



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 11 September 2003

HOUSING BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (12.19 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise to support the Housing Bill 2003, which provides a modern legislative basis for the state's present and future housing directions and replaces the existing State Housing Act 1945. This bill is framed to focus on the most significant challenges for the government and for our community and therefore has two main objects, which are to improve the access of Queenslanders to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing and to help build sustainable communities. I would like to use my brief contribution to the debate today to primarily thank the minister for his support of public housing in the electorate of Barron River and to touch on some of the issues that I have been involved in there.

Barron River itself does not have a large stock of public housing. It is one of those electorates which has high private home ownership and a proportionately larger number of people on higher incomes. That has resulted in less public housing. That actually is not the main reason, in my view, we have that legacy in Barron River. After I was elected, it was made very clear to me when I started to make moves to increase public housing in Barron River that the previous member, Martin Tenni, had consistently made it plain that he did not want public housing in Barron River. That legacy is something I have fought against. It is, in my experience, one that dies very hard in some National Party quarters.

It was in 1995, when we first began our policy of integrating public housing into the broader community, that I encountered fierce resistance from the National Party and the then National Party candidate. He shamelessly exploited people's reservations and concerns about public housing when we were proposing to put some units of public housing in Freshwater, where I live. That was a quite disgraceful episode in terms of demonstrating—

Mr Schwarten: They sold the land, too, didn't they?

Dr LESLEY CLARK: The land on which the units were to be constructed was eventually sold. Other units were built in Freshwater, along Kamerunga Road. People happily moved in there, settled in and became a wonderful part of the Freshwater community. I hope that we have all—including the National Party—moved on from those days. It has been encouraging actually—

Mr Lawlor: Most of them have moved on.

Dr LESLEY CLARK: I guess one should not make too sweeping a statement. It has been good to see the recognition that has come from the opposition for the good work that the minister has done in his portfolio.

I have now worked under two Labor governments to increase the public housing in Barron River. We have some wonderful seniors units at Kennedy Place, Smithfield. I have some great friends there in people like Shirley and JD. We have a number of houses for the disabled in Kewarra Beach. We have wonderful family homes in Redlynch and Brinsmead. As I said, we now have some units in Freshwater. We have a smart house in Trinity Beach. That demonstrates energy efficiency and shows how we can build homes that can be modified as people with particular needs move in.

As other people have said, we have in the Cairns area some great staff in the Department of Housing. I particularly recognise Brian Sheehan, the regional manager, and Tony Martens, the head of the ATSI housing unit. I would like to make some particular reference to that in my contribution today.

My electorate has its share of battlers, but today I want to speak about those people who most need safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing in Barron River; namely, the indigenous communities of Kowrowa and Mantaka near Kuranda. I have worked with those particular communities together with ministers Spence and Schwarten. Last year Minister Spence provided \$1.14 million from the major infrastructure upgrade program in these communities as well as a third community, Koah, which is actually now in the electorate of Cook. That funding provided for a water supply upgrade, with new water tanks and drainage works. It provided a flood-proof access to Mantaka. There was bitumen sealing of roads and the installation of footpaths and street lighting for Mantaka and three of those four settlements that make up the Kowrowa community. It was great to have Minister Schwarten, together with Minister Spence, present when we were actually opening that infrastructure earlier this year. That was really terrific to see.

It is the fourth of those communities that make up Kowrowa that has been the focus of work with this particular minister. The 10 duplex and triplex homes at Top Kowrowa were in such an appalling condition that they needed total replacement, as well as the associated infrastructure. It is in fact a major program that has been adopted by the minister over three years to provide some millions of dollars to actually effect that total redevelopment. I wish to thank the minister for his support in relation to that.

There is still one issue that needs to be resolved in relation to sewerage. I have spoken with the staff of Minister Schwarten and the staff of Minister Spence in relation to that. Some more money needs to be found. We had a good meeting last week in Cairns. We looked at the options to resolve that issue and it is now well on the way to being resolved. I conclude by thanking both Minister Schwarten and Minister Spence for their commitment to those communities at Kuranda. Indeed, I look forward to inviting them back to the opening of the completion of stage 1 in Top Kowrowa.