



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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STATE HOUSING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.26 p.m.): I congratulate the Minister on this innovative Bill, the State Housing Amendment Bill. In an environment in which home ownership is falling and workers are finding it harder to afford to buy their own homes, this is an excellent scheme.

Earlier this week I said that when I was working as a builder's labourer I found it very hard to afford to get a deposit together to buy my own home. The banks would not lend me any money. They would lend me money for a motor car, so I got a bank loan for a motor car and never bought the car. Then I went to the trade union building society and said that I had a deposit and it gave me a loan for my home. I can assure honourable members that if I was not a little inventive and did not do that, I would not own my own home now, particularly in the place where I live.

I can assure the House that the scheme the Minister has put together will really benefit itinerant workers who find it hard to get a deposit together to buy their own homes. I know that the Minister realises they are very good payers and that once they get into their own homes they will pay them off. This scheme gives them that start. The families of Australia are workers and we need to make sure that we assist families to buy their own homes if that is what they want to do.

It is very important to keep our seniors in and around the areas in which they have lived. I represent an inner-city area. It is probably not unlike Gladstone, where people have lived in the area all their lives, they know their patch and they know the people around them. Many people have lived in my suburb all their lives and have brought up their children there. They know the people down the road. Their friends, their relatives, their churches and their support groups are all there. We must continue to build seniors units in areas such as mine, but it is getting very difficult to do so after the previous Government sold so much land out of my electorate. Some lovely land was set aside for public housing by previous Labor Ministers. The coalition Government destroyed that project almost overnight. The coalition sold \$22m worth of land in my electorate. The money was sent down to John Howard on a plate. That makes it very difficult for the present Minister to find suitable land in order to look after people in my electorate. However, I know that he will endeavour to do everything he can.

The member for Gladstone spoke about a block of land on a hill. She wants to keep an eye on it. I can assure her that, if we are not in Government and this Minister is not the Minister, it will be sold off. The coalition sold the best block of land in Brisbane. It has beautiful views. In my opinion, it was virtually given away. The coalition sold 80 acres of land for a little over \$22m. That land was only 10 minutes from the city and had city views. It was just given away. The Department of Housing is being screwed federally. More and more money is being taken out of the portfolio of public housing. The GST is going to devastate the department and the building industry. That land was a money earner. We could have entered into a partnership with a developer and constructed some very good private housing, as well as public housing, and we could have made money out of it. What happened was absolutely criminal.

We cannot talk about public housing without mentioning the people who look after our public tenants. The staff at the Stones Corner office look after the majority of my electorate. There are some areas of Murarrie that will probably come into my electorate after the next election and will be looked after by the Wynnum office. I mainly deal with the staff at Stones Corner. I cannot speak highly enough

of them. They are a hard-working staff who work their backsides off for the people in my electorate and for me. They are very cooperative. They are most understanding of the plight of public tenants.

They know that people are battling from time to time when they are in and out of work. As I said, I worked as a builder's labourer. Invariably, one is sacked just before Christmas so that one does not have to be paid for the public holidays at Christmas. That makes it very hard for workers to pay their rent. They have kids and relatives for whom they have to buy Christmas presents. The staff at Stones Corner understand all these things. They have a heart. They are very good people. I ask the Minister to convey my congratulations to the staff of the Stones Corner office. They do a very good job in very difficult circumstances.

Some members have not been in this place as long as I have, but I can remember going into the housing commission office in town. It was difficult to approach officers in the city because of the amount of pressure that was put on them. They were all working in the one building. I think one of the better things that this Government has done is to set up a regional office at Stones Corner. It has been marvellous.

I am a member of the Public Works Committee and I have had opportunities to inspect public and private housing around the State. There is a difference between public and private housing. We looked at some private housing units and we also looked at some public senior units which had been renovated. The committee compared the two types of units. I believe that anyone who was a member of that inspection team was able to see the difference in construction between the two types of units. A lot of care and attention went into the construction of the public housing units. It was noticeable in the bathrooms, particularly in the shower area. Thought was given to the older people who would be using those facilities. There were grab handles and doorways were of the right size to accommodate wheelchairs. There were no nibs around the showers. It is those simple things that make life so much easier and better for people. A lot of thought was put into the construction of those units. The department does that very well.

Another thing the department does very well is open up its doors to training. The department, in partnership with the Master Builders and other organisations, has built a large amount of public housing. Apprentices have been used in this process. It is not cheap. People with expertise are working on houses in the building industry. Apprentices work on commercial constructions, but it is very difficult to get good work there. We have wood butchers who slam buildings up as fast as they can. They have a four-day week. It does not matter how well the formwork is put in or how well a doorway is erected. It does not matter to them if a stairwell has been set correctly; the builders' labourers come along and jackhammer two or three inches off the construction later. I love builders like that because it keeps the builders' labourers busy fixing up all their stuff-ups.

However, the State does not want to waste money in public housing. The quality of housing we achieve from our training schemes is excellent. I accompanied the Minister when he opened some units in Gladstone. Those units are a credit to the people who built them. They give dignity to the people who live in them. They are well-built, well thought-out and well set out. The streetscape is beautiful. The units have been built on the edge of a creek. The building has a nice feel about it. When people retire to those units they have the feeling that people care about them. They are units in which people can happily spend the rest of their days.

I have looked at other public housing schemes in Toowoomba with the Minister. A large number of houses were being renovated. The labour which had been brought in did an excellent job. The houses were painted and given a lift. Some of the housing had been there for many years and looked as if it needed some attention. We did not get to speak to the tenants because they had been moved into other accommodation while the repairs were being undertaken. However, I know how appreciative those tenants will be.

My mum never owned her own home; she lived in rented accommodation. I know how she had to battle to get things done in and around the house. Women become houseproud and they like to see things painted and made good.

I reiterate how important it is to be able to allow workers to own their own homes. It is the largest outlay they will make in their lives. It is very important that we allow people to buy their own homes at the right price so that they can raise their families and live life with dignity.
