

# Councils blamed for failed mergers

■ Gareth Parker and Kate Emery

Colin Barnett has lashed out at WA's local government sector as "incapable of reforming itself" as he effectively abandoned the Government's reform process.

The Premier yesterday pre-empted Cabinet discussion of the implications of weekend referendums which saw ratepayers in East Fremantle, Cockburn, Kwinana, Victoria Park and South Perth veto merger plans.

Mr Barnett said the people had spoken and he had "run up the white flag" on the issue, and would now deal with proposed capital city legislation for the City of Perth that would also see it merge with Vincent.

But Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi and Vincent mayor John Carey said yesterday the municipalities had "irreconcilable differences" and each called for Vincent to be withdrawn from the exercise.

"It became a shambles. I accept responsibility but I don't think I deserve the blame," Mr Barnett said. "I don't think local government is capable of reforming itself. I formed that view over the weekend. They are not capable of reform."

While merger plans were foiled by the referendums, there remains uncertainty over the status of other councils which were to be effectively amalgamated using "boundary adjustment" pro-

cedures in the Local Government Act that did not give ratepayers a vote.

While Mr Barnett suggested only councils that wanted to merge would do so, the Governor has already signed orders to join Mundaring and Swan, Bayswater and Bassendean, Belmont and Kalamunda, Cambridge and Subiaco, Gosnells and Canning, splitting Serpentine Jarrahdale between Armadale and Murray, and adjustments to Melville.

The changes are due to take effect on July 1 and council administrations are working on merger plans.

A spokesman for Local Government Minister Tony Simpson said no decisions had been made about whether to countermand or rescind those orders, adding further to confusion in the sector.

WA Local Government Association president Troy Pickard said he was "disappointed and saddened" that the reform process appeared to have largely collapsed.

He said he believed it was likely the Government would dump plans for both the City of Perth Act and a western suburbs merger to create the City of Riversea.

Opposition Leader Mark McGowan said it was a "disaster" all of Mr Barnett's making. "His style of government has been disastrous for this State in so many areas," Mr McGowan said.

"He's interfered in major projects, he's ruined the budgetary position.

"He's embarked on flights of fancy like this, or culling sharks, and in the process caused embarrassment and great expense to the State."

A parade of Liberal backbenchers have emerged in recent days to publicly question or criticise the Government's handling of the reform process but reactions were muted when Mr Barnett briefed them on the state of play at a party room meeting in Busselton yesterday. Sources said no questions were asked.

Belmont mayor Phil Marks said in light of the poll results, Belmont should not be forced to merge with the Shire of Kalamunda because it was denied a right to vote.

"Clearly the Government has got it wrong. We call on the Government to give everyone an equal say or abandon local government reform completely," he said.

Stirling mayor Giovanni Italiano said to push on with "partial reform" of the sector was "ludicrous".

"I'm urging the minister and the Premier to abandon partial reform of the sector and reverse the Governor's orders," he said.

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■ EDITORIAL, ALSTON P22

## **RUNNING UP THE WHITE FLAG** PREMIER'S POLICY REVERSALS



### **STOP AND SEARCH POLICE POWERS**

ABANDONED NOVEMBER 2010

"I've got no doubt, I think the tasing incident (involving Kevin Spratt) did undermine confidence in the police on this issue."



### **JAMES PRICE POINT LNG PROCESSING HUB**

ABANDONED AUGUST 2013

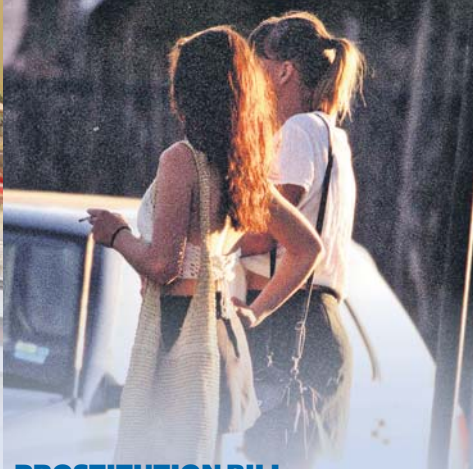
"I've failed to get the project — LNG — to James Price Point. I've failed to create the thousands of jobs for West Australians. I've failed to create the opportunity for WA industry. And most important I have failed the Aboriginal people. They placed their trust in me, and I have let them down."



**CCC REFOCUS TO TACKLE ORGANISED CRIME**

ABANDONED SEPTEMBER 2012

"I'm a pragmatist. The Labor Party are opposing it along with some independents and now Rob Johnson. So I don't think it's realistic that this legislation is going to get through both houses of Parliament."



**PROSTITUTION BILL**

ABANDONED SEPTEMBER 2012

"Every single measure that this Government has sought to put in place to protect the citizens of this State has been opposed, resisted by the Labor Party without exception."



**HALVE THE SOLAR FEED IN TARIFF**

ABANDONED AUGUST 2013

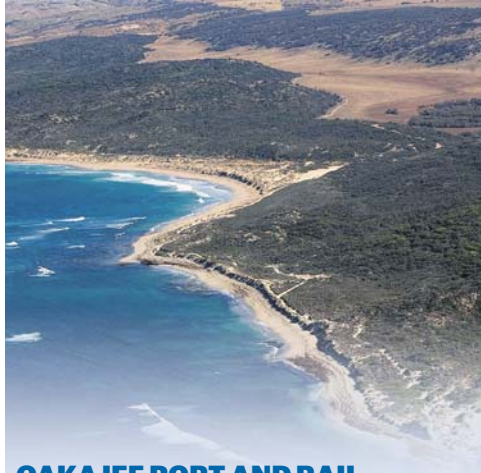
"There was an outcry from people who, in good faith, had purchased solar panel systems. I listened to that outcry."



**SHARK DRUM LINES**

ABANDONED SEPTEMBER 2014

"We would simply be caught up in the courts and disputes and probably more demonstrations, more threats, more violence. I don't want to see that happen in WA."



### **OAKAJEE PORT AND RAIL**

ABANDONED JUNE 2013

"You have a standoff between China and Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea. Basically China and Japan are not talking to each other on major commercial projects."



### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT MERGERS**

ABANDONED YESTERDAY

"I've failed, I've put up the white flag. I gave it my best shot. If ratepayers want to stay the way they are, so be it."