



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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PUBLIC HOUSING

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (10.27 a.m.): About 3,000 people in my electorate rely upon public housing. Many more who need public housing are struggling to survive in the private sector. The major source of public housing funds for the Beattie government is the federal government through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, yet Queensland is set to lose \$174 million in federal funding for public housing under the five-year housing agreement which commenced in July this year. This is in addition to the \$90 million lost in the previous year.

The Howard federal government funding cuts severely limit the state government's capacity to construct new housing and maintain existing stock. As a result, new houses being built have declined dramatically from more than 2,000 a year in the early nineties to only 300 this financial year. This is despite the Beattie government boosting spending on housing assistance in Queensland from \$330 million in 1997-98 to \$528 million this year.

The federal coalition believes that by giving individuals rent assistance—that is, a small fortnightly cash payment to people receiving Centrelink payments—this helps them find suitable accommodation in the private sector. This unfortunately fuels the shortage of affordable housing. It also is out of touch with the fundamental problem Queenslanders face, which is a shortage of affordable housing. Rental assistance does not solve this problem. More than 167,000 Queensland households are now living in after-housing poverty. This means they are paying more than 30 per cent of their household income in rent and struggling to pay for other essential goods and services. Many are forced to join the soaring public housing waiting list, which is now over 30,000 statewide. It is time for John Howard's friends here in this parliament, the Queensland Liberals and Nationals, to get the federal government to rethink its short-sighted and ineffective public housing policies.