



Speech by
Marc Rowell

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 1 March 2006

RETIREMENT VILLAGES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (12.20 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill, which is currently before the House. There are many variables when it comes to dealing with retirement villages. I think it is extremely important that we acknowledge that. One of the variables is partners or husbands and wives who have lived together for a long period of time.

Many people move into these places in the twilight of their lives. We need to acknowledge that these people have made a major contribution to the country. It is our responsibility to make it as easy for them as we possibly can. They do not want conflict and they do not want to be faced with issues that they cannot handle. I received a letter from some residents of the St James Village at Heatley. The residents state—

The Resident population of Retirement Villages is made up of a large number of widows who have attained ages well into the 80's and the 90's. Many people in this age range find it far too difficult to pursue a long laborious dispute process. We believe a better solution could be found among the following suggestions

1. An ombudsman who would look into complaints and correct matters without a dispute process for this population of Residents in lieu of the dispute process.
2. An investigative unit or mediator whom residents can access immediately as the first step of the dispute process.

This letter is signed by six residents of that village. This shows that people in these retirement villages certainly want to resolve the issues and problems as easily as they can. From what I have seen of the legislation, it will do that. It will make it much easier to address the complex situations that develop over time.

We have an ageing population. I think with medical science we are going to live longer. I believe that in the future the demands on retirement villages will be even greater. Many people in these villages are on pensions and are on very strict budgets. They do not want to see things that are out of the ordinary or that are unforeseen and that make it difficult for them financially.

In my part of the world there are many people from non-English speaking backgrounds. That makes dealing with problems even more complex for them. In the electorate of Hinchinbrook, over time service clubs such as Lions and Apex have not necessarily had retirement villages but have put together units and little houses. The member for Mundingburra came up and opened some of these units at Forrest Beach. I think those units are very advantageous and beneficial for those who want to stay in the area.

It is difficult if people move away from the people who would be their first responders—that is, their immediate family. People can change where they live, but if they stay in the area where they have been for some time then it is quite easy for them to go to somebody they know and can depend on—whether it be their sons or daughters or somebody else—because they are not too far away.

I know over time some aged-care facilities have been built in my electorate. Some of these are run by not-for-profit organisations and others are run by profit-making organisations. It is important that they do not fall over. Whatever we need to do to back them up and support them has to be done. We have a mixture of nursing home beds and retirement village units together in one place. Very often there will be a block of, say, 40 nursing home beds and then there will be eight, 10, 12 or 15 retirement type facilities. That is particularly beneficial. Unfortunately, sometimes the transition from one to the other is a fact of life.

What has been hard for boards of nursing homes, particularly those that are community based, not-for-profit organisations, is the high cost of complying with the accreditation standards. A lot of the standards deal with the conditions that are important for the safety of people in those facilities.

I have something like 12 aged-care facilities in my electorate that cater for about 350 residents. Not all the residents come from within the electorate; some of them have come from further afield. Of course, there is a selection process which is very important. Finding beds for people who are either infirm or ageing will be a challenge for all of us in the future. I think it is probably a little easier in the more populated areas—in regional or city areas of this state—because there is a mass of people and the profit organisations are more likely to put facilities there, whether they be nursing home facilities or retirement villages.

There is a major challenge facing us at the present time in terms of the direction we take with all this. The legislation goes a long way towards dealing with the current problems of retirement villages. There are a number of things that we have to address. We are dealing with retirement villages in this legislation, but there will always be a transition from the retirement villages to the nursing home facilities.

The opposition is concerned about the retrospectivity of the bill that is before us. I am sure the shadow minister has dealt with that more than adequately. I suppose there is always a fear of the unknown. Exactly what will this mean at the end of the day? Will the provisions be overly demanding or will problems be created because a rule of law has been set down? Whenever change occurs there will always be major concern for older people. To some degree they are comfortable with the current arrangements. Maybe in some cases those arrangements have not been ideal. Unfortunately, change is always of some concern to the older generation.

I support the bill. I know the work the minister has done on it. I know that it has taken some time. There will be issues as time progresses but we need to meet the challenge.