



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Thursday, 18 October 2007

QUEENSLAND HERITAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.00 pm): I rise to support the Queensland Heritage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and to put on the record a small number of issues in my own electorate in relation to heritage listed buildings. People who find themselves the owners of heritage listed buildings—I will not say accidentally, but as a result of a process—have to be regarded with a great deal of respect and have to be afforded support in terms of the additional cost of upkeep on those buildings. There is an additional cost to them as custodians of what we are claiming as our heritage. They need consideration in terms of the financial burden of ownership of those buildings.

There was an incident in my region, which is resolved now, where one of the local councils nominated an old picture theatre for heritage listing. The member for Stafford was talking about the picture theatre in his electorate. This was not the original picture theatre, but one of the original picture theatres in the Gladstone City area. It was nominated by council for heritage listing. It was accepted onto the heritage list. The majority of the building was made of corrugated iron, which pits over time. Some of the fallout in our area is particularly corrosive for metals.

In the last four or five years the family who owned the theatre, the Upton family, found themselves with a building that was uninsurable because nobody would take the risk for it. The fittings were timber but the externals were corrugated iron. There was a lot of aged timber in the building that obviously was very susceptible to fire. It had not been used as a picture theatre; a new modern picture theatre, as occurs, had been constructed. This building occupied prime real estate. The older Mr Upton, who was part owner of the building, had operated the theatre right up to his retirement, which was quite late. He had a great deal of respect for the city's built infrastructure, in particular its heritage listed infrastructure. This building had practical problems such as a sloping floor and it was difficult to use it for anything.

When it was nominated for heritage listing, the heritage group went through and accepted it as a heritage listed building. After a couple of years Mr Upton applied for the listing to be lifted because he could not get tenants for the building. There had been an attempt by one of the cultural groups to get funding to establish a cultural organisation but it was unable to achieve that. This building was slowly deteriorating. Periodically young people—we assume—broke in because of what was left behind. They were not particularly destructive but they would get in and spend a couple of nights inside. This was becoming very worrisome for the old gentleman. It was only through protracted negotiation and then potential court proceedings that the listing was lifted. For all the time that the building was heritage listed and not being used for anything he had to pay full rates on that block of land. It really impacted on his quality of life and his health. The issue has been resolved now. With the heritage listing of a building, whilst we are the benefactors in terms of our cultural heritage being maintained for us and for future generations, we need to also share in some of those costs.

Another building in my electorate, the Star of the Sea Catholic Church, has been listed. I would not say it is a big church. It is a wooden building. I would like to speak generically on purpose-built facilities, churches in particular. Congregational needs change over time—not only needs in terms of the style of

service and the facilities that churches and other purpose-built buildings have to provide but also accountability responsibilities change. The heritage commission needs to be flexible in the right way. I do not mean so flexible that the entire heritage value of a building disappears. If one looks at the practicalities of the Catholic Church or a denominational church wanting to retain its congregational worship or fellowship, there are also demands to have more social times so perhaps they require facilities such as a covered area, because we are all sun smart now. One of the issues that many churches face is that of answering the concerns of parents in terms of supervision. Wherever the church congregation is, irrespective of age, there needs to be visual supervision of children. If I have little children and they are off in another part of the church building, there needs to be ample supervision of them in terms of their own safety. I am not saying that to cast aspersions on anybody. In our day and age it is a practical consideration.

In maintaining those cultural and heritage values, changes made to the infrastructure need to be flexible so that they are still in harmony with the style and construction type and so that the users of the facility, whether it is a church congregation or another specialist group, are able to achieve what they want in terms of the use of the building. There are occurrences where the core purpose of the building has not changed but the way that service is provided—whether that is a church service or some other sort of cultural pursuit—has changed because of accountability and supervision requirements in this day and age. The owners and custodians of those buildings have been unable to modify or change in any way the layout of the building because of its cultural registration, and that hampers their ability to continue to provide the service that is their core business.

As a state we in some ways are the poorer because we do not have an area like The Rocks. The member for Moggill talked about the precinct along George Street where there are those beautiful old buildings. One is now a casino, which raises a question, and one is a motel. The facades and the architecture are absolutely beautiful. This building here is a gift to our community. It gives me a great deal of pride to be able to ask schoolchildren in my electorate who have been to Parliament House whether they know that this building is theirs and that it is part of their and their parents' heritage. I tell them to come and have a look and understand and respect the beauty and the talent of those who not only designed but also built these buildings. The investment that is made over time to maintain the buildings in good order and condition is an investment not only in the future but also in the past.

