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Central Goldfields Shire Dismissal

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This is a bill of course to dismiss the Central Goldfields Shire Council.

Central Goldfields is a municipality of some 1530-plus square kilometres and has a population of around about 12 500, of whom 7500 are resident in the main township of Maryborough. It is 180 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. It has a relatively low population density and an annual budget in the region of \$26 million, I believe, and assets of some \$282 million.

It is a municipality that fits comfortably into the small shire councils category.

In terms of its finances, while its level of indebtedness is relatively high, the Auditor-General in his most recent report on councils was relatively comfortable with that. In terms of the council's internal financing, it has been patchy, but the most recent forecast indicates that that is headed in the right direction as well.

Similarly for liquidity, they have green figures right across the board. In terms of net result there are some difficulties with the asset renewal gap, but that is not matter that is unique to this council by any stretch of the imagination.

Similarly with capital replacement, there are some amber figures there.

It is a relatively small council; financially it is not amongst the wealthiest in the state but it is certainly not on the brink of bankruptcy by a long stretch either.

There is of course in the background of this bill a history of issues, some dating back to 2013, but essentially this bill has been generated off the back of a report of the Local Government Investigations and Compliance Inspectorate, which was released a couple of weeks ago.

I do not intend to go through the details of this report — it speaks for itself — but it is worth noting that Central Goldfields is in terms of disadvantage one of the most challenged municipalities in the state, and is indeed the most challenged municipality outside the metropolitan area.

It is the type of area that really needs the support of the Parliament to get back onto its feet.

The matters that have been raised in the report of the local government inspectorate, if proven, do not reflect well on those people involved or on some of the actions of some of

those people.

In terms of the bill before us, it is indeed a pretty stock standard bill, but of course sacking a council is a significant step. That is why we now do not allow the Minister for Local Government to do that unilaterally; we require the agreement of the Parliament. It is a significant step.

I understand in this case that the government has been advised by the department that the removal of the sitting council is necessary and that is the basis on which the bill has been brought into the house.

We may have one or two quibbles with the bill but nothing of consequence.

I note that there is some flexibility in terms of the number of administrators who are able to be appointed — one or more. There is also some flexibility in terms of the breadth of the administrators' powers, that being defined by the instrument of appointment rather than simply all those matters that are normally bestowed on a council by the Local Government Act 1989.

Having said that, I would prefer the Parliament to be making those decisions, but at the same time I can understand why that flexibility has been proposed by parliamentary counsel and no doubt by the department as well. I certainly do not see those minor points as show stoppers.

As has probably been telegraphed by the fact that the bill has been brought in and is now being debated, the opposition will not be opposing the bill.

Accordingly I wish it a speedy passage.