



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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STATE HOUSING AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.03 p.m.): I endorse most of the remarks made by the shadow minister. It is refreshing to find one among the conservative politicians prepared to speak up to Canberra on the issue of housing. There is little likelihood that I will be pleasantly surprised in respect of the federal budget tonight and discover an increase in housing funding—as there should be—rather than a decrease. Public housing is important for meeting social need.

I am pleased to support the State Housing and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002. There are a number of significant aspects to the legislation. During the luncheon recess, I was surprised that, when asked to speak on this bill and I replied that I was already intending to do so, I was told by the other member, who shall remain nameless, 'I don't know why you'd bother; there isn't much in it.' What an indictment that is of that member and others who think in that way. Not all bills that are 100 pages thick are any more important than this one, which whilst not thick is substantial and important as part of a raft of bills the minister has introduced into the House, one of which we debated last week. I am pleased to say that most members opposite endorsed our action as being appropriate.

One of the small but significant changes that will come about as a result of this bill will be the change to local government and its ability to deal with home buyers under our instalment purchase scheme who have not paid their rates. The Cairns City Council, similar to a number of other councils around the state, has had difficulties in the past and made representations to me and, thereby, to the minister. I am sure they will welcome the news that purchasers who are already contractually liable for payments will suffer the same consequences as any other purchasers of houses around Queensland. The changes we are making will also allow local governments to sell properties after three years, which is the usual qualifying period, if overdue rates become unpaid. However, this power of sale will apply only to rate arrears incurred after the commencement of the amendment legislation, which will be on 1 July 2002. This change will put these home buyers on a similar footing to other home owners and home buyers in the marketplace and remove the advantage they have due to the fact that the homes remain in the name of the commission until they are fully paid for. I will be interested to see the response from local government. I had heard whispers that it will not be satisfied because the bill will not be retrospective and therefore will not catch those with rate bills unpaid to date. In line with fundamental legislative principles, we are not able to make the bill retrospective. Nonetheless, we are remedying the situation, and that will take effect from 1 July this year.

Another important part of the bill that I wish to recognise is that relevant to the supply of affordable housing in Queensland, which is, unfortunately, declining. This bill will provide a head of power in the State Housing Act to allow the department to offer an affordable loan scheme for residential services industry operators to assist in the achievement of compliance with standards in the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill, which the parliament debated and passed last week. It means that the loan product is for the purpose of undertaking capital repairs and improvements only and not for routine maintenance. Therefore, it is a complementary amendment to ensure that, with respect to the upgrading of standards, the compliance that we expect from industry operators and those who will have to take their punishment for non-compliance, at least we have in place the proper powers to make sure that a loan can be provided to those who need to undertake significant works to their buildings in order to comply.

This issue of housing affordability goes beyond the Residential Services (Accreditation) Bill and those operators still in the market. I am told it is already a serious problem in Brisbane and it is

becoming serious in other cities, and that is so in Cairns. Around the fringe of the Cairns CBD the old boarding houses have disappeared progressively over the last 15 years of rapid development in Cairns. Historically, those new to Cairns, single adults and those of limited means and who needed to live close to the city resided in those boarding houses, and happily so. They were a good part of the history of Cairns and it is sad that they have disappeared. They have disappeared primarily because with growth comes an increase in property values. Developers have bought up the old boarding houses and constructed new developments—tourism, commercial and residential—that are beyond the affordability of the former residents of the boarding houses.

I give recognition to the minister for the very successful example of a new boarding house we have in the CBD of Cairns. It has been open for some two years and is a great success, offering three different kinds of accommodation according to the needs of residents. It is run successfully by the residents. I pay tribute to the manager, Access Community Housing, which has done an excellent job, having participated in the design of the building and then being responsible for its day-to-day management. I expect that model for boarding houses will be replicated in the years to come. I have already suggested to the minister that a second similar boarding house in Cairns would be appropriate. He suggested to me that he might even consider boarding houses in other parts of the state, if not another one in Cairns.

Unfortunately, however, it would seem that the affordability issue is one that some good and bright people in other ways are having difficulty getting their heads around. In Cairns there are some—and unfortunately one of them is the Mayor of the Cairns City Council—who cannot or will not understand the difference between affordable housing and welfare housing. 'We do not want welfare housing in Cairns', he said. Unfortunately, with that narrow perspective, he—and some others, particularly developers—has not engaged us in discussions on the affordable housing discussion paper as to what are good models whereby, in participation with local government—not necessarily at the cost of local government—and with developers, we can best provide some affordable accommodation.

Cairns, despite its gloss and its glamour and all of the international tourists—well over a million per year—who visit us, is quite a modest place in terms of income. The wages are not those of the big cities. There is a high proportion of people who live on casual wages, with all the difficulties that go with that, and others who live in impecunious circumstances. Many of them do their darnedest to be independent. They are not on public housing waiting lists; they are managing the best way they know how. Some are, for example, even young couples who are at university at this time and working around their university timetable with a very uncertain and limited income. These are the kinds of people who need government assistance at all levels to have affordable accommodation. They cannot take a rental property half an hour's drive from Cairns because they do not have a car, and they cannot afford to live, as it were, so far distant from the city and their jobs and the university. It is a right and proper role for our government to take, under the minister's leadership, to find some ways to encourage the development of affordable housing—hopefully with those in the private sector whose minds are open to opportunities towards providing that type of housing—on the fringe of city areas such as in Cairns.

The bill proposes to amend the State Housing Act 1945 to make it clear that the Minister for Housing is, and always has been, the appropriate decision maker, and to validate approvals for dealings given prior to the date of the legislative amendment. Of course, I support that. While I understand that it is not the particular intention of inserting that amendment to the bill, I give recognition to how political indeed is the matter of housing; how very important it is not only for those in need but also to give those in need a leg-up, some advantage, some chance of becoming more independent and more stable in their income and in their social living. The fine programs initiated by our minister, particularly the Urban Renewal and Community Renewal programs, are politically designed. I am proud indeed that they have been so, having such a fine example of their success as I do in the Cairns area—the Manoora Urban and Community Renewal Project. I am pleased indeed to stand with other honourable members of this House in supporting the bill.