The architecture that we find in our rural communities is diminishing. Things like the old tin sheds and old-style buildings are lost because of the privations of time. The deterioration of buildings—unless the owners have the resources to keep those buildings up to scratch—will, in a relatively short period of time, mean the loss of them. I drive up to Rocky on not a regular basis but often when I have to because a lot of regional meetings are held up there. There are a couple of little old tin shacks on the way up that would probably have no cultural value to some; they are the old settlers shacks with a skillion out the back. One of them is at a very precarious lean at the moment, and I think it is probably past being restored. There is another corrugated iron shed near the Marmor garage that has always caught my attention. It would have to be on a dirt floor because of the style of it. At one stage, it had a very impressive bougainvillea out the front that was haunting the front door. It had a character about it. Whoever owns the property has cleared up the noxious weed, so that is a plus, but the building has been left there and I hope it stays. Because it is not on stumps, nothing can really go too pear-shaped in terms of its structural integrity. It is more about the integrity of the cladding, which as I said is predominantly corrugated iron.

Those buildings are as much a part of our heritage as some of the sandstone buildings. I hope we can keep enough of those buildings so that our kids and their kids can see that the settlers of our state—and I am sure it is the same in other states—survived in some fairly austere circumstances. They worked hard, tirelessly and in pretty poor conditions to give us the affluence that we enjoy today.

There are two groups in my electorate that I would also like to acknowledge. The larger of the two is the Calliope River Historical Village. The inaugural president was Lloyd Curtis and his wife, Val, who was a stalwart. They were instrumental in the establishment of the historical village. Calliope Shire Council has always been enormously supportive of the village. The current president, Harold Harvey, and all of the subsequent committees work on a voluntary basis. The historical village markets are held about eight times a year, so not every month, and they generate quite a bit of funding now to reinvest into the historical society.

A lot of the buildings that they have relocated to the village are not heritage listed, but they are very much a part of our local heritage. They include homesteads, a church, a school building, the old Calliope police lockup, one of the original slab huts, the Barmundu station, the old station shed from Gladstone and the Raglan Dance Hall—which is fully corrugated iron on the outside with a beautiful hard timber floor and exposed timber beams. It is a lovely stereotypical bush hall. The historical village has very patiently and very responsibly renovated those buildings when they have been moved on to the site. Small businesses, in particular, and larger businesses in the electorate have provided a lot of support with things like trailers, cranes, the materials for renovations and those types of things.

That whole village precinct is a wonderful replication of some of our earlier buildings. It has been achieved through the dedication and hard work of those committees, and it has been on a voluntary basis.

People from a couple of unemployment schemes have worked out there. That whole village precinct is a tribute to everybody who has had input into it. It will be a place where groups can go for many years into the future and have a look at the architectural style that was prevalent in the early and mid 20th century.

The other group is a relatively new group, and that is the Ubobo Historical Society. It has only one main building of an historical nature on its site at the moment, and that is an old homestead. It is unique because of the timber panelling that is inside. It is all local timber which has been painstakingly gouged out—or what would you call it?

Mr Weightman: Restored.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Yes, that is a good word. It is beautiful panelling and a lot of work has gone into it. The word I was looking for was 'routing', and it has all been hand done. It is a lovely example of a country farmhouse out in the Boyne Valley. That little group—and there are only a handful of them who work at the Ubobo site—is also establishing camping type facilities so that school groups can spend a weekend there and learn about the valley's history, not only its architectural history but its cultural history as well.

I think every one of us here would have smaller or larger groups in our electorates that are dedicated to the preservation of our past—whether that is built structures, cultural articles or a cultural phenomenon. They are priceless in terms of their ability to be able to retain the history of our state—as I said, both our built history and our oral history. I want to put on the record my appreciation to all of these groups. As I said, I support the legislation but I implore groups like the Queensland Heritage Council to be practical in their application of the protections that they administer to ensure that people who are custodians of our heritage listed buildings are also able to function in those buildings and carry on the pursuits that the buildings were initially built for.