



GreenActive

From the Greens federal and NSW parliamentary teams

Greens Resist Labor's Local Govt Power Grab

The NSW State Government under Bob Carr has embarked on a reform agenda for local government that has frightening similarities with what Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett did in Victoria in the 1990s. Under Kennett local council numbers dropped from 210 to 78.

The Greens aren't against amalgamations per se. Some amalgamations that are set to take place in NSW will be based upon a mutual agreement between the Councils involved and may bring benefits to their constituents. But others will be far more insidious with larger ALP-dominated councils set to reap the rewards from mergers with councils they share borders with, with minimal community consultation.

It is this attempt to weaken what is supposed to be the most representative form of government in NSW that the Greens are strongly opposed to. We are against taking the 'local' out of local government. Greens MP Sylvia Hale is working with Greens councillors around the state to mobilise community opposition

to Carr's attack on local councils and shires.

Interestingly in Canada the government is now hearing 'de-amalgamation' cases, arising from community anger at the lack of services and representation as a result of amalgamations and reduction in councillor numbers.

The Carr Labor government has other plans to weaken the power of local councils, under the guise of deferring their elections to March next year, by attempting to allow councils to apply to the Minister for a reduction in the number of its councillors, *without the need to hold a referendum.*

Under the *Local Government Act 1993* any substantial change to a council whether it be in the form of a reduction in the number of councillors or a change to its boundaries must be put to a referendum of that council's constituents.

By allowing for a reduction in the number of councillors with no community consultation or a referendum Labor is laying the groundwork for a gerrymander* at local government elections. When you consider the extent of donations from the property industry to the NSW ALP if these changes went through councils could potentially become rubber stamps for big developers.

Continued page 5

***Gerrymander - To divide (a geographic area) into voting districts so as to give unfair advantage to one party in elections.**

What can you do?

Write, fax or email all opposition, minor party and independent MPs asking them to oppose the section of the Government's *Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2003* that allows Councils to apply to the Minister to reduce the number of Councillors. For a full list of contact details for these members contact Sylvia's office or visit <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/>

Write letters to the editor of local and metropolitan papers and phone talkback radio and tell them how important your local councillor/council is to you.

NSW sets dangerous GE precedent

While other states draft new laws on genetically engineered GE food crops, the NSW Government has set a dangerous precedent for them to follow. Ian Cohen fought to amend the Gene Technology GM Crop Moratorium Bill in late May to prevent the Carr Labor Government introducing a 'claytons' three-year moratorium.

Prior to the last state election the Premier promised a three-year moratorium on the release of GE food crops in NSW, but the Bill does not ban a single crop. The Bill gives total discretion to the Minister for Agriculture to decide whether or not he will declare a moratorium. It does not even state which crops will have a moratorium on them. Further, the Bill makes non-GE farmers liable for their crops to be destroyed if contaminated by GE crops planted nearby.

The great irony of this deceit is that the NSW Farmers Association has driven much of the broken promise. This is an organisation that claims to represent the best interests of NSW farmers but which chose to support 5000-hectare 'trials' of GE food crops that large commercial interests seek - irrespective of concerns about cross-contamination expressed by non-GE farmers across the state.

Not only are the Greens concerned that non-GE farmers will face serious threats to their livelihoods, but consumers receive little assurance they will be able to choose between GE and non-GE foods in the future and export markets for organic food crops are threatened as well.

The Carr Labor Government was able to force this Bill through the NSW Upper House by relying on the support of the conservative cross bench - in this case the Christian Democrats, the Outdoor Recreation Party and One Nation. The race is

now on to prevent the commercial interests of large biotech companies from having a similar impact on proposed legislation in other states.

Cleaning up politics

The Greens have taken a big step forward in their campaign to get the murky world of corporate donations to political parties into the public spotlight. In March, the Greens released their new online database that exposes the big corporate donors and where their money goes.

The meticulous research of Norman Thompson and the web design skills of Suzanne Gemmell have created an invaluable information and campaigning tool, allowing instant access to donation data, sorted by recipient party or by donor company and industry.

