



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Public Housing

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (10.10 am): The federal government's failed policy of relying on Commonwealth Rent Assistance instead of building public housing means that there are not enough homes for low-income earners across the country. In the private market there are now 70,000 fewer homes for rent for under \$200 a week than there were in the year 2000. As a result there has been an inexorable rise in the demand of people seeking Queensland government housing assistance in spite of the fact that this government has doubled the housing budget.

As the minister for housing, I have the difficult task of targeting scarce resources because John Howard simply does not believe in the concept of governments building housing for low-income earners. Social housing is a hand up in life. It gives people a chance at security and stability. There are some people living in social housing whose lives and income have substantially improved. They are on their feet. These households are the real success stories of social housing. It has allowed them to stabilise and improve their lives. But they can now give other people that same opportunity, that same experience of stability that was so important to them.

To this end, I recently approved an ongoing eligibility policy, which assesses a household's ongoing eligibility for housing assistance. The first phase of this is being implemented. This will mean that if a couple in social housing has a combined income of over \$80,000 per year, they will be required to move from their social housing into private accommodation. The department will provide these households with a six-month transition period to enter the private rental market or home ownership. The 186 households in this category have recently received a letter advising them of this new policy. Of course, where households believe they have particular reasons why they should stay in social housing, they can contact their nearest Department of Housing office to discuss their case. It is pointless and, indeed, it could be disastrous to evict persons whose current income does not reflect their permanent circumstances.

As the minister for housing, it is my responsibility to ensure that the limited supply of social housing managed by the department can be accessed by those with a genuine need for assistance. It is for this reason that the ongoing eligibility policy has been developed and is now being introduced.