



Speech by

ANDREW McNAMARA

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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PUBLIC HOUSING, FRASER COAST

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): I rise to place on the record my concerns at the failure of the federal government to provide appropriate assistance and support for my electorate of Hervey Bay, particularly in the area of housing. It is no exaggeration to say that Hervey Bay is facing a housing shortage which has reached crisis proportions. I see the member for Darling Downs, the shadow minister for housing, leaving the chamber. Perhaps that is appropriate because I do not think he will have the benefit of having this roof over his head after the next election.

I have an outstanding community housing sector in Hervey Bay, with great organisations such as the Fraser Coast Community Rental Group and the Hervey Bay Housing Coalition doing great work. Hervey Bay is growing strongly. We have brilliant growth in our student numbers at the University of Southern Queensland's Hervey Bay campus. The new prison at Maryborough is also putting pressure on housing because there are 270 permanent jobs being filled at the prison, and eventually next year the families of inmates will put more pressure on the housing market.

The state government is doing its bit and the Minister for Housing, Robert Swarten, was on the record in this House again today detailing his concerns about the availability of public housing. The Department of Housing's budget has increased by \$130 million to address housing shortages. I was delighted to be able to announce on behalf of the minister at the recent AGM of Hervey Bay Housing Coalition a grant of \$660,000 to buy two new two-bedroom houses and two more four-bedroom houses for the coalition. It will bring the coalition's housing stock to 21, and I wish to congratulate the housing manager, Marilyn Sard, and the coalition's committee on the great work they do. They improve the houses under their control and are an outstanding example of what a dedicated group of volunteers can achieve. They have an outstanding balance sheet and are a model for all community organisations. Nevertheless, in the absence of any Commonwealth assistance by way of meaningful increases in the federal housing budget the situation will just get worse.

At a time when the Queensland government has increased its commitment to public housing to \$130 million, the federal government has decreased funding by \$410 million. What this translates to is families looking for housing on the Fraser Coast being offered accommodation in Mount Isa and Biloela because there is simply nothing available in our area. I have had people in my office who have been to every agent and every housing group in town and found nothing.

Last week, Kim Linton, who is the coordinator of the Fraser Coast Community Rental Group, was reported in the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* as confirming that her organisation is turning people away daily. Kim is an outstanding coordinator and a dedicated and committed person. I have spoken with her on numerous occasions about the looming crisis. She is doing a fantastic job, managing some 45 properties, and she is a fearless advocate for the public housing sector. But she cannot meet the demand without significant additional housing stock being put on her books.

I fear that a situation which has now reached crisis point will, in a year's time, become a disaster if Commonwealth assistance is not increased. The state government is doing its part. I call on the member for Wide Bay, Warren Truss, to put the plight of people in his electorate who cannot find housing on the agenda for federal cabinet's consideration. Cities like Hervey Bay need growth. For jobs, for stability in our housing construction industry and to protect jobs in the teaching sector by making sure that our schools continue to grow, we need more housing.

People are going to continue to move to the coast. At all levels of government we have a responsibility to ensure that people are not left to sleep in cars or on the beach. I support Kim Linton's analysis that 'drastic changes by the Federal Government in the way of extra funding and better forward planning were the only solutions for the future'. Kim knows what she is talking about. She has had years of experience at the coalface. Her concerns are not party political but are the result of genuine fear for the safety and comfort of the people she serves. They are my fears, too. They should loom large in the minds of every member of this place who wants to see people with a roof over their heads.

I call on the federal minister and the state shadow minister to produce some concrete proposals to increase funding in this area. We have a disaster looming; we know it, we can see it and everyone is talking about it, but the federal government is not working on it consistently. \$410 million cut out of the public housing sector by the Commonwealth cannot be replaced by the Queensland government. This must be addressed, as houses are not built overnight.

The Commonwealth government encouraged home ownership via its first home ownership rebate scheme. I support that scheme; it was a good scheme which put many people into their own homes. But the direct result of that has been a dramatic decline in the availability of housing on the rental market. In Hervey Bay about 700 rental properties have gone off the market over the last two years.

A government member: It is a great place to live.

Mr McNAMARA: It is a great place to live. The time for action is now.