Since the launch of the site www.lee-rhiannon.greens.org.au/donations.html, it has already been used to embarrass the NSW Government on several development issues, and in debates on gambling issues in Parliament. It's also a foundation for Lee Rhiannon's private members bill on property developer donations, which will come before Parliament soon.

A line in the sand at Kurnell

A concerted campaign by local residents and the Greens has helped secure a State Government commitment to put forward the sand dunes of the Kurnell Peninsula for heritage listing. This will protect the wetland and the dunes, but it still leaves the door open for developer Australand to build 500 houses nearby, and the Greens are concerned that the Government wants to use the heritage listing to bury the issue and allow the Australand project to go ahead. The campaign is far from over.

Donation and developments

Property developer Australand Holdings is not only one of Australia's largest listed companies - it's also one of the Labor Party's largest donors. What's more, it has benefited from some remarkably favourable treatment from the Labor Government in the past few years.

In Kurnell, former Planning Minister Andrew Refshauge has stripped Sutherland Shire Council of its power to approve an Australand project on the environmentally sensitive peninsula after the Council voted against it; in Lane Cove, the Government has taken similar action for an unpopular residential development in Duntroon Ave; in Auburn, the Government sold land to Australand on extraordinarily generous terms; and in Darling Harbour, it has allowed the developer to exceed height limits, despite the opposition of Sydney City Council.

To draw attention to Australand's attempts to ride roughshod over community concerns, and to the mysterious role of donations in the relationship between Australand and the ALP, the Greens staged a successful protest outside Australand's annual general meeting in Sydney. Shareholders were given information leaflets, and several speakers addressed the protesters and media gathered outside. As part of the donations to political parties project Lee Rhiannon's office plans to organise more protests at selected company AGMs.

Residents rally to save defence land for public use

Greens MP Sylvia Hale spoke at a 200 strong meeting of local residents campaigning to keep the Gan Gan Army Base near Nelson Bay in public hands. Like the ADI in western Sydney the Commonwealth Defence Department wants to sell this public

land. The local community have united behind the Hands off Gan Gan HOGG group to pressure the federal government to hand the land to the State government for inclusion in Tomaree National Park. Should the worst happen and the site is purchased by private interests, locals want Port Stephens Council to undertake not to rezone it for commercial or residential purposes. The State Government is refusing to let locals know what its intentions are.

Aceh - the next East Timor?

Cunningham MP Michael Organ has called on the Australian government to pressure the Indonesian Government to resume dialogue in pursuit of a political solution to the current problems in Aceh. Speaking in parliament Michael said that with the reports of murder, torture, rape and human rights abuses, there is increasing concern in the community that we are witnessing another humanitarian crisis similar to what occurred in East Timor.

The Greens are calling on the government to urge the Indonesian government to revoke the imposition of martial law in Aceh, and pull the troops back to defensive positions. In view of the reported human rights abuses it is vital that the Indonesian government guarantees that international norms and conventions on the protection of civilians in war are strictly adhered to.

The government should urge Indonesian authorities to allow third party mediation, preferably by a UN special envoy, to help find a political solution to the problem in Aceh. Australia should offer a temporary safe haven to Acehnese people who have already been displaced, and whose lives are under immediate threat, by the military actions.

Last chance for grey nurse sharks

An unexpected breakthrough in the campaign to save the grey nurse shark from extinction emerged in mid-May when the new Minister for Agriculture Ian MacDonald announced a review of the state's protection measures. Ian Cohen joined with conservation groups to renew a call for 1000 metre protection zones, free of all fishing, as the minimum needed to halt the decline in numbers of the critically endangered Grey Nurse Shark.

The NSW government's efforts to protect the species has been long on rhetoric to date and short on what is really needed - the complete exclusion of all fishing activities in 13 small habitat zones along the NSW coast. Marine experts have advised conservation groups that the east coast population of the Grey Nurse Shark could be extinct in as few as seven years. Available evidence suggests the number of sharks totals less than 300, with a mortality rate of one per month.

