



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard 10 May 2002

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES [ACCREDITATION] BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (10.33 a.m.): I rise to speak on the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill 2002. I congratulate the minister for introducing this bill. The issues surrounding regulation of this industry are clearly very complex. With this legislation the minister has achieved an outcome that acknowledges both the immediate need for improving the living conditions of residents and the unique characteristics of this for-profit industry. The registration and accreditation requirements in this legislation will ensure that residential service providers meet crucial safety and suitability standards before they can operate and that improvements to services will be a continuous process.

The staged approach to implementation of this legislation is to be commended. It recognises the importance of urgently implementing critical standards to protect the most vulnerable residents in our society. However, at the same time the legislation affords service providers time to assess their own practices and facilities in order to make staged improvements, thereby reducing the immediate impact of this regulation. This bill will see an accreditation scheme that aims to meet the needs of a for-profit industry which the government cannot afford to replace and to ensure community standards about the care of people who are aged, have a disability or are one step removed from homelessness.

The bill establishes compliance processes and provides for sanctions ranging from agreed corrective action and improvement orders to the capacity to remove or refuse accreditation and close a premises where industry operators do not or will not meet the minimum requirements. A closure order is only likely in circumstances where there is a serious risk to the health and safety of residents and when all appropriate avenues of corrective action have been pursued. Where a service provider disagrees with an accreditation or registration decision, it will have the right to seek review of the decision by the accreditation body. Where a service provider disagrees with the review decision, it will have the right to appeal the decision by lodging an application with the Queensland Building Tribunal.

The purpose of the bill is obviously to establish a regulatory framework to mandate the standards and conditions under which residents of the residential services industry live. The bill aims to protect the health, safety and basic freedom of residents, encourage service providers to continually improve the way they conduct residential services and support fair trading in the residential services industry. The residential services industry is one of the few within the broader residential rental market that remains without consumer protection legislation.

This bill is one component of a reform package that has been developed, and it is only the Labor Party that continues to ensure that those less fortunate are looked after. Conservative members must realise that their mealy-mouthed colleagues have removed millions from the most needy in our society. They will be condemned. I therefore commend the bill to the House.