



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Thursday, 12 May 2005

BUILDING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (5.57 pm): The Building Amendment Bill 2005 proposes an amendment to the Building Act 1975 to bring further clarity to the term 'budget accommodation building'. Stage 1 of the compliance strategy required owners of budget accommodation buildings to comply with early warning and emergency lighting requirements in the fire safety standard and to develop a fire safety management plan by 30 June 2003. Stage 2 gives owners a further two years to carry out any necessary structural works ranging from relatively minor changes, such as the direction in which doors swing, to more significant work, such as additional emergency exits or fire stairs, fire isolation corridors or, in certain circumstances, sprinkler systems. Owners of relevant budget accommodation buildings need to comply with the requirements of this stage by 30 June 2005.

For the last few years now hotel owners have struggled to comply with stage 1 of the fire safety standards. We are not talking about wealthy people. Often they are owner-occupiers in small towns trying to make a buck, but they are constantly failing the regulations for one reason: they do not understand them and they are not getting any assistance from government to help them comply. The examples available to them to help write their effective fire safety management plans are lengthy and often contradictory.

Mr Cummins interjected.

Mr KNUTH: The Minister for Emergency Services does not know what he is talking about.

Mr Cummins interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Jarratt): Order! We will not have conversations across the chamber, Minister.

Mr KNUTH: I was with the fire safety inspectors and I have seen the situation that they have been in. The system is not working.

The examples made available to them, in order to write an effective fire safety management plan, are lengthy and often contradictory. Many hotel owners and managers have busy work schedules and no expertise to implement regulations. Government ministers have lawyers, barristers and people to write these rules, but hotel owners do not have those people at their beck and call. They are struggling to determine what has to be done to comply with the regulations. Many of them have paid extraordinary sums of money for work that they were told was necessary. Upon further inspection, they found out that that work was not necessary but that other work was necessary.

Some of these pubs have been operated by the same families for generations and are part of our history. Many have been forced to close because of the costs and complications that have arisen from these new regulations. We are not talking about hotels that are crammed to the roof with backpackers; we are talking about hotels in small towns across the highway that offer a bed to the weary traveller. Some of these pubs have an occupancy rate of one person per week. With all of the compliance measures that publicans have to meet, this type of accommodation will no longer be affordable or even available for motorists and backpackers.

Many publicans have been forced to remove beds from rooms so that they are not considered budget accommodation. Nothing has changed in the design of the building or its risk of burning down. There are just fewer beds and, therefore, less profit for the owners. Many owners have had to install more emergency lighting and smoke alarms than there are ever people in the building.

Many of these buildings are old. They are a part of our heritage and a huge part of the appeal of visiting rural and regional Queensland. It would be an absolute disgrace if these buildings were deserted and left to rot because hoteliers were unable to afford to comply with fire regulations. Imagine the difficulty for a rural or regional pub such as Einasleigh in complying with these standards when it is over 300 kilometres from the nearest provincial town. It can take three months or more for an electrician to service the emergency lights and to meet other safety requirements. There needs to be greater communication between departments and fire safety inspectors to support and assist owners in carrying out the fire safety improvements necessary to comply with these regulations.