Nuke waste transport inquiry established

The Greens will be represented on a state parliamentary inquiry into the Federal Government's plans to transport nuclear waste through and, potentially, store it in NSW. Ian Cohen will be one of seven members of the joint select committee. A key objective for the Greens will be to present a serious hurdle to the Federal Government through an examination of the impacts and threats posed by the controversial plan.

By ruling out storing waste generated from the old reactor at Lucas Heights at a second site in South Australia, Federal Science Minister Peter McGauran has increased the likelihood of the 250 truckloads of that radioactive waste being stored in

western NSW. South Australia has sought to test the legality of the Federal Government's decision through its own legislation and it is hoped that NSW will demonstrate as much opposition through the inquiry.

Carr turns over green leaf

Greens MP Lee Rhiannon met members of the Nimbin Hemp Embassy and the Summerland Greens in Lismore in May to discuss a campaign strategy for decriminalisation of cannabis. Premier Bob Carr has given tentative support for medical cannabis with plans for a four-year trial of cannabis as a drug for people in chronic pain or with wasting illnesses. It will probably be available on prescription in the form of a tablet or an inhaler spray.

Pressure mounts over Australian detainees

Greens MP Michael Organ has taken up the case of David Hicks, who has been held by the US military at Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay Cuba without charge since January last year. For nearly all this time Hicks has been held in a cage.

In Question Time Michael Organ asked if the Australian government had ever requested David Hicks' return. The Howard government's treatment of this case is outrageous and disgraceful. The Howard government has extended full support to the denial by the US of Mr Hicks' rights as a prisoner of war under the Geneva Convention in open repudiation of the rights of an Australian citizen. Terry Hicks, David's father, continues to work for justice for his son.

Defend and extend Medicare

The Howard Government revealed plans to make huge cuts to public healthcare in the recent budget.

Medicare is not perfect but it's a fair system and it is too valuable to lose. The Greens are committed to defending and extending Medicare, and Senator Nettle has spoken out several times on this topic including at the ACTU summit on Medicare in Melbourne.

Nationwide defend higher education campaign

Around Australia a strong campaign is building to defend our university system from the funding cuts proposed in the Costello-Howard budget. As education spokesperson Senator Nettle has developed The Greens critique of the Government's package and is now taking this vision to the community as part of a nationwide tour of campuses. Kerry's office has had The Greens vision for free tertiary education costed and found that it would cost less than the \$4 per week personal income tax cut announced in the budget. The Government's changes are likely to be debated in the Senate in October and until then Kerry's office will be dedicated to the defence of high quality, accessible, public higher education. An education that can and should be free.

Fighting for public education

The Greens continue to fight Labor's stingy approach to funding public education. During the NSW election campaign, the Greens released a detailed, costed policy that would free up funds to give teachers a full pay rise, upgrade investment and cut class sizes.

The Greens are supporting the Teacher's Federation in its push for a pay rise above the Government's miserly offer of 3 per cent a year over two years - a decline in real terms. On Public Education Day, May 22, Lee Rhiannon moved a motion in

Parliament recognising the hard work and dedication of teachers and the need for more funding. The motion was supported by all parties in the Legislative Council. The Greens will test the extent of their support by introducing a private member's bill to cut State Government subsidies to private schools and redirect the funding towards public schools.

Federal budget fails Illawarra

Greens MP for Cunningham Michael Organ took up the needs of the people and the environment of Illawarra when he replied to the Howard Government's eighth Budget. Labelling it a "budget of neglect" for its failure to deliver any major new initiatives for the Illawarra. The Greens criticised the budget for giving big business a \$300 million tax break, but failing to invest in job creation.

The Greens MPs and Senators strongly took up the attack on higher education outlined in the budget, arguing that university staff, students, and their families will bear the brunt of the Federal Government's plans to increase HECS and up-front fees. Michael Organ commented that many Illawarra people will think twice about enrolling in a university degree if Howard and Costello have their way with higher education.

Greens MPs e-brief

The Greens MPs put out a fortnightly e-brief, which contains the latest Greens news - information on the work of Greens MPs in and outside parliament, coming events, job vacancies.

