



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 29 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Department of Housing

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (10 a.m.), by leave: I wish to respond to claims made yesterday by the member for Mooloolah about the installation of security screens in a public housing dwelling at Stafford earlier this year. I will begin by saying that the tenant in question was contacted by my office almost one month ago in relation to this matter after writing to me. At that time—almost a month ago—she was advised of my deep concern about the breakdown in communication, which is at the heart of this incident. Furthermore, an apology was extended to her for any distress she may have experienced. I openly acknowledge that the problems arose from a system used by the previous Government that needed to be streamlined. I have directed that to happen.

I am advised that the tenant in question requested security screens after a break-in on the weekend of 16 and 17 January. That request was acted upon on Monday, 18 January. I have been advised that shortly after a work order was issued to Q-Build by the Department of Housing. However, it was not issued as a priority work order—one that required a response within 24 hours. Instead, it was issued as one needing a response within 30 days and was dealt with by Q-Build on that basis, even though the Department of Housing had indicated it should be given priority. In addition, the work order was forwarded to a private contractor who did not act on it because it did not contain an order number. This was responsible for the delay in installation of screens, which began on 22 February.

This series of events is not acceptable. As I said, that view has already been conveyed to the tenant. It is not acceptable to me as the Minister responsible for both Q-Build and the Department of Housing. It is regrettable that the house in question suffered a second break-in before the screens could be fitted. I have directed senior officers of Q-Build to examine this case and ensure the process of communicating work orders and other information between them, the Department of Housing and private contractors does not break down again in such an appalling manner.

Yesterday, the member for Mooloolah asked me to take full responsibility for this incident. I am not sure if he wants me to dust off my old chippie's toolbox and go out there and spend the time fitting these screens myself. I do not know that that is the best use of my time. The member for Mooloolah said he did not want me to blame public servants, yet that is precisely what he did. It is no use launching a tirade against Q-Build workers and officers of the Department of Housing and then try to square off by shovelling the blame onto my shoulders.

The member for Mooloolah is again trying to score points off this Government by highlighting faults in a system Liberal Ministers were happy to use. I only wish he was as forthcoming on a major issue, such as the proposed cuts to housing funds over the coming four years that the Howard Government is putting forward at next Monday's meeting of Housing Ministers. Unfortunately, I will miss Labour Day for the first time in 45 years.

Mr Mackenroth: Because of Howard.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is right, yes. It is also a pity—

Mr Borbidge: It is always someone else's fault.

Mr SCHWARTEN: As a matter of fact, it is. I am delighted to say that it is somebody else's fault: it is the fault of the member's own rotten Tory mates in Canberra.

As I said yesterday in relation to another matter, the coalition's plans to abolish Q-Build are well known. They are known by every one of its 2,500 employees and almost 380 apprentices. They are raised with me at every depot I visit, especially in smaller rural and regional centres where Q-Build and its workers make an enormous contribution to local economies. I will not defend stupid mistakes, but I will defend Q-Build against politically motivated attacks.
