



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

Hansard 30 November 1999

RETIREMENT VILLAGES BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (8.41 p.m.): I have a number of high-quality retirement villages in my electorate of Archerfield: the Cazna Gardens complex at Sunnybank Hills, which is run by the RSL War Veterans Homes and which is where my Uncle Vic and his wife Pat live; and also the Forest Place Retirement Village in Durack, which provides a quality, secure lifestyle for residents.

Mr Briskey interjected.

Ms STRUTHERS: No, I have no relatives in that retirement village. In each of these complexes, I have met with many residents and, in the main, they are very satisfied with the standard of accommodation and services that they are receiving for their money.

A number of residents with that little extra drive and initiative have also been able to acquire additional amenities through community grants and other means. I want to pay tribute to Zoe Williams at Forest Place. She deserves credit for her efforts in getting many of her fellow residents surfing the net. Zoe was instrumental in securing a Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund grant to buy computer equipment for her residents computer group. She has organised Internet training and many other activities.

However, not all retirement village residents in Queensland can report that, upon entering a retirement village, they are living happily ever after. I know of some seniors in Brisbane who are very worried about their fees, delays in maintenance work and lack of input into financial decision making within their village. To maintain quality lifestyles within retirement villages at an affordable price and to maintain a balance between residents' rights and the viability of the retirement villages industry, it is essential that retirement villages laws are up to date and that they regulate the industry effectively. Therefore, I commend the Minister, Judy Spence, for taking action early in her term as Minister to put the revised legislation out for further consultation and to finalise the Bill earlier this year.

I also commend the residents in my area who took the initiative to have input into this Bill. The comprehensive written submissions prepared by Mr Dick Robertson, a Forest Place resident, deserve particular recognition. Having many years of professional managerial roles behind him, Mr Robertson is very competently chairing the Forest Place Village finance committee. He is particularly keen to ensure that the new contractual rights of residents are enhanced in the new legislation. He has cited the positive example of the Forest Place finance subcommittee that reviews budgets, costs, service charge increases and quarterly accounts. He fully supports the provision of quarterly operating statements to residents rather than annual operating statements. I know that this is a common call from the residents. They want to see the books regularly, they want to make sure that maintenance funds are being administered properly and they want to have a fair say.

In the main, this Bill has been received well. However, one matter that has raised the blood pressure of some residents is the maintenance reserve fund to which residents will be required to contribute. I understand that our Government's intention in legislating for this fund is to ensure that routine maintenance is carried out so that properties do not deteriorate prematurely. Some villages are dragging the chain and are failing to do routine maintenance on capital. Residents risk facing significant loss through the exit fee payable by them if the properties have not been maintained well. Recently, several residents have spoken to me about their anxiety. They believe that they may be required to pay up to \$15 per week to this maintenance fund. In a letter to me, two residents stated—

"This retirement village is full of pensioners and find that any amount of money involved in this law would be almost impossible to pay—especially those on single pensions."

My understanding is that the fund should require no more than a few dollars per week from residents, so I have been keen to allay their fears about that. I certainly do not support any slug on seniors on fixed incomes, and I have assured them that the Minister does not either. However, I draw this issue to the Minister's attention for her consideration, because it seems that that sort of scaremongering is out there in the sector. I certainly think that it is important that seniors are not hit hard and that operators seek fair contributions, not unreasonable contributions, from residents.

I am confident that our Government has achieved a more equitable balance. I feel hopeful that residents, such as Dick Robertson, and operators will be pleased with the results. We all want the security of knowing that when we retire we will have access to a secure, affordable roof over our heads. Retirement village living will be the option that some of us choose. In supporting this Bill, we have the opportunity to get the contract arrangements, dispute resolution, capital replacement and service charging processes right. That will continue to build a fair, high-standard industry now and into the future. I remind members that this Bill is in our direct interest, as our future need for retirement living is not so far off.
