



STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms KN Millard MP (Acting Chair)
Mr SA Holswich MP

Staff present:

Dr K Munro (Research Director)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO LAND TENURE ACROSS QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2013

Brisbane

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Subcommittee met at 1.07 pm

CAMPBELL, Mrs Sheila, State Vice-President, Southern Region, Country Women's Association

COULSON, Mrs Joy, State Vice-President, Central Region, Country Women's Association

HILL, Mrs Jennie, State President, Country Women's Association

JACKSON, Mrs Carol, State International Officer, Country Women's Association

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming to Parliament House today to participate in our inquiry regarding land tenure across Queensland. My name is Kerry Millard. I am the state member for Sandgate. I will be acting in the role of chair whilst David Gibson is in transit from Gympie. Mr Seath Holswich, the member for Pine Rivers, is with me today. We also have Dr Kathy Munro our research director with us. Mr David Gibson, the chair, will be with us soon.

The committee is a committee of the Queensland parliament and as such represents the parliament. It is an all-party committee which adopts a non-partisan approach to its proceedings. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask you to identify yourselves when you first speak and to speak clearly and at a reasonable pace. This transcript may be published in whole or in part.

Ladies, would each of you like to spend a few minutes outlining your main concerns and then we will go on further from there. Perhaps we will start with the state president.

Mrs Hill: Our purpose in coming was that we saw that this committee was operating and there has been quite a bit of discussion about changes to land tenure. We have over 100 buildings on reserves. We were concerned about whether any of the conditions we now have for those buildings would change if they were changed to a different format or they were to become the responsibility of shire councils instead of being state health reserves. We are really seeking information as much as anything, but want to have input into any changes that are made.

ACTING CHAIR: Who would like to go next and outline any concerns they may have?

Mrs Coulson: As Mrs Hill has just mentioned, we would just like to know where we stand because the ladies have worked hard over 20-odd years to build these buildings and all of them are for the benefit of the community. We have one for example that is units that we rent out to low-income people. They are now wondering what is going to happen and whether they are going to be taken away. We need to know where we stand.

ACTING CHAIR: The units you are talking about, Joy, are they residential units?

Mrs Coulson: Yes, at Mudjimba, Bli Bli.

Mr HOLSWICH: Just to explain—you probably know a lot of this background already—the inquiry process that we are undergoing on land tenure at the moment is exactly that, an inquiry to put some findings and recommendations forward to government and from there the government will obviously consider what legislation and potential changes they want to put forward. Realistically, from our point of view at this time, it is a fact-finding mission. There have certainly been no decisions made.

It is all about hearing from each of the different stakeholders who have an interest in this area. Obviously, from the information you have sent through previously you are a significant stakeholder given the number of properties that you have around the state. You have already mentioned that you have concerns about whether conditions will change if changes are made to the legislation. I guess I am interested to hear a bit more about what sort of impact that would have on your organisation? What would be some of the tangible impacts if changes were made?

Mrs Hill: We have quite a lot of buildings. The Kissing Point units are available to the public for holidays at a very reasonable rate. They are situated on the Strand in Townsville. They have looked to expand the units but we have said that we do not want to spend money on buildings when we do not own

the land. Whilst up to now we have had no problems, we want to be assured that holiday accommodation at a reasonable rate, which is what the grant was for, is not going to become something that is not acceptable under the new guidelines. We do have quite a few holiday accommodation buildings that are built on health reserves.

They are holiday accommodation and accommodation for hospital patients. A lot of people from out west who are going to Townsville Hospital come and stay in our units, but they are also holiday accommodation. We need to be assured that any changes will not impact on those buildings and that it will not be decided that those particular buildings are not the type of building people want on health reserves.

Mrs Campbell: In my region the CWA hall or the CWA rooms are often the only public meeting place in small communities. If something happens to them there is nowhere for these ladies to meet—and it is not just for ladies. We can go through a list and tell you that the local RSL meet there, the mothers' club meet there and so on. It is a concern in that regard. The ladies need to know that their buildings are theirs.

ACTING CHAIR: With the arrangements that you have in place at the moment with regard to your halls, holiday accommodation or medical transit accommodation et cetera are there any areas where you feel the land tenure arrangements could be more positive?

Mrs Hill: You could freehold Kissing Point at no cost to us. That would be marvellous. They are probably some of the ones that are of major concern. When we got Kissing Point it was out in the sticks—there was nothing there. It is the same for the meeting room at Coolangatta. The back of our hall and the whole block comes right onto the waterfront at Coolangatta. They are in prime real estate in some places. There was nothing there when we went there. They are probably the ones that are of major concern. Developers and everybody else looks at those blocks of land.

ACTING CHAIR: Have you been given any freehold land at zero cost prior to this?

Mrs Hill: No. We have not been.

