



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

---

Hansard 10 September 2003

#### **HOUSING BILL**

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (5.44 p.m.): I am pleased to speak in support of the Housing Bill 2003. The Housing Bill provides a great opportunity for the Queensland government to enshrine its commitment to advance the availability of safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing for Queenslanders. The role of the Queensland government in housing has changed greatly from 1945, when the current state Housing Act commenced. At that time, the focus was on providing housing for families post World War II. Today the role of the Queensland government is much broader and ranges from providing public housing to people most in need to working with the private sector to expand the provision of affordable housing.

The Housing Bill contains two objects that capture the breadth of the government's role in housing today. These objects, firstly, are to improve the access of Queenslanders to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing and, secondly, to help build sustainable communities. Both objects are adopted from the Queensland government's housing policy statement endorsed in May 2001. These objects have also been the subject of extensive community consultation, as has the bill.

I have seen that particularly in the Cairns area, where I have attended a number of consultations in regard to the Housing Bill over recent years. I have seen the steady and sensible way in which the department has conducted the consultation. I remember well the early consultations and some of the people who attended, particularly those representing small community organisations that provide housing with assistance from the state government. They experienced nervousness over what might be the government's agenda, how it might affect them, whether the Housing Bill would make the standards too high or money too hard to access—all of the fears that understandably can be in the hearts of those who see the government might be changing the game plan or the arrangements.

Through proceeding in such a steady fashion with the consultations—and I extend my compliments to those who facilitated the consultations—by taking on board all of the issues, by allowing those anxieties and concerns to be clearly expressed and then by addressing them we have arrived at a point now where almost all of the housing organisations, if not all, across Queensland are supporting the action that the House is taking today. I note the opposition's support for the bill.

The first object, to improve the access of Queenslanders to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing, acknowledges the important role of the state government in helping Queenslanders to access housing that meets their needs. The second object, to help build sustainable communities, acknowledges the importance of housing in creating sustainable communities. This has been most recently illustrated, as Madam Deputy Speaker would herself be aware, by the Department of Housing's administration of the Community Renewal Program. The Community Renewal Program has been a tremendous success in the electorate of the acting Deputy Speaker, as it has been in mine and others around Queensland. The Community Renewal Program has demonstrated the importance of enhancing community capacity as a way to assist communities to thrive.

In particular, I mention the tremendous benefits in what was regarded as the poorest and least attractive suburb to live in Cairns, the suburb of Manoora. Some five years ago it was at the bottom of the real estate attractiveness scale in Cairns. In truth, a lot of people there were dislocated and there was a low level of employment and education relative to some of the other suburbs of Cairns. Unfortunately, there was a relatively high crime rate, particularly in terms of youth crime, vandalism, graffiti and break and enters. All of this has changed thanks to the urban and the community renewal

programs led by the Department of Housing. They recognised early not only the importance of providing modern, up-to-date housing for the families who will live in it but also the importance of the connection to other state government departments—the connection between housing and safety, housing and health, housing and training, education and employment, the importance of the connection between housing, stability in the family and community pride. All of these things have been accomplished over the last five years, thanks largely to the leadership of the Department of Housing and the Community Renewal Program.

I am pleased to say that, for example, crime rates in the Manoora area have gone down. I am pleased to inform members that now it is very hard to get a house in the public housing areas of Manoora because the turnover in tenants has dramatically reduced. I am pleased, too, to say that when we do sell some of the older public houses in that area they are snapped up by private sector buyers very quickly. I predict that it will be only several years before Manoora will become the trendy inner-city suburb of Cairns.

The minister is aware that that has been wonderful work, but that there are those of us in Cairns who hope there will be a further community renewal program for the suburb of Moorooloolool. Moorooloolool was one of the last small lot public housing estates established in the state of Queensland and we are left with the problems of that design—ill considered as it was—with some effects that we had not predicted and that are not of benefit to the community. I am hopeful that the minister and his department, with the support of cabinet colleagues and the Treasurer, will decide to continue community renewal programs and designate Moorooloolool as a priority as soon as possible. Unfortunately, in Moorooloolool we have some of the same conditions that we encountered in Manoora before we started the urban and community renewal projects.

The two objects on which this bill is founded will be primarily achieved through the state's provision, first and foremost, of public housing and other housing services. They will be achieved through the state developing, undertaking and supporting other housing programs and initiatives and through the establishment of a system for supporting and regulating funded organisations that are providing housing services.

In the early consultations on the bill this was a matter of some real concern for housing organisations, at least in the Cairns area and the far-northern region. There were those who were concerned that the new standards we might be setting would be beyond them. There were those who were concerned that they may be, as it were, put out of business. Understandably they were concerned that the standards may be beyond their understanding or their capacity or knowledge to provide. I am pleased to reassure any who have not yet been reassured that we will include with the bill proper education for the registered housing providers of the new standards and assistance to those organisations to make sure that they do meet the new standards under the bill. Unfortunately, at the same time it is necessary for us to have these new registration provisions in place for those housing organisations that do not deliberately, consistently and, despite assistance from the government, provide a good enough service for their clients and do not manage the money, which really is public money provided through the government, in a proper fashion, with integrity.

Unlike the State Housing Act 1945, the Housing Bill makes specific reference to public housing in acknowledgment of the important role the public housing program plays in providing housing to Queenslanders in housing need. Feedback from community consultations on the Housing Bill conducted by the Department of Housing in 2002 included a strong view by tenants and peak community housing groups that the state government's continuing commitment to the provision of public housing should be reflected in the new legislation. I suppose that fear came about as a consequence of moves by conservative governments, such as the federal government, towards contracting out arrangements—a move in many areas of government service provision—moving away from direct service provision to contract management. I am pleased to join the minister in reassuring any such groups that this government—as long as it is a Labor government proudly led by Peter Beattie and the Minister for Housing, Robert Schwarten—will continue to fight for more public housing.

The bill enshrines eight principles that will guide the administration of the new legislation. I commend these principles to all of those in the housing business.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Phillips): Order! The level of conversation is making it very hard to hear the speaker.

**Ms BOYLE:** Despite the riveting information that I am presenting to the House that is not capturing the attention of honourable members, I would like to inform them of some valiant people in Cairns who not only are supporting this Housing Bill but who work away year in, year out towards providing housing options for those in need and sometimes in crisis and others who have fallen into difficult times and are in need of community housing or public housing assistance.

In particular, I would like to recognise all of the workers at Access Community Housing. Access Community Housing manages the boarding house in Cairns that has been such a great project.

Additionally, it is developing other innovative projects which I hope will contribute to the supply of affordable housing in Cairns and be established over the next several years. I would also like to recognise Wyn Hopkins and others at Shelter Housing, known in Cairns as SHAC. Wyn Hopkins has done a magnificent job at a statewide level as well as in far-north Queensland in fighting for and providing in the best way possible housing for those in crisis. She is retiring this year and her great expertise will be sadly missed.

There are other organisations that are particularly providing housing to Aboriginal and Islander people whose contributions also need recognising. Unfortunately, the rate of homelessness and the rate of poverty for ATSI organisations in far-north Queensland is still too high.

I would like to recognise the tremendous efforts of the Department of Housing in the development of this bill and not least amongst those the leaders in the Department of Housing in Cairns, in particular the regional manager, Brian Sheehan, and the leaders of the community and urban renewal projects in Cairns, Gary Roberts and Felix Klose. I pass on my compliments to all of those involved in the minister's office. I am pleased to support this bill.