If you are not subscribed send an email to:
lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Juanita Nielsen remembered

The Juanita Nielsen lecture, hosted by the Greens MPs in the NSW Parliament, was once again a success, drawing a crowd of 90 people to hear NSW Teacher's Federation president Maree O'Halloran deliver an address on "passion and politics in public education". University of NSW historian Rae Francis introduced the lecture by paying tribute to the life and work of Juanita Nielsen, the community activist and anti-development campaigner whose disappearance in 1975 remains unsolved.

Greens work to expose nuclear transport routes

Science Minister Peter McGauran has refused to rule out the shipment of spent nuclear fuel rods through Port Kembla. Cunningham MP Michael Organ asked the Minister to give a categorical assurance that spent nuclear fuel rods from the Lucas Heights reactor would not be transported through the electorate of Cunningham and shipped out of Port Kembla.



The Minister replied that security considerations prevent him giving such an assurance, while admitting that

the casks used to transport spent fuel rods have not been tested for their ability to withstand terrorist attack. Greens MP Michael Organ commented that the patronising statement from the Minister that no previous shipments have been made through Port Kembla did nothing to reassure the people of Cunningham that they won't have nuclear waste trucks trundling along their roads.

Little public support for Howard/Carr Senate plan

Premier Bob Carr's backing of the Prime Minister's plan to shackle the Senate will do massive damage to Labor's standing in the community. The NSW Premier's support for Howard's grab for power will further alienate Labor from its supporters. The people of NSW have shown that they support a strong independent Upper House.

In a recent Saulwick Poll, two-thirds of voters – even Coalition voters – said the Senate either had the right amount of power, or not enough. And in the Australian Election Study of 2001, only a third of Australians said they would be relaxed and comfortable if the same political party controlled both houses of parliament.

Most Australians want to keep the Senate. They clearly value its role as a counterweight to the absolute power of the government in the House of Representatives. Despite the quirks in the Senate voting system, it delivers a remarkably democratic outcome – much more so than the House of Representatives.

No mandate

In fact, the Senate doesn't force the issue that often. In the past 30 years, the Senate has blocked less than 3 per cent of legislation. Of the Howard Government's 1238 pieces of legislation, only 33 have been voted down or laid aside – even less than this 3 per cent figure. The Senate does have a mandate for this. Consider the last federal election: the Liberal Party won a landslide of lower house seats, but its lower house primary vote was only 37.1 per cent. That's all John Howard's "mandate" really amounts to.

The Liberal-National Coalition has very little to complain about in the

Senate. In the 2001 half-Senate election, they scored an upper house primary vote of 41.5 per cent. That gave them 19 seats, or 47.5 per cent of the 40 seats on offer. The Greens, Labor and the Democrats also gained Senate seats in about the same proportion as their upper house primary vote; and, as it happens, everyone bar the Democrats gained Senate seats in rough proportion to their total lower house vote as well.

Carr secretive

In other words, the Senate broadly reflects the policies and principles that Australians want to see enacted. And judging from the Saulwick Poll, that's the way Australians like it. But it's not the way Bob Carr likes it. His government is already one of Australia's most unaccountable and secretive – yet that's still not enough for him. Carr should be wary of joining Howard's hubristic attack on our democratic institutions. It may look like a good idea from the safety of the government benches, but the electorate is likely to take a very different view.!



Jack Munday joins up

Legendary green ban activist Jack Munday has joined the Greens. His decision was a big boost to the party during the recent NSW election campaign, given his track record as a campaigner on core Greens issues such as development. He says the Greens have "arrived as a serious political party", and offer the only genuine alternative to the increasingly similar major parties. He hopes to use his standing with the trade union movement to help foster relationships between unionists and Greens.

Upgrade call for rural rail services

The Greens have vowed to pursue the NSW Government over its failure to offer rail services to rural NSW, and over its poor record on rail safety and track maintenance. Greens MP Lee Rhiannon has opposed a NSW Government proposal to lease the State's regional freight lines to the Federal Government's Australian Rail Track Corporation. The Carr government argues this will improve the rail freight network. But independent studies of the Government's plan show that it underestimates the cost of maintaining the track and infrastructure by up to a third.