Mr HOLSWICH: You talked about the 100 plus buildings that are on reserves at the moment. That is a combination of halls, units—

Mrs Hill: We have the list there. The majority of them are on health reserves and they are a combination of units like the ones at Kissing Point in Townsville, holiday cottages which are older type cottages up and down the beachfront mainly in North Queensland, places that have purely meeting halls, others that have cottages that have meeting rooms in them. There is a variety of different buildings and low-cost housing units in several areas as well. Some are for pensioners and others are for low-cost rental. There is a variety of different building types all on health reserves.

ACTING CHAIR: So many of the halls and other buildings are used for other uses such as mothers club?

Mrs Hill: It depends on the size of the community, but you might have the SES, the local fire brigade, craft groups and all sorts of other groups meeting in the halls.

Mr HOLSWICH: Hypothetically, if there was legislation introduced and you considered it to have a detrimental impact would that be a detrimental impact on the services you provide and use those facilities for or would it be a financial impact to the organisation or a combination?

Mrs Hill: It would depend on what the changes were. At the moment, on the reserves we have a right to remove the buildings. We are considered to own the buildings. At Kissing Point there is no way you can remove it because it is a brick building built on the ground. In the smaller places we have the right to sell the building off—and we have done—and then we relinquish the land. Where we have come across some problems now is where there have been some changes and instead of it being a health reserve it has become a reserve of council and council then considers they own the building. They say they own the building so they will say who can meet in the building. They will say, 'You are not using it every day of the week. We are going to take it over for a respite centre.' That is the attitude of some of the councils.

ACTING CHAIR: How many buildings do you have in that situation?

Mrs Hill: We only have three or four at this point in time. We fought for one and it is now legally in our name. We had a building on Thursday Island but the council up there completely took it over. We did not even get the contents back. We did not even get our minute books back. They just took it over. That was because there was a building where there was no branch. The branch was in recess. So in that case we were not using the building. We had leased it out to a local Aboriginal group, but the council felt that we were not using the reserve. But we did not even get the contents of our building back.

Mr HOLSWICH: So that was one on Thursday Island. Do you know offhand where the other ones were?

Mrs Hill: There was one in the Cairns area which we have now come to a legal compromise about. We have one here in Brisbane which is ongoing at the moment. We got all the contents out. We did build the building. We are still having ongoing talks at this point in time with Brisbane City Council. There have not been many because fortunately most of them have remained as health reserves. And we have had a few hassles with railway reserves. Gladstone was one case in point and I am not sure of our land tenure there now. Gladstone QR was going to sell the land. Between the local member and I do not know who else—Mr Fraser, the former Treasurer, came out and said he had done something. There was our hall and another community building on that land. He came out and said he had saved the building for the CWA. But I do not know what the land tenure arrangement is. We have not received any paperwork. Whether it is still just how it was and the railway has been told, 'You cannot sell that land,' I do not know. We had one building in Cooroy where our building—

Mrs Coulson: They had done a deal there.

Mrs Hill: Yes. I have no idea how it happened but our building was built half on a health reserve and half on a railway reserve.

Mrs Coulson: No. It is actually about a quarter on—

Mrs Hill: It is so much on one and so much on the other. Because the railway wanted to sell, we had to pay about \$60,000 to DERM for them to secure the railway land. So we paid the money but we do not have any title over what we have paid for. DERM own the whole block now. So if ever we wanted to try to buy out the other bit they would give consideration to the amount of money we have already paid.

Mrs Coulson: They did give a price on that of \$180,000-odd for the balance of the land that was left. It is not a big block.

Mrs Hill: So we have had a few complications. Mostly we have had no problems at all with the health reserves. But when this inquiry started we really wanted to have our say and find out what the feeling was because we have seen reports in the media where the shires would like to have all of them given over to them one way or another where they all have similar sorts of tenures.

Mr HOLSWICH: If I am hearing you correctly, the two main points are, firstly, having security over being able to continue to use those facilities for CWA purposes—

Mrs Hill: Yes.

Mr HOLSWICH: But there is the secondary concern—and it is no less of a concern—of ensuring that where your halls or facilities are used by other community groups that there is the ongoing availability for those groups to continue to use those facilities.

Mrs Hill: Yes. At the moment, with the introduction of the new workplace health and safety, we are trying to encourage all our branches to make sure that their buildings are all in really good condition et cetera which is at no considerable outlay on our part. We are paying out a lot of money to upkeep all these buildings. So we want to know that we are not going to pay out all this money and somebody else is going to end up with our buildings.

ACTING CHAIR: If there were a situation where you could not have the land title for zero dollars, what would be your next preference? What would you see as your next best option?

Mrs Coulson: A 99-year lease.

Mrs Hill: No. We have more than 99-year leases now. In a lot of cases we are reasonably happy with what we have. For some of them, yes, you would probably like to be able to buy the freehold certainly at a very reasonable rate. In some cases we probably could not afford even a reasonable rate, particularly in the coastal places that have really taken off. In a lot of cases it does not really matter that much as long as it stays as it is where we have complete control of what is there and that if in the future we do not require it and nobody else does we still have the right to remove our building or in some cases to sell our building to another community group—usually at a very reduced rate—who will take it on, to a community group who wants to have community access with that reserve, and we have done that. We just did it recently in Mirani. We had a hall in Mirani and there had not been a branch there for quite some time. The Classic Car Club required headquarters. They were looking for somewhere to meet and we sold them the building for a few thousand dollars and the title to the reserve—the trusteeship was handed over to them. The main thing is for us to have some security.

