



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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RESIDENTIAL SERVICES [ACCREDITATION] BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (11.01 a.m.): I am pleased indeed to stand with other Labor members of the House in supporting the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill 2002. This bill is needed and it is a sign of the times in that for many years we have had poor control over boarding houses and supported accommodation. Previously, this was not an issue because the poor—those who were limited not only in means but also in terms of their capacity to participate in life through disabilities and so on—were not particularly assisted. They were left to live in poor accommodation and the standards of that poor accommodation were not scrutinised as well as we expect them to be in 2002.

This bill is certainly, too, a sign of the times in terms of the need for categories of accommodation that come under the auspices of this bill. That is certainly so in the electorate of Cairns. Unfortunately, over the past decade or 15 years we have lost the boarding houses that were so much a part of the inner city of Cairns. As the city has become much more developed and land prices have risen, as predicted the old boarding houses have been replaced by much more expensive buildings that are mostly commercial or tourism related.

Thanks to the Honourable Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing, I am pleased to say that one magnificent boarding house on the fringe of the CBD in Cairns has been built by the department and is now run by Access Community Housing. It is a large boarding house with different kinds of boarding accommodation within it. That has been a great success and, I hope, will be the model for more boarding houses built in Cairns and perhaps in other places throughout the state.

Cairns still has quite a number of hostels. Members would be aware that Cairns is a place where people sometimes come to live for short periods—for six months, for one or two or even three years. Therefore, Cairns has a considerable turnover of residents, many seeking a break from the exigencies of colder climates as well as the pressures of city life. Frequently they live for periods in hostels. Therefore, it is important that we not only keep those hostels as they reflect the needs of the population of Cairns but also that we ensure that the standards within them are appropriate.

I have to say, too, that there has been increased pressure on the hostels in Cairns—and dare I say elsewhere—since across Australia we have had the fashion of emptying out institutions. For a while it seemed as though institutional living for those with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, psychological or psychiatric disabilities had become such a no-no that, somewhat to the extreme, we forced people—many of whom had lived for very long periods in institutions and many of whom had quite extensive disabilities—to live in the community. Unfortunately for those people, many do not have families with whom they are able to live, so they need supported accommodation.

I must admit that I am particularly concerned about those people in Cairns who have chronic psychiatric disabilities. Although many of them do not require institutional living, they require some support and some sensitivity in the kind of accommodation that they are offered. We need these hostels, as well as some that offer additional support, for such people. The other important point about this accommodation is that it also needs to be made available on the fringe of the CBD. Generally, these people do not have much in the way of financial resources. In terms of travel costs, they cannot afford to live in the outer suburbs. If they do, they are too isolated and that is not good for them in terms of their social, educational, employment, lifestyle or personal needs.

Unfortunately, some people who are of a very strong development mentality in the city of Cairns see this provision of affordable accommodation on the fringe of the inner city of Cairns as inappropriate. They insist on referring to it as welfare housing. Of course, it is not; it is supported accommodation, often run by the private sector, in which those of lesser means can live quite appropriately close to the city and have access to all of the needed facilities. Nonetheless, because many of the people who live in supported accommodation have a limited ability to speak for themselves, and that is particularly so of those who have psychiatric disabilities and who may become anxious or distressed and find difficulty in asserting their proper rights, it is important that they are provided with accommodation that meets certain standards and, if those standards are breached, action taken to ensure that is remedied.

I am pleased also to inform members that aged care accommodation run by the private sector is on the rise in Cairns. Only last week I saw the plans for one new development in the southern suburbs of Cairns. I would like to refer to an excellent publication by the Queensland Parliamentary Library, on this occasion written by Nicolee Dixon, in regard to this bill. It states—

Many residents in residential services facilities are disadvantaged by physical or mental disabilities, age and infirmity, and/or low incomes and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous service providers.

That quotation well emphasises the need for this bill. The bill will accomplish the new standards through three actions: registration, accreditation and then enforcement, where necessary. I absolutely support this bill.