

RATEPAYERS SAY NO

Push for vote after three mergers fail

■ Phoebe Wearne

Two Liberal MPs are calling for all ratepayers whose local councils are flagged for mergers to be given a say after the State Government had to abandon three amalgamations because residents rejected them.

South Metropolitan MLC Simon O'Brien also wants the entire merger process abandoned because it has "no merit" or ratepayer support.

Local Government Minister Tony Simpson said yesterday that the amalgamations of Fremantle and East Fremantle, Kwinana and Cockburn, and South Perth and Victoria Park would not go ahead because ratepayers had vetoed them.

Mr O'Brien said the new poll results gave the Government an opportunity to "eat a very large serve of humble pie" and rethink its approach. He believed if people in Canning and several other local government areas were given a vote, they would also reject the mergers.

"Why 2000 voters in East Fremantle should be able to have a vote, whereas tens of thousands in Canning don't — that's quite outrageous," Mr O'Brien said. "It's not in the spirit of the Act and I think it offends any sense of fair play.

"Apart from the Premier, I don't know of anyone on the planet who thinks that the local government reform process is a good idea."

Only ratepayers in councils being amalgamated get a say under the Dadour provisions of the Local Government Act. The other 15 councils subject to "boundary ad-



Disappointed: Tony Simpson

justments", which will proceed on July 1, do not.

South Perth MP John McGrath agreed that all ratepayers should be offered a vote.

"It does seem strange that others don't get that same right," Mr McGrath said. "What has happened at the weekend further enforces why people should get the vote."

Mr Simpson said he was disappointed that ratepayers in the failed amalgamation areas would not realise the "significant benefits" that merging would bring.

"Change is long overdue, however, the onus is now on the local governments in these areas to determine the best future for their ratepayers," he said.

"The Government will continue its focus on progressing metropolitan reform in other areas, including the introduction of legislation for an expanded City of Perth."

Opposition Leader Mark McGowan said the amalgamation process had cost the Government tens of millions of dollars, adding that all councils should be offered referendums.