ACTING CHAIR: Carol, is there anything you would like to add?

Mrs Jackson: I would just like to reinforce what the ladies have said here. I still have a lot to learn as I am new in this role.

Mrs Hill: At this point in time we can still remove any building. As far as I am aware, conditions have not changed. If we have a lease and we have building on it, we can remove the building and we have to return the land to the original condition. That is our understanding. Is that how it still works?

Dr Munro: Yes.

Mrs Hill: Thank you, because somebody did question us the other day and said, 'I didn't think that was how it happened now.' But we did it just the other day.

ACTING CHAIR: As Seath was saying, what we have been doing is going around the state to meet all of the different stakeholders that might be affected in some way, shape or form—whether they be from the agricultural sector or the tourism sector and everything in between—and we have been getting their input as to what they would like, what they see as working well and what they see as being problematic. So we have not made any recommendations at this stage.

Mrs Hill: There are so many different people with so many different situations. The situation for rural landholders is so totally different to our situation. Our situation is similar to that of a lot of agricultural show societies and things like that.

Mr HOLSWICH: It has certainly been a broad inquiry. We have received a whole range of submissions.

Mrs Hill: Yes. Quite some time ago when the inquiry first started I listened to a hearing that was available on the net. I listened into that one morning when I was in the office. I think that was the time we made contact, when that hearing was being held.

Mrs Campbell: Is there a time frame on the inquiry?

Dr Munro: Yes, there is.

Mr HOLSWICH: I think there is an interim report due—

Dr Munro: No.

Mr HOLSWICH: Sorry, the interim report is done. The final report is due on 29 March.

Mrs Hill: Yes. I think the interim report time has already gone, hasn't it?

Dr Munro: That is right.

Mrs Hill: Yes, I thought that was what you had told me.

ACTING CHAIR: Ladies, do you have anything further to add?

Mrs Hill: No, just so long as you understand what we are talking about.

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, we do.

Mrs Hill: Thank you for your time.

ACTING CHAIR: It is a little bit along the lines of what others have raised, especially in relation to showgrounds et cetera.

Mrs Hill: Yes, there would be quite a few groups who would have similar concerns. There may not be that many groups who have as many as we do. We seem to have an awful lot.

Mrs Coulson: I think also the halls are a lifeline for a lot of these ladies because it is their world. They are all so focused on their QCWA. It is something they need. It might just be a timber building or it might have asbestos in a lot of places, but it is well cared for and loved by them all. So they do need their halls.

ACTING CHAIR: Absolutely. I have just been advised by our research director, Dr Kathy Munro, that as per recommendation 16 we will be writing to the minister and asking for his—

Dr Munro: At the moment I think it basically says that we support the transfer of state reserve leasehold land to local government as freehold tenure. That is what it says at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR: We will be writing to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines specifically to make an amendment to that.

Dr Munro: We have to look into it further because there are a number of stakeholders including yourselves, the royal agricultural societies and the universities who have made representations subsequent to the release of this report indicating the unintended consequences of implementing recommendation 16 in this form.

ACTING CHAIR: I just wanted to let you know that. There are probably lots of things that you are hearing on the ground and probably lots of people presuming one thing or the other, but the reality is that, of the full recommendations, this one will have an amendment made to it and everything will still be reviewed.

Mrs Coulson: So we will wait to hear in writing.

Mrs Hill: Is the interim report available?

Dr Munro: Yes, it is on the internet.

Mr HOLSWICH: If you go to the parliamentary web page, go to the committees tab and look for this committee, you will see the published report there.

Mrs Hill: Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR: What we are talking about specifically is recommendation 16.

Mrs Hill: Yes, I wrote that one down.

ACTING CHAIR: Fantastic.

Dr Munro: It is the one that directly affects—

Mrs Hill: What we are talking about.

Dr Munro: Yes.

Mrs Hill: So we are not the only ones who have concerns about the same thing.

Mrs Coulson: I am sure we are not.

Mr HOLSWICH: No, not at all.

ACTING CHAIR: On behalf of Mr Holswich, Mr Gibson, who has not been able to make it in time, and Dr Munro, I thank you all for your attendance today. I presume some of you have driven a little further than others. I certainly do appreciate your attendance. I believe this committee has gathered some valuable information that will assist it in its inquiry in the future and the continued relevance of government land tenure arrangements in Queensland.

Pursuant to section 50(2) (a) of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001, I move that the committee authorises for publication the evidence given here before it this day. I now declare the meeting closed.

Mrs Hill: Thank you very much. On behalf of the Queensland Country Women's Association, I thank you for your time.

ACTING CHAIR: You are more than welcome. Thank you for coming in and seeing us.

Committee adjourned at 1.33 pm