



Speech by

DON LIVINGSTONE

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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COMMONWEALTH-STATE HOUSING AGREEMENT

Mr LIVINGSTONE (Ipswich West—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): While the Beattie government has lifted spending on housing assistance from around \$330 million to \$528 million a year, our efforts to expand the availability of affordable housing have been severely affected by a federal government that is short-sighted and miserable. This federal government, which has a \$7.5 billion surplus, is an absolute disgrace in terms of the reductions it has made in the area of housing.

The major source of housing funds remains the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, yet through that agreement the Howard government is continuing to walk away from its responsibilities by cutting Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement funds. Since the end of World War II federal governments have played a major role in the social housing sector. That role, and the onus it puts on the federal government to provide adequate funds through the CSHA, was honoured for the last 50 years by both Labor and coalition governments, until the Howard government.

While demand is increasing, the ability of the state government and housing groups to respond is being severely limited by funding cuts instigated by the Howard government. Adequate and affordable housing influences a wide range of social outcomes, such as education, health and employment. It is vital that as many Queenslanders as possible are aware of the position we face and the callous approach being adopted by the federal government.

In recent years we have seen the loss of many affordable housing options for Queensland families, particularly in Brisbane, Ipswich and other regional centres. This has caused increased competition for the dwindling supply of low-cost rental housing. As a result, rents have soared to levels that are unaffordable to low income and very low income families. More than 160,000 Queensland families are now living in after-housing poverty or in housing stress. This means that they are paying more than 30 per cent of their household income in rent. In Brisbane and Ipswich alone, hundreds of bed rooms have been lost due to boarding house, caravan park and flatette closures. The loss of stock at the affordable end of the housing market is increasing competition in the next bracket of rental accommodation, which is also adding to increased rental prices.

Between the 1986 and 1996 censuses there was a considerable shrinkage in the affordable segment of the private rental market. Over that decade a total of 93,000 new dwellings were added to the private rental market in Queensland, yet 80,000 of these new dwellings were in the medium end of the market. The number of dwellings renting for less than \$150 grew by only 12,000 in the entire state. One can understand that people who can afford to invest in the rental property market are entering a market in which they can be certain they will receive rent. They are certainly not looking at spending money in the low income end where people are perhaps struggling to pay their rent.

The Department of Housing relies on funding from the Commonwealth government under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement for continued expansion of the public and community housing portfolio. These funds have been declining. While Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement funding has declined markedly in recent years, funding for rent assistance has increased significantly over the same period. However, without adequate support for capital programs, rent assistance will have limited effect. There is not much point in people receiving rent assistance if there are no houses to rent in their price bracket.

Just last week in Ipswich I contacted quite a few rental companies and found that there were not any houses—not one—in the under \$150 bracket for families. Many families in our area are struggling. I heard the Minister for Housing, Robert Swarten, say earlier this morning that something like \$1.7 billion has been put into rent assistance by the federal government. While talking about the inadequacies of the federal government, there are real concerns over the Queensland opposition in relation to housing. It is a shame the shadow minister is not in the House at the moment, but I acknowledge that the Leader of the Liberal Party is.

The Borbidge government introduced a pilot program in housing with a group by the name of Chesterton. Basically, there were hundreds of houses given over to Chesterton for it to manage and it was a trial period looking at doing away with the Department of Housing. That is something which causes great concern to the people in my area. A lot of people remember only too well the neglect of the Bjelke-Petersen government, where people lived almost in hovels and very limited amounts of money were spent on maintenance. This issue concerns me greatly. I would like the opposition to let us know in advance that it is not looking at doing away with government housing.

Time expired.