



Speech by

**ELISA ROBERTS**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Hansard 10 September 2003

#### **HOUSING BILL**

**Miss ELISA ROBERTS** (Gympie—Ind) (5.56 p.m.): I rise tonight to speak in support of the Housing Bill 2003. The issue of housing affordability and availability in the Gympie electorate has become, to quote a member of the Housing Minister's staff, a hot issue. I am pleased to support any initiative aimed at meeting the housing requirements of Queenslanders. As the minister mentioned in his second reading speech, this government does face many significant challenges in meeting these needs. The way society is headed the requirement for housing, particularly by people who make up the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, will continue to rise. I agree that this is going to be a huge issue for all governments at every level in the future.

Yesterday someone asked me if the issue of housing in my electorate was due to the sea change concept, that is, were the people looking for housing from the coast? Had they moved to Gympie in order to experience a different lifestyle? I would like to say that this was the case because usually in this scenario it is city dwellers who opt out of the hustle and bustle of city life in favour of a more relaxed, less frenetic lifestyle. More often than not, these people have the money to justify the move to places such as Tin Can Bay or Rainbow Beach and, like the television series, have made a conscious decision to make the change to their lifestyle. Unfortunately, the people with whom I come in contact are generally locals with little or no job prospects and who have subsequently been priced out of the rental market.

Another reason for my belief that a sea change mentality is not the underlying contributing factor to the housing crisis in my electorate is the fact that if someone, say, from Maroochydore chooses to move to a place like Gympie, the ability of that person to continue to receive New Start payments can be affected if that person moves to an area which has a higher unemployment rate, such as Gympie. In an ideal world everyone would not only have employment; they would have well-paid employment, which would enable them to afford to rent. But, sadly, this is not the reality.

From a personal perspective, I have been unemployed and been in receipt of a New Start allowance, which included rental assistance of \$20 a week. The cheapest rental in the area where I was living was \$140 a week. My entire allowance was \$320 per fortnight. So I do understand the difficulties faced by people on low incomes. I was fortunate that I had generous parents who were in a position to assist me financially. Regrettably, not everyone is that fortunate.

The extent of limited housing that we are seeing here in Queensland seems to be only relatively recent. A similar but probably more severe crisis has been occurring in places like Sydney for years. Renting a property within an hour of the Sydney CBD is virtually impossible if a person is on either a pension or a wage lower than \$30,000 per year. The answer to this problem in the short term is to share premises with other people. Those types of living arrangements, whilst not ideal, are in many instances the only way people can afford to live. For the last few years I was in Sydney it was a given that one had to have a flatmate. I think this may be an interim and realistic short-term answer for those in my electorate who are facing homelessness.

The types of people I see looking for housing are typically single mothers and, surprisingly enough, many single men. Women's refuges can take only so many women and the ability for a man to find accommodation is even more restricted. I must commend the ADRACARE men's support services for the tireless work that they are doing in order to rectify this situation.

In terms of trying to solve the housing crisis, I know that it is not possible to build a new house for every person who requires one. Obviously, this is not viable. One of the shorter-term alternatives is for the federal government to make a greater contribution to the rental assistance scheme so that people can afford to rent private properties.

Last week I had a pregnant woman in my office. At a time which should have been one of the happiest in her life, she was in tears because she had nowhere to live. It got to the stage—she was so desperate—that I was ringing my family and friends to see if they would take her in. I considered taking her in to rent at my place until one of my staff members said, 'Lise, you can't do that.'

Whilst the Minister for Housing is always ranting and raving at me about what a terrible person I am, I have to say that his staff are always marvellous and nearly always manage to solve the numerous housing issues I present them with. They did that with this girl by waiving some moneys owed and allowing for a much appreciated additional sum to be made available to her for a bond. The minister's office has also advised me of plans to build hostel type accommodation in Gympie. This is greatly appreciated as it will go a long way to addressing the current housing situation.

At this juncture I must also commend a organisation within my electorate, the Cooloola Community Housing Association, which is always incredibly helpful and works tirelessly to assist and offer advice to people who are in need of accommodation. I hope that organisations such as this will benefit from the new range of powers the government will achieve as a result of this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Miss Roberts, adjourned.