



Speech by

ANDREW McNAMARA

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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FRASER LODGE VILLAGE

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): I rise today to bring to the attention of the House a matter of very serious concern to a large group of mainly elderly residents in my electorate. In recent weeks I have met with the residents of the Fraser Lodge Village at 59 Truro Street, Torquay, in relation to their very justified concerns about the withdrawal of services, the deterioration of facilities and a campaign of bullying, harassment and victimisation by the owners of Fraser Lodge Village. Fraser Lodge Village is a mobile home park and the issues I will detail in a moment illustrate very clearly why the review of the Mobile Homes Act being conducted by the Minister for Fair Trading, Merri Rose, is so important. I strongly support the minister's review of the legislation and look forward to seeing the new draft legislation, which I am informed will be released for public consultation around November.

There is no doubt that the injustice, neglect and oppression which the residents of Fraser Lodge Village have been suffering recently will only be alleviated by legislative reform to put some minimum service standards and protection of residents' rights into law. Residents of Fraser Lodge Village were enticed to live there with glossy brochures advertising a better way of life. They were told in writing that access to the fully tiled saltwater swimming pool and all facilities offered at the adjoining Fraser Lodge Carapark would be theirs. Bins were emptied twice a week by on-site managers. Their lawns were mowed and the gardens were trimmed regularly. Streetlight bulbs were replaced when they blew so that the park was well lit and they felt secure. Problems were dealt with promptly and without fuss by the on-site managers, who were friendly and accessible.

However, it all started to go wrong when the previous owner sold the village to a company called Deception Bay Holdings Pty Ltd, a company operated by Mr Blair Rowen, in January 2002. Mr Rowen, acting as manager for the company, immediately removed the on-site managers, giving residents a 1800 number on which they could contact him in Brisbane. The collection of bins ceased along with the supply of bin liner bags. The nightly security patrols were cancelled, as was the gardening and pool maintenance. After understandable complaints from residents, monthly pool maintenance was restored, although Mr Rowen is now wanting to charge extra for that. The use of the adjoining carapark facilities disappeared when it was sold separately. Security patrols were restored but the absence of on-site managers remains a very real concern for the elderly residents of the village.

I have met with the residents of Fraser Lodge Village. They are by and large retirees. A number among them have disabilities. There are some 35 residents currently. They are angry, disappointed and afraid. They do not need nursing home care but they chose Fraser Lodge Village because it had the level of support and security they needed at this time in their lives. Now not only is the support gone; if residents complain, they are abused, bullied and threatened by Mr Rowen. Numerous residents have told me of the verbal abuse they have suffered as a result of making the mistake of ringing Mr Rowen to voice concerns they might have about the park. They have been told to run the village themselves, including doing potentially dangerous work such as changing light bulbs on streetlights.

One resident, Mr Norm McGill, has been treated shamefully, and has been threatened with eviction for putting together an informal residents association. Mr McGill has lived at Fraser Lodge Village for over four years. He is a retired inspector of police from Victoria. He served in the Victorian police force for 28 years and is a recipient of the national police medal. He is a man of honesty and integrity. He is also not a man accustomed to being stood over and bullied. He and his wife have now had to suffer Mr Rowen threatening to continually move their home around the park until they leave.

The people at Fraser Lodge Village need some legislative protection from their rapacious absentee landlord. I look forward to seeing the minister's draft legislation to reform the Mobile Homes Act shortly. Elderly residents of mobile home parks need better protection of their rights and protection from the erosion of services which induced them to move there in the first place. They have a right to live peacefully. But if they have to meet collectively to discuss issues of common concern, they should be able to do so free from fear of victimisation. I support the right of all people to organise collectively to protect their rights, be they students, workers or retirees. It is a tragedy that I have had to report these matters to the parliament. I call on Mr Rowen to look at his behaviour towards the elderly and vulnerable residents of his park and to treat them with the respect and fairness to which they are entitled.

Mr Rowen had the temerity to send an email to a solicitor acting on behalf of Mr McGill telling him that I had politely dismissed the concerns of residents. Let me assure him that nothing could be further from the truth. I am deeply concerned at the treatment they have received and will stand up for their rights on every occasion. I will be discussing the new Mobile Homes Bill with the residents to ensure it meets their concerns. I will also be watching Mr Rowen's actions closely and encouraging him to meet the obligations of a good corporate citizen and fair landlord.