



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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HOUSING BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (5.02 p.m.): The provision of adequate, safe, affordable housing was an interest of mine long before I became involved in the political scene in 1984. I was working in a voluntary capacity in an organisation that provided emergency housing. I cared for families in a number of houses, and also did office duties. It was very evident to me that a family without a stable home was a family in crisis. Children were sometimes malnourished, resulting in poor health. Some had emotional or behavioural issues. Family relationships were often strained and their financial state was quite precarious. I still recall one young family with four children—two with severe medical conditions—and their inability to function at even the most basic level.

The services available back then were certainly very inadequate. When I began work in the Woodridge electorate office in 1984 the area was heavily populated with residents in department or, as it was known then, commission homes. These were the days before area offices were established, and the electorate office was the first port of call for anyone on the waiting list or indeed for anyone with a housing inquiry. Names in central office that come to mind are Tony Moss, Peter Videroni, the late Bob Kasaulke, Tony Waters, Jim Murphy and so on. They were dedicated officers, and many remain within the department to this day. Indeed, Jim Murphy came to Woodridge before the area office was established, has been a stalwart of the department and is still there today. Peter Videroni served our community as our first area office manager and is fondly remembered in our community.

The department has had a fine, stable, caring work force. I must pay tribute to them for the huge assistance they have always given to members and their staff. Throughout the past eight years Katherine Saffiotti has served as area manager and has enjoyed the greater contact with community that our community renewal has offered. Katherine, sadly, is leaving us. You will be greatly missed, Katherine. Our community thanks you.

However, times have moved on. The State Housing Act, which has been in existence since 1945, has more than served its time. Today we have a department which is flexible and innovative and needs to be far less restrictive. To be able to respond to the varied needs, broad principles have been put in place to allow for support of other agencies—giving financial assistance to organisations which are registered with the department and providing workable guidelines. Of course, the department's core business of providing public housing, loans, grants, research and future planning all remain.

The electorate of Woodridge proudly boasts many organisations which are partners in our task of housing our residents and offering related services. Interlink is a lead agency in the provision of emergency and community rental scheme housing. Jenny Schultz and her team administer their organisation well. However, they and other groups, such as the Kingston East Neighbourhood Centre, are under great pressure due to the high needs in our community. The influx of migrants from the south as well as overseas, the closure of boarding housing and caravan parks and, of course, the demise of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement all contribute to the great pressure on housing.

I recall when the wait time for a three-bedroom house in Woodridge was four weeks or even less. It is now between 15 and 18 months, and the fact that there is no area which has taken the place of Logan as an area with a short wait time leaves many people out in the cold, literally. Just over a week ago, at my mobile office at the local Sunday market, I was approached by a lady who has been living in her car for months. She is helping her son with his education expenses and so maintains that she simply cannot afford rent. She was an intelligent, neatly dressed woman. It was quite disarming.

My tenant support committee LANARTA, the Logan and Neighbouring Area Regional Tenant Association, has been a wonderful support both to the department and to tenants. Jean Succi, Ann Langley, Ros Morris and others have not only fostered good relationships in the area and dealt with any problems presenting; they have organised the local department's gardening competition, sought a gambling fund grant and sponsored computer classes for seniors and many other community initiatives, including involvement in our community renewal. Other funding goes to our tenant support services and Home Secure to assist our seniors with their home maintenance. In Woodridge and Kingston many millions of dollars have been spent upgrading department homes, thus instilling an increasing sense of pride in the area. The impact made by the department in my electorate of Woodridge has been remarkable.

This bill reflects a department responsive to the changing needs within our communities, gives flexibility and ensures a consultative, accountable entity, with discretionary powers resting with the chief executive officer to ensure that the department remains people focused. With others in this House, I share concerns for the future—how we deal with the growing number of families and individuals seeking public housing with ever-diminishing funds from our federal government, how we meet the needs of people with disabilities or where displaced people are housed as low-rental facilities close.

On a recent visit I was pleased to see the advances being made on a number of our Aboriginal communities in the cape. I hope that this good work will continue. I commend the minister for his commitment to affordable, safe and appropriate housing for Queenslanders. I thank his staff and those who have prepared this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.