



Speech by

Stuart Copeland

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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RETIREMENT VILLAGES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (7.30 pm): I rise to speak briefly in the debate on the Retirement Villages Amendment Bill 2006. The shadow minister, the member for Currumbin, has outlined that the opposition will be supporting this bill but we have concerns with one particular aspect of it. At the outset, I pay tribute to the member for Toowoomba South who covered in detail the concerns we have with the bill. I think he put them very well. I guess that comes from the experience he has had in this field, which always helps.

Ms Keech: It was a very valuable contribution.

Mr COPELAND: It was, Minister. It was a very valuable contribution. He certainly outlined the concerns that many people in the community have expressed to those in the opposition—concerns that warrant some explanation from the minister as to the government's position and the course of action that it has taken.

My electorate covers a large portion of Toowoomba. Toowoomba is a large regional centre where people choose to retire. My parents are typical of people who live west of Toowoomba. They made the decision to retire and came to Toowoomba. Although they moved into their own house they are now considering moving into a retirement village. I think that is why Toowoomba has a large number of retirement villages. It has a number of aged-care alternatives, whether it be retirement villages, hostel accommodation, low-care or high-care nursing homes.

Although the bill is specifically about retirement villages, it is very important to look at the sector as a whole because we need to have a seamless transition for those people who may be in a retirement village or independent living units but may, if their circumstances dictate, need to rapidly progress into the level of care they need. As the member for Toowoomba South said, there is some concern about the number of beds available in nursing homes in Toowoomba, for example, and the way the formula is applied federally.

In Clifton, Millmerran and Pittsworth there are retirement villages and nursing homes. It is very important that beds and facilities are available for people as they get older or as they are not able to live independently and that they are available in the communities in which they live, the communities where they are comfortable and, most importantly, the communities where they have support networks, whether that be their GP or medical support but, principally, their family support. Without their family networks and family support, it makes it very difficult for those older residents to really live out their years with the most support and comfort they can.

The opposition supports any move to protect the rights of older Queenslanders. We need to make sure that they are protected. It can be a very confusing time for a lot of people when they make the decision to enter a retirement village. It can be very difficult and daunting to go into all the details surrounding that decision and make sure that they know up-front what the requirements of the facility are that they are going into, know up-front what they are up for should they move or pass away and their family have to deal with it later or know up-front what they are up for if they have to move into a different level of care and different level of facility.

It can be a very difficult time for those individuals and a very difficult time for their families. We need to make sure that those consumer rights are protected absolutely. As the shadow minister and as other members of the opposition have stated, we support absolutely the rights of older people to have as much protection as we can possibly afford them because it is a daunting thing to go through.

We as an opposition have opposed the issue of retrospectivity numerous times in this parliament. Whenever the issue of retrospectivity comes up we have opposed it. It is something that we will continue to oppose. It is something that we are seeing more and more of in legislation that is introduced by this government. That is not a good thing. We should not be adding retrospectivity to our legislation without very serious consideration. In terms of this bill there are real questions as to whether retrospectivity is needed, whether it is desirable and whether it is right.

We need to make sure that the concerns of the aged-care facility operators, whether they operate not-for-profit or for-profit facilities, are taken into account. We need to make sure that they remain viable. We need those facilities to remain profitable and remain viable. Without them we are in a lot of trouble. The state simply cannot provide the facilities that are provided for the not-for-profit sector and the for-profit sector. Without those two sectors providing aged-care facilities, retirement villages and nursing homes, we simply will not have those facilities in our community. We need to make sure that they are able to survive, that they can plan with some certainty, that they know what they are in for and that they know what they are going to be facing down the track.

To introduce retrospectivity in this bill puts into doubt large portions of their budgets, for example. It is going to be very difficult for them to comply with the legislation. We have no problem at all with the changes coming in and operators having to comply from today. That is an accepted part of life. I think they accept that as well. But to thrust this upon them meaning that all of the legally binding agreements that they entered into in the past are now superseded is of very real concern to those operators.

My electorate has a large number of facilities. They cover just about every form of aged-care facility that we could possibly imagine. The only thing I do not have is a state owned retirement village or aged-care facility, but Toowoomba does have such a facility. They are not-for-profit and for-profit facilities and they provide independent living units, co-located with hostel or nursing home accommodation and high-care and low-care accommodation. By and large they do an excellent job.

Since being elected at the beginning of 2001, I have had an occasional problem brought to my attention. Some involve the arrangements for ownership or the exit strategies when people leave or pass away—in these cases their families have to deal with it. Occasionally there are problems but, by and large, the operators are very good. The residents are happy with the facilities that are available. We have seen a real increase in the standard or a raising in the standard of accommodation that is available. I think that is a good thing. It is something that we are faced with. We have an ageing population. We are going to need more and more of the kinds of facilities that we see in my electorate. We need to provide certainty for both the residents and the operators to make sure that that level of care continues.

One thing that I wish to raise—and I beg the indulgence of the chair because is it not purely relevant to this bill—is the issue that the opposition raised when introducing a private member's bill. I refer to extending to leasehold retirement villages the rate rebate that freehold retirement villages enjoy. Unfortunately, the government did not support that bill. I have two retirement villages in my electorate, Willowglen and Drayton Villas, that are affected by this. I have ongoing consultation with those residents who continue to lobby us to do what we can to get that changed. We have done what we can—that is, introduced the private member's bill. Unfortunately, the government did not see fit to support that but we will continue to push for that. As I said, we will be supporting this bill, but we have real concerns about the retrospectivity aspect of it as we have with all legislation that this government has introduced which involves retrospectivity.