Labor's local govt power grab

...Continued from Page 1

Carr's spin-doctors are out in force manipulating the message on the government's plans for local government. When it comes to the thorny issue of council amalgamation the word is it's bad PR to use the word 'force', even though there is every indication that this is its intention.

Bob Carr told the annual Shires Association conference last week that his government would have to 'crack the whip' if councils did not undertake to merge of their own accord. All the while continuing to maintain the line that his Government is, and has always been, opposed to 'forced amalgamations'.

Government MPs are working hard to influence crossbench MPs to support the government's legislation when it comes before the Upper House. See box on front page to read how you can make your voice heard for local government.



Contacts

Federal Parliament

Senator Kerry Nettle

Senator.nettle@aph.gov.au

Sydney Office

Ph 9241-6663 Fax 9241-6680

Level 11, 70 Phillip St, Sydney

GPO Box 36, Sydney

NSW 2001

Canberra Office

Ph 6277-3501 Fax 6277-5716

Parliament House, Canberra

ACT 2600

www.kerrynettle.org.au

Staff:

Jon Edwards (Campaigner)

Katrina Willis (Canberra Adviser)

Elise Staples (Office Manager)

Tanya Excell (Canberra Office Manager)

Michael Organ MP

Member for Cunningham

Michael.Organ.MP@aph.gov.au

Electorate Office

Ph 4283-7300 Fax 4283-7800

Suite 7, 83-85 Railway St, Corrimal

PO Box 246, Corrimal NSW 2518

Canberra Office

Ph 6277-4366 Fax 6277-8472

House of Representatives

Parliament House, Canberra ACT

2600

Staff: Carol Berry, Kristian Bolwell,

Allen Clark, Jason Hart, Theresa

Huxtable, Damien Cahill, Sharon

Callaghan

Inquiry into Iraq war intelligence

Greens MPs continue to take a leading role in the peace movement. Federal Greens MPs have maintained the pressure on the government, as well as the 'opposition', to justify their appalling policy in regard to the invasion of Iraq. Kerry Nettle and her staff have been instrumental in this project resourcing the activist community, distributing over 10,000 anti-war information kits, speaking at over a dozen peace rallies around the country, and in parliament moving numerous motions and asking multiple questions in the parliament.

Our peace activities are not over. The Greens MPs are pushing for an inquiry into the federal government's intelligence justification for the invasion. The facts that are now emerging about the war against the people of Iraq reveals a massive death toll, both civilian and military and no weapons of mass destruction.



Equal age of consent

The Greens helped bring about a win for gay men, with NSW finally lowering the age of consent for gay men to 16. Although Labor's official policy is to oppose discrimination, it offered its MPs a conscience vote on the issue. This risked defeat for the bill, since last time the issue came to Parliament, a handful of conservative Labor MPs voted against the bill and secured its defeat.

The Greens organised a letter-writing campaign aimed at the Labor MPs who voted against the bill last time, urging them to change their position. One did so, and two others abstained. The bill passed 23 votes to 16. Unfortunately, this historic victory was overshadowed by paedophilia allegations, illustrating the Labor Government's tactical mistake in linking the age of consent bill to tougher penalties for paedophilia, which provided a forum for homophobia.

Contacts

The Greens NSW Parliamentary Office

Parliament House

Macquarie St

Sydney 2000

Sylvia Hale, MLC

sylvia.hale@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph: 9230 3030 Fax: 9230 2519

Staff: Mithra Cox, Seb Crawford,
Cate Faehrmann

Lee Rhiannon, MLC

lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph 9230-3551 Fax - 9230 3550

www.nsw.greens.org.au/lee

Staff: Andrew Burke, Hans van
Leeuwen, Dan Cass

Ian Cohen, MLC

ian.cohen@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph 9230-2603 Fax 9230-2267

www.nsw.greens.org.au/ian

Staff: Jenny Emblem, Paul
Sheridan, Jan Barham