



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Wednesday, 5 September 2007

URBAN LAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BILL

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (5.04 pm): I rise to speak to the Urban Land Development Authority Bill 2007. On many occasions in this chamber I have raised the issue of the difficulties that families in my electorate experience in being able to afford to buy a home and, indeed, to even have the opportunity to have a home available in their price bracket. Currently, rents in my electorate are \$300, \$330 and \$250 a week and many of those houses that are attracting those rents are quite modest homes. The cost of housing in my electorate ranges from \$500,000 to \$300,000. I printed off a real estate brochure which advertises an executive home with water views for \$495,000. I know the suburb in which that house is located and you would have to stand on your tiptoes and lean slightly to the right to be able to see the water. But anyway, that house is attracting a premium for its water view.

An honourable member: Glimpes.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: 'Glimpses' is the operative word. It is very difficult for families to be able to afford to enter the home ownership market. Every time there is an industrial development in the region—and I am certainly supportive of the economic benefits that they bring—there is also a renewed round of pressure on people on fixed and low incomes. They have invested in the social capital of the electorate but they are forced to relocate because they simply can no longer afford to live there. Whilst that will happen in any community, I think the extent to which it is happening in my electorate—and I am sure it is also occurring in the south-east corner—is an indictment on us as a society. It has been said before that an indicator of how we are travelling as a society is the way we treat our older people, our young people and the poor.

I heard the member for Bundamba recite some prices for bare land that is for sale in the Ipswich area. She referred to \$200,000 or \$300,000 for a block of land. There has to be a house put on that. That means that both mum and dad have to work. They cannot afford to get sick. They cannot afford to have kids. The cost of housing really puts pressure on families.

Several weeks ago the federal Labor candidate for the seat of Flynn held an affordability summit, to which I was invited and attended. The shadow deputy Treasurer was in attendance, as was a real estate valuer, a small businessperson and a representative of one of the social welfare groups. I also spoke at that forum. We were all singing off a similar hymn sheet in that we were talking not only about access to affordable housing but also affordability in areas such as petrol prices and grocery prices—all of those basic services that affect how a family copes and how a family manages. Whilst there were no direct conclusions to the summit—it was more an airing of perspectives—it really pointed out that all sectors of the community share the same concerns.

Some years ago now the federal government changed its focus from investing in housing construction in cooperation with the state government to rent assistance programs. I do not think that has been a good single focus. I am not saying that that should not occur. I certainly would not like to see the removal of all safety nets in terms of the level of rents paid and assistance given to people who need a top-up on their rental payments. But I believe the best answer to affordable housing is housing that is funded by governments—state and federal—because those two spheres of governments have the ability to put a

cap on the rent. Even under our current state government Queensland Housing puts a cap on the rent paid, which I believe is 25 per cent of a person's gross income. But that is still a really big chunk out of a person's income given that some people have commitments, whether they are child maintenance payments or other financial obligations, which they must fulfil. I am still of the view that government built and owned housing is the best way to manage an affordable housing program.

In Gladstone accommodation for singles was built. I have already put on the record my appreciation to the minister for housing for those 22 housing units, which were filled before they were opened. There is now a waitlist of a significant length for that accommodation. That is singles accommodation for men and women and there is no age limit and it has already been filled. It is well managed by Roseberry Community Services Inc. However, more of that style of accommodation is needed desperately. I encourage the minister for housing to consider that.

Seniors units are also at a premium. Heritage Village, which is supported by the Queensland housing department, has land for more units. Again, I put on the record my call for the minister for housing to fund more of those housing units. They are beautifully designed. Anyone who lives there or visits would have to say that the housing department has done a brilliant job in terms of the style and quality of that housing. We just need more of it.

Mr Bombolas: I have some in my electorate.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: The member can send them up to mine. Six or seven years ago I raised another accommodation option for older Queenslanders. I know that the minister had a trial on foot in relation to this. Other members have talked about the people who lose a partner and go from a double pension to a single pension, which really has a significant impact on what they can afford. In Victoria they trialled modular units that were craned in or skidded in, depending on the layout of the block, to the home block of a person's son or daughter. They could be plumbed into the existing water and sewage systems while still being quite self-contained. It allowed the children of the parent in need to keep a weather eye on their mum or dad while giving their parent independence. Then when the need for that accommodation had passed either through higher care needs or sadder circumstances, the units could be removed. That solves the concern that a lot of local governments have about on-the-sly rentals. These self-contained modular units provide a great answer for a particular segment of the community, that is, parents who lose a partner but still need somewhere independent and affordable to live and who have a family member prepared to accommodate them in this way.

In my electorate a number of affordable accommodation options have been lost due to industrial development. One particular set of units was located behind the Club Hotel. As was their right, the owners evicted the tenants who almost without exception were older gentlemen who had no partners and fairly poor self-care skills. They could go over to the club and have a counter lunch and other lubrication, and then come home quite safely because they lived close by. Those units were ideally located for the people they catered for. The residents were asked to leave and the units were refurbished and sold or used for industry workers. That happened on a number of occasions in the electorate. Those people have very poor care skills because they come from a generation where the wives did all of the home care, cooked the meals and did the washing and the cleaning. They never learnt how to do those things. They are a group in our community that has particular needs and they certainly deserve our consideration.

When the state development department purchased homes at Targinie, a lot of good sound homes were and are being demolished rather than kept for rental purposes. Whilst a few are still being rented out, gradually those are being weeded out. It is sad to watch. Some of those homes needed to be demolished because of their state of repair, but many of those houses were in a sound and habitable condition. It is discouraging to know that those places are being demolished or removed when the need is so great.

I put on the record my support for the comments of the member for Gregory about high-density housing. If a family with children is asked whether they would rather be in a high-rise or nowhere, they will always say the high-rise. However, that is not an appropriate environment for young kids. Kids are synonymous with noise and running around. If developers are going to build high-rises, they have to incorporate secure play areas with things such as closed-circuit TV because of some of the low-lifes who, for the wrong reasons, are attracted to areas where children play. Such things have to be incorporated into the development.

I am conscious of the time. I know that another speaker wishes to rise after me. However, I put on the record some concerns of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, bayside branch, which has already been referred to once or twice. The Wildlife Preservation Society stated—

This Bill will reverse years of consultation and planning and allow developers to ignore community values, destroy waterways, develop on contaminated land and wipe out habitat for koalas and other wildlife.

This Bill takes away community rights, removes the provisions of any restrictive legislation to protect the environment, removes requirements that certain types of development be assessable and overrides local government planning schemes.

I seek leave to table that submission from Sheila Davis.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Copy of Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Bayside Branch media alert, dated 4 September 2007, titled 'What a way to celebrate Threatened Species Week—Queensland environmental and social laws at risk'

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: The only other issue that I wish to put on the record is my concern about the overriding of fundamental legislative principles. As I said, I am conscious that others wish to speak and I will be making contributions during the consideration in detail phase of the bill in relation to the loss of appeal rights and other issues that trample on the rights and liberties of members of our community. I support legislation that has the potential to provide affordable housing to our community, but that must be done with accountability.