



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Hansard 14 May 2002

STATE HOUSING AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (3.35 p.m.): I am pleased to rise in support of the State Housing and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2002. Affordable housing in Queensland is declining. Between the 1986 census and the one in 1996, a total of 93,000 new dwellings were added to the private rental market in Queensland. Some 80,000 of them were in the top end of the market, renting for more than \$150 a week. The number of dwellings renting for less than \$150 grew by only 12,000. The median weekly rent for a three-bedroom house on the Gold Coast is \$190 compared to a state wide figure of \$170. A large family has to pay an extra \$30 a week to rent a four-bedroom house on the Gold Coast, with the median rent being \$240 compared to the state wide average of \$210. In the electorate of Mudgeeraba, which is becoming an increasingly popular place to live on the Gold Coast, affordable rental properties are becoming exceedingly hard to find.

The higher cost of living on the Gold Coast has a significant impact particularly on elderly residents, who often live alone. In fact, the median weekly rent for a one-bedroom house in the Gold Coast region—and they are very few and far between—is \$155, \$40 more than the state wide figure. Rapid population growth on the Gold Coast not only provides opportunities for many to live in paradise but also continues to place pressure on members of society who cannot participate in the burgeoning residential developments, forcing them increasingly to the fringes of society and the edges of our community. The loss of low-cost private sector accommodation is displacing people who are, for many reasons, at risk of homelessness. A lack of affordable rental accommodation is making it increasingly difficult for people on low incomes to live in decent housing. This includes single parents, many of whom have come to talk to me about this problem, the aged, young families, low income workers and people with disabilities and their carers. In fact, anyone on a low income or pension is finding it very hard to find anywhere of a good standard to live on the Gold Coast.

Homelessness is a sad fact of life for many people on the Gold Coast. I recently attended a meeting of community organisations on the Gold Coast working with young people at risk of becoming homeless. At that meeting I spoke with a journalist from a television news crew. He was very interested in the topics of conversation and the factors of youth homelessness on the Gold Coast. He was quite naïve and unaware of the facts of life on the Gold Coast. He actually said to me, 'So we have some homeless youth on the Gold Coast, do we?' That workshop was a bit of an eye opener for him and many other people on the Gold Coast who have difficulty accepting that, behind all the glitzy and glamorous aspects and fantastic tourism on the Gold Coast, homelessness and poverty are a fact.

Poverty is experienced. It is there. It is behind all of the things that make the Gold Coast great. It is a society much like any other where people live, work and often struggle to make ends meet. It is a society that has its fair share of battlers, disadvantaged, unemployed and poor. The simple fact is that the federal government's rent assistance scheme just does not cut it. It just is not enough and does not support the people who most need the help of that scheme or affordable housing. In fact, the people who have come to see me in desperation about their housing situation have all been in receipt of the federal rent assistance scheme and have still found it almost impossible to exist on the Gold Coast. As a result, they have to look for housing outside the region, leaving behind any friends, families and connections they may have made.

For many people, the private rental market is simply out of reach. It has been estimated that approximately 160 boarding houses, incorporating over 2,000 rooms, in inner city Brisbane were lost between 1987 and 1997. The Department of Housing is working proactively to address the decline of

supply of low cost accommodation. Some of the strategies the minister has undertaken and is to be commended for his efforts in this area to improve the quality and availability of affordable housing include: developing a state planning policy and legislative framework that will support the provision of affordable housing through the land use planning system; developing a protocol for the disposal of surplus state land to encourage affordable housing outcomes; and supporting local government to encourage affordable housing development in their jurisdictions by having collaborative input into planning schemes.

The population explosion being experienced in Mudgeeraba, the Gold Coast hinterland and in fact right across the Gold Coast is not in affordable housing development but is aimed at double income, middle class people who are able to purchase into those housing developments. I ask the Gold Coast City Council in its future deliberations regarding zoning and housing developments to pay closer attention to the needs of low income earners and to make sure it sets aside some specific housing for those groups of people. The Department of Housing is also trying alternative methods of supplying affordable housing by undertaking initiatives such as the Brisbane Housing Company that will provide one third of its stock as boarding house accommodation. Specific assistance to residents to manage issues arising as a result of regulation of the hostel industry will be provided in several ways.

The Residential Tenancies Authority will undertake training and community education activities. The state government has boosted funding for the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service Queensland to expand its capacity to work with affected residents. However, the key concern today is the Department of Housing strategy to develop an affordable loan product to help industry operators reach the standard of service for tenants set out through accreditation. A key objective of the bill is assisting the residential service industry to meet its obligations under the housing accreditation legislation passed earlier. Loan funds will be made available to meet the costs of undertaking capital improvements to meet the registration and accreditation standards. The authority for the department to provide housing loans lies under the State Housing Act. However, the act does not authorise the department to lend outside the scope of home loans, and therefore these amendments to the State Housing Act are necessary to facilitate housing related loans to the residential services sector. Loans would be made available for the purpose of undertaking capital repairs and improvements to meet the requirements for registration and accreditation.

The introduction of legislation to protect the interests of vulnerable Queenslanders is well overdue. This bill, in conjunction with the residential services accommodation legislation, goes a long way to meeting that need. Work to improve the safety and quality of accommodation available at the low cost end of the market is crucial. For some operators, the extension of financial assistance allowed by this bill may make the difference between closing down and making the necessary improvements to continue to operate and provide an improved level of service. While the federal government continues to cut funding for housing through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, as the minister and other members have raised time and again, the state government must look at new ways of developing more with less. I again praise the Housing Minister and the Beattie government for addressing the needs of the sector and the residents the industry supports. I am delighted to be a member of this Labor government which demonstrates time and again its firm commitment to social justice and key Labor principles. I am pleased to see members opposite support the bill and indeed to see the National Party swinging to the left once more by supporting this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.
