



Speech by

WARREN PITT

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (3.21 p.m.): Today I am pleased to speak to the Estimates for the portfolio of Public Works and Housing, concentrating mainly on the issues within public housing. I can assure the people of Queensland that public housing dollars are being very well spent.

I draw to the attention of honourable members the recent successes achieved by the State Government's Department of Housing in recognition of its excellence in design and commitment to innovation. The Queensland Department of Housing won a major award for a Cairns boarding house at the Urban Development Institute of Australia—UDIA—Awards for Excellence. The boarding house at McLeod Street, Cairns beat seven other nominations to win the innovations in affordable housing category. The other finalists in this category were also Queensland Department of Housing projects—in Woolloongabba, Highgate Hill and Fortitude Valley. The Cairns boarding house project has three separate buildings, providing 22 bed-sit units, 10 one-bedroom units and eight traditional boarding house rooms. The Minister, who opened the boarding house last year, named its three buildings after former Labor members for far-northern electorates—the late Ray Jones, Bob Scott and Keith De Lacy, each of whom made a valuable contribution to the provision of public housing for the constituents in our area.

The Cairns boarding house fits in well with the local neighbourhood while responding to the density demands of inner-city land. Location, street presentation, energy efficiency, privacy, unit amenity, proximity to services and landscaping were all considered within the design.

Another success in recognising the current quality of public housing was achieved at the recent Queensland Masters Builders Association Awards. A project of seniors units and detached houses at Sandgate was nominated in the best multiresidential units and the most innovative use of steel roof categories and won awards in both categories. The Sandgate project was also one of three Brisbane projects to receive commendations from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects at the Brisbane regional awards in April this year. The other two were the Villiers Street boarding house in New Farm and the Woolloongabba boarding home.

I wish also to mention some recent international successes achieved by the Queensland Government in the provision of public housing in this State. An innovative housing development at Cotton Tree, Maroochydore, has been included in an international design exhibition in New York which is showing only 10 projects from around the world that combine architectural excellence with environmental sensitivity. The other nine buildings are in Europe.

In my electorate of Mulgrave the community of Babinda will be in receipt of a new-style project for Queensland—an Abbeyfield project. At the Community Cabinet meeting in Edmonton in July 1998 the Minister received a deputation from the Babinda and District Aged Care Association on an Abbeyfield concept for Babinda. Mr Fred Lizzio, who is the driving force behind the BDACA, also raised the issue with me in the lead-up to the general election in 1998.

The Abbeyfield concept was promoted by local people in Babinda as a concept that would suit their particular needs. Babinda has a significant seniors population, many of whom are forced to leave home to access retirement accommodation facilities. This results in social disruption. Such a small community, which is in many ways suffering a downturn, can ill afford to have any of its residents having to find another place to live.

The Minister was aware that he had to look for new ways and means to deliver housing to meet the specific needs of people and communities. The innovative streak in Queensland public housing came to the fore. He recognised the project as challenging, but the Labor Government was prepared to deliver a different concept for evaluation. On 2 November 1998 he announced that a pilot Abbeyfield project would be built in Babinda. Abbeyfield has worked in the housing sector for more than 15 years, providing older people living on low incomes and with few assets with a genuine and cost-effective housing and support option. The philosophy behind Abbeyfield that older people should remain in familiar surroundings close to family and friends was what appealed to the Minister. A house is integrated into the community so that residents can continue to enjoy their leisure and social activities in their own district and continue to remain independent and in charge of their own lives.

On 25 March 1999 the Minister approved \$900,000 in funding for the Babinda and District Care Association under the 1999-2000 long-term Community Housing Program to construct a pilot 10-bedroom Abbeyfield house at Babinda. The Cairns City Council did its part by providing land to the association for the project from holdings that were acquired when it purchased a cane farm to facilitate the construction of a golf course in the town. The project is complex due to the number of stakeholders involved—Abbeyfield Australia, the Babinda and District Aged Care Association, the Cairns City Council and the Department of Housing. It has resulted in some frustration, but there is a determination to see the project through. The association appointed a local architect from Cairns to work with the Abbeyfield architect to establish a design suited to north Queensland. There has been much toing-and-froing, as the Abbeyfield requirements need to be met but also modified to suit local needs. It has taken some time to work through the complexities of the project and get to this stage, but it is now envisaged that the work will be well under way before Christmas.

Time expired.
