



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 17 September 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Retirement Villages

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (9.58 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to inform the House that this Government is maintaining its commitment to the Queensland community to develop workable, meaningful and responsive legislation. The retirement village industry in Queensland is presently governed by the Retirement Villages Act 1988. This Act has not kept pace with changes and developments in the industry over the past decade and desperately needs revision. The residents of Queensland's 3,000 retirement villages send me that message every week, when I receive scores of letters imploring me to review the legislation.

The previous coalition Government tried but failed to meet the evolving needs of the retirement village community. Following a prolonged process of public consultation and submissions, the coalition Government released a draft of the Retirement Villages Bill in August 1997. The release of this Bill provoked a backlash and the Office of Consumer Affairs was bombarded with submissions. Unfortunately, both residents and operators condemned the coalition legislation because it did not solve the problems of sinking funds, capital replacement and retirement village maintenance. The coalition's solution was to put those issues in the too-hard basket. The coalition baulked at an obstacle that this Government will overcome. Our predecessors have left the issues that they thought were intractable to a Government that can talk, listen to and understand the fears and concerns of the retirement village community. Since taking responsibility for the Office of Fair Trading, I have worked hard to gain the trust of operators and residents. I believe that I have gained their trust by talking to them, by becoming aware of the issues that are important to them and, most importantly, by listening to them.

Retirement village residents welcomed the election of the Beattie Labor Government because they were frustrated by our predecessor's dithering and inability to grasp the important issues. The coalition Government wanted to drag them through yet another consultation quagmire. This is not what village residents or owners wanted. I am fully aware of the concerns of retirement village operators and residents. I have acknowledged to them that the current Retirement Villages Act is an outdated piece of legislation that has not kept pace with our changing lifestyles.

Importantly, I have taken on board the diverse views of retirement village operators and residents. I understand that residents want retirement villages to be places where they can enjoy the facilities and live a calm and peaceful life. Simultaneously, operators want their businesses to be commercially viable. The balancing of those two opposing viewpoints is extremely challenging, but this Government will not walk away from a challenge.

To find common ground, I have established a new Retirement Village Task Force, which is made up of six—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms SPENCE: Members will be pleased to hear that the new task force will not give a consultancy to one of our former cronies, as members opposite did. To find common ground, I have established a new Retirement Village Task Force, which is made up of six highly credentialled retirement village residents and operators. The role of the task force will be to examine stakeholders' concerns, give them a forum for informed discussion and a chance to seek out goals together. Its aims

will be the development of practical legislation and the ending of ideological differences that have prevented cooperation between residents and operators. Unlike the previous Government's oversized working party, which was chaired by former Attorney-General Sam Doumany, I believe that this smaller group of experts will quickly resolve the contentious issues concerning the residents and operators.

The task force is facilitated by the Dispute Resolution Centre, which has demonstrated superb mediation skills and has already helped it reach agreement on many past differences. It has made significant headway on the issues that the coalition left languishing in the too-hard basket, among which was the responsibility for capital replacement and sinking funds. The outcome of the meetings should make a valuable contribution to the review of the legislation, which I hope will be finalised this year. I am committed to working through the issues that time and time again have stalled the development of a workable, responsive piece of legislation.

While Queensland retirement village residents and operators once felt deserted and unacknowledged, our Government has made them a central component of legislative change. Our program of legislative reforms will not just be a bandaid approach to retirement village issues. Under this Government, both residents and operators will be secure in the knowledge that the legislative underpinnings of their retirement villages are sound.
