



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

Hansard Tuesday, 18 May 2004

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. M.M. KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (3.14 p.m.), in reply: In rising to conclude this second reading debate, firstly I thank all honourable members for their contributions today. As minister, it is particularly exciting to be able to present my first bill to this House. This is a historic day for me personally, for my department and for my hardworking ministerial staff. I thank all government members, the member for Beaudesert, the opposition and also the member for Tablelands for their support.

The bill contains amendments to legislation administered by the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development through the Office of Fair Trading's Residential Services Accreditation Branch, the Department of Public Works, Housing and Racing through the Residential Tenancies Authority and the Queensland Police Service. I would particularly like to thank the Minister for Public Works and the Minister for Police for their support of the bill.

The majority of the amendments in this bill are consequential amendments that are minor and technical in nature. However, there is one substantive amendment to the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002 and that is the one that has been focused on today by the majority of speakers. This is the amendment to exempt some room-only student accommodation services from the operation of the act. May I add that this exemption does not represent any change in government policy. It merely addresses an unintended drafting consequence and ensures that the legislation operates in accordance with the original intention of the act.

The exemption will mean that the room-only student accommodation sector will not have to incur costs for an administrative burden in meeting legislative requirements that were not intended to apply to this sector. It will also mean that government resources can be more focused on the vulnerable target group of the legislation and the particular target group that is the key focus of the Beattie government, that is, those people with limited incomes or who might experience a range of disadvantages, including intellectual and/or psychiatric disability, drug and alcohol problems, brain injury, problems associated with ageing, social and economic disadvantages, and social isolation. As a whole, students do not fall within this targeted group. We have heard some wonderful descriptions of members' student days in today's second reading debate.

While some students, particularly international students, may have consumer vulnerabilities due to their inexperience, cultural differences or perhaps their language difficulties, these are considered significantly different vulnerabilities from those of the target group under the residential services legislation. Further, unlike the target group, students have greater choice in accommodation options due to a growing and competitive market that specifically targets them and their potentially higher incomes.

This bill also contains amendments to the Residential Services (Accommodation) Act 2002. Unlike students who rent under a lease governed by the Residential Tenancies Act 1994, students living in room-only accommodation do not have basic legislated tenancy rights without the accommodation act. This bill contains amendments that will ensure that such an inequitable situation does not occur by continuing the

application of the tenancy rights and obligations of the accommodation act to students of room-only accommodation and their service providers. For these reasons, the amendments are supported by government, industry and community stakeholders.

I particularly would like to make comment on the speeches of particular members this afternoon, particularly that of the member for Whitsunday. I would like to thank her for her support in all aspects of the portfolio. The member is a tremendous advocate, particularly for the tourism industry. Recently I met with Tourism Queensland and their regional tourism organisations. The representative from Whitsunday was singing the member's praises to the high ceilings. So I give congratulations to the member on the work that she does not only for Tourism but also for Fair Trading and, hopefully, Wine Industry Development. The member will have to start getting some wineries up in the Whitsundays. The member for Whitsunday also has an accurate understanding of the residential services acts and realises that student accommodation was never intended to be part of this act. The member also beats a path to my door regularly on behalf of her constituents, particularly with regard to the tourism operators. As I said, she is a strong advocate for all aspects in her electorate of Whitsunday.

I would particularly like to thank the member for Algester for her support of this bill. The member is well known for her advocacy role in the areas of housing and accommodation, particularly for those in disadvantaged groups. She spoke very passionately when the accreditation bill was debated in 2002, and I thank her for her support.

The member for Noosa pointed out that most students who are accommodated in these facilities are not vulnerable—the situation the original legislation was intended to cover. I take on board her comments in relation to the Howard government's lack of support for housing in Queensland and agree that Mr Howard is turning his back on vulnerable people in our society.

I particularly appreciated the comments of the member for Mudgeeraba with respect to the Gold Coast and the fact that we have a tourism minister from the Gold Coast. I am very keen to work with her and her regional tourism organisation through Ian McFarlane, who was an outstanding choice as CEO down there. She is a great advocate of the Gold Coast, and I particularly appreciate her support for this bill and her support for tourism and fair trading on the Gold Coast.

The member for Hervey Bay made the important point that the exemption will not only help students located in the south-east Queensland corner but also benefit students in regional Queensland. I thank him for his support and contribution. The member for Toowoomba North raised a number of points in relation to the situation in Toowoomba. He is a strong advocate of student issues in regional Queensland, and I hope that this amendment will alleviate some of the workload for council officers that he mentioned.

The member for Woodridge discussed the real intention of the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act and that it is to protect those in society who are most vulnerable. I take on board her point in relation to her electorate of Woodridge, of which she is a tremendous representative, about students resuming studies. I commend her for raising this point. I thank the member for Indooroopilly for his contribution. I note that during the debate in 2002 he raised the issue of student accommodation. I thank him for his contribution today.

The member for Yeerongpilly made an outstanding contribution. I thank him for that. The member plays an important role on my caucus committee and provides me with great support on all issues within my portfolio. I also thank him for assisting in a visit that I and my staff made to an independent student-only accommodation service which was opposite Yeerongpilly Railway Station, which I believe is in his electorate. I have to say that I was very impressed with the owners and the industry stakeholders we met there and the tremendous quality of the student accommodation that they have there.

I thank the member for Tablelands for her contribution and for her support of the bill. I also thank the member for Nudgee for his support. It was great to hear about the development of the Australian Catholic University—a wonderful university. I commend him on his support of this education facility.

I particularly thank my departmental staff. We have the Commissioner of Fair Trading, Matt Miller, here today. Matt is an outstanding commissioner. I do not think I am gilding the lily too much by saying that he is recognised not only by the department but also throughout Australia as being the best commissioner of fair trading in all of Australia. I thank Matt very much for his contribution and his support today. I also thank all the departmental people who are here for their contributions. Also, I thank my ministerial staff of Michael Caldwell, Kathie Standen and particularly David Smith, who have worked extremely hard on this bill. I thank them for their support.