people from having their say.

This assault on people's democratic rights has been perpetrated by the Labor Party deliberately to silence rural and regional communities and force them into submission as their democratically elected local government, the level of government closest to the people, is decimated, without any reference to the people who installed them.

While the substance of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007 deals with giving Queenslanders their voice back, it is important to consider this Bill in context of historical facts that brought us to this point.

The Goss Labor Government started forced amalgamations of Local Government areas while Mr Kevin Rudd was Chief of Staff to the Premier. It was Labor Party policy under Premier Goss and Mr Rudd to amalgamate Local Councils without reference to electors. 11 years later, with Mr Rudd now as Federal Leader of the Labor Party, forced amalgamations are continuing. It took Mr Rudd more than one month to publicly state his opposition to forced amalgamations once Premier Beattie cranked up the process again. Clearly Mr Rudd's opposition cannot be genuine, given his support and actions as Chief of Staff in the former State Labor Government and his delay in opposing the move.

Families living in rural, regional and remote communities will suffer the most from forced amalgamations. In the new federal electorate of Flynn, the number of complete Local Government areas will fall from 28 to 9. The number of elected representatives, so many living in the rural areas presently, will drop from approximately 200 to around 40. To slash the number of democratically elected members without reference to the community is a complete assault on democracy. The reforms will ensure that many representatives from the new super shires will come from the more densely populated areas, rather than smaller rural and remote communities. Elected members of the super shires may not have the local

experiences and knowledge to represent and make sound judgements about the needs of small communities.

The rural economy may suffer as jobs and local services are lost to the major centres.

Local community groups and sporting clubs may also suffer as they lose access to their close local networks while super shires build larger bureaucracies which are less responsive to local needs.

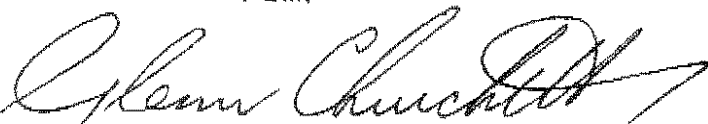
It is important that people living in all areas consider how the Labor Government's changes will affect them as individuals and as a community. Are people convinced that these new boundaries rammed through the State Parliament will benefit them or will they hurt them, their families, their community and service organizations and sporting associations? Or are people concerned that the Labor Party has abused its majority in the Queensland Parliament, with the Labor Premier denying his members the fundamental principal and gift of true representative Government - a free vote. Labor rarely allows a free vote on any issue, and that is why the Labor Party rarely serves democracy.

Every person affected by forced amalgamations must have the opportunity to have their say. That is the most critical aspect of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007

The only way we can stop forced amalgamations from ever happening again is to have Local Government formally recognized in the Constitution of Australia. If we value Local Government as the level of Government closest to the people, democratically elected, to act in our best interests and represent our needs, values and beliefs, then it needs to be afforded the same protection that our nation and our state have through the Australian Constitution.

Regardless as to whether we as individuals support amalgamations of our local councils, forced or voluntary, the most important tool that we have at our disposal in our democracy is the right to have a say. The State Labor Party's attempts to steal that from us have failed.

I welcome the Bill.



**GLENN CHURCHILL**

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**Please note that I am very keen on behalf of the people, to provide evidence directly to the Inquiry at its meeting at Emerald, Queensland on 31 August 2007.**