



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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URBAN LAND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.23 pm): There are some important aspects of this bill. Amongst other things, it is aimed at systems of planning, housing affordability and low-cost housing. As our shadow minister has said, we are supporting this bill, although we have a number of reservations about some issues, and they will be addressed in the amendments. Some of those things concerned the way that councils could be pushed out of the process and become only a secondary part of the process as things would be handed on to councils at a certain stage. There were some concerns expressed by the Urban Development Institute of Australia about the make-up of the ULDA and those who would be appointed to it as well as concerns about appeals, reviews and so forth.

The first concern is the fact that this bill was introduced to the parliament on the 22nd of last month and here we are on the 6th of this month debating it. It is hardly enough time for a bill that is as complex as this one to be analysed carefully by the many organisations across the spectrum of housing and development, those who want to use houses, people in councils—and most of our councils are in turmoil at the moment with the forced amalgamations—and the professional bodies. It is not enough time for them to look at the bill and determine whether it will work, if it has any chinks in it, what needs to be fixed and so forth. There has been an obscene rush on this particular piece of legislation. It is extremely complex legislation and it deserves more time than that. Had we been debating it at the next session of parliament there would have been an additional four weeks for organisations to look at it and get back to both sides of the House.

On the matter of supply and planning, I think there are some very important issues. We have seen housing in Queensland and the way our cities develop dramatically change in a very short period. I grew up in the southern suburbs of Brisbane amongst housing commission camps and people struggling to build houses on single incomes. There were housing commission camps at Moorooka, Rocklea and Victoria Park near the hospital and there were pensioner camps in places like the now suburb of Clifton Hill which was full of little tin humpies all over the hill, in the bush and in the grass. That was not very long ago. The next step from there in affordable housing was to develop new housing commission suburbs—the little block houses that went up at Coopers Plains and Inala. People were desperate to get a house at the time but many of those places were isolated and that was a problem. At least Coopers Plains was on a railway line, but Inala was quite isolated and was virtually a suburb out in the bush. Subsequently, there have been some difficulties for those people in terms of that isolation.

Planning is important as to how we develop our towns and cities and particularly how we move with the changing demographic. Part of the reason for the high cost of housing today is this rapidly changing demographic. The number of people under a roof in Australia is now something like 1.4. Not too long ago it would have been four or five people under a roof. However, with changing lifestyles, people marrying later in life, smaller families and divorced people happy to live on their own there is a whole range of reasons why there is suddenly a need for more units of accommodation, be they houses or units. With a degree of affluence has come those people who have been fortunate enough to have a second house as a holiday house along some of the coastal strips. All of that has put pressure on the amount of land that is available, the number of tradesmen who are available and the cost of housing.

Australia has very low unemployment. We are a country whose economy is so strong and so powerful but we do not have the population to work within that. In my own area there are simply no unemployed workers because there is virtually zero unemployment. They have had to bring out Brazilians to work the meatworks and Chinese to work as welders and boilermakers and other people to drive cattle trucks and so forth because we just do not have the population commensurate with the size and strength of the economy. That is what we are seeing in relation to housing affordability. It is not so much a shortage of tradesmen, it is just a shortage of people. Those who are fortunate to have a trade go off to work in the mines or work getting great returns for their labour in major construction.

The central issue of housing affordability that I want to bring into this debate is: will this work? Is it going to address the availability of land? Is it going to address quick decision making on land? One of the costs of development is holding costs. If people buy land and have to hold it for many years, those holding costs are built into the eventual sale price of that block of land. The young married couple who need to buy a block of land to try to establish their house are the ones who will, in the end, be paying the cost.

The other costs, of course, are stamp duty costs, government charges, local government charges and infrastructure charges. They have been rising astronomically. The more and more demands that governments—including state government and local government—place on developers for this, that and the other thing and the more planning and amenities that people demand, that just simply drives up the cost. Those issues have to be watched very carefully.

People have great expectations today. They like to buy a house that has the landscaping done, the curtains on the windows and all of those sorts of things. They tend to get into large debt in order to get those things. My colleague mentioned that banks used to insist on a 40 per cent deposit and the ability to repay a loan. As it has become easier to get finance, people have been able to have higher aspirations and they have been able to stretch themselves financially a bit more. All of that has led to this heating up of the housing market. We would all like to have a nice home, but sometimes we have to start in a fairly humble way and hope that after a number of years or when our kids have grown up we might be able to extend the house or move on to something better. They are the sorts of things that need to be considered.

I know that some years ago the member for Rockhampton, in his portfolio, sold houses at Harlaxton. Harlaxton is a Housing Commission area and those houses were very modest. They were sold for \$70,000. The minister then tried to buy houses for somewhere between \$240,000 and \$360,000. That meant that for every four houses that were sold that would have housed four people, the minister's department got one house in return. At the time I thought that was bad economics. Those modest houses, with the addition of a nice little carport and a few other things, could have been made into quite good homes. Those ones that were bought are now rented out for about \$180 or \$200 a week. You need to strike a good balance between how many roofs you can provide for people with the standard of the home that you are going to provide. Somewhere in there you have to try to provide as much accommodation as you possibly can. I think that is one of the most important things to start with.

I believe that in Toowoomba we need affordable housing, particularly for those elderly people who are not in a financial position to be able to have their own house and need to have Housing Commission units. Some of the units that have been built in recent years are very nice. Importantly, those units have to be relatively close to the CBD so that people can get on to a bus or other transport, or walk to the nearest shopping centre. I think those things are very important for people, particularly elderly people.

A common issue throughout many regional centres, including Toowoomba, is the need to provide housing for elderly people whose older children have an intellectual disability. These people have raised their children, who are now in their 50s or 60s. These people are old parents. They are approaching the end of their natural life and they worry about where their children are going to live. I think probably one of the most critical and urgent needs of housing in this state is the need to provide safe, secure and pleasant accommodation for the intellectually disabled who are moving on in years and whose parents are extremely worried about them. I ask the minister to pass on those comments to Rob Schwarten.

I do know that the federal government has now provided an amount of money—from memory, I think it is in the order of about \$11 million over five years—specifically for this type of accommodation. I would like to see a system put in place where the provision of that accommodation is worked out very quickly. I know that the system is going to work through Centrelink and that there will be a screening process. I would like to see that happen pretty quick smart so that these elderly parents can see their disabled children safely placed in the right and appropriate type of accommodation.

This bill covers some development areas in Brisbane and one in Mackay. I think it is important for the government to work with councils on issues, such as airspace that the government owns over railway lines and so forth. We have seen developments such as the construction of those shopping centres over the Toowong Railway Station and at Roma Street Railway Station, which were quite innovative in their time. Those developments make good use of available airspace, and sometimes land space, but particularly space that is close to transport and space that is close to the CBD.

I strongly believe that the ambience, or the feel of a place, is very important when undertaking planning. I think it is important to have adequate green space and facilities that people can walk to. In Australia we have tended to develop urban sprawl where there are the three-bedroom brick veneer homes with the Colorbond fence in between. Everybody gets in their cars to drive to the big shopping centres or to the hotels where they have to park outside. Centuries ago in England people lived near little hotels that they could walk to. Those places had a community feel. People could go to those places and have a meal, play darts—or whatever they do. Whereas here people get in a car and drive to a place that has 300 car parks and someone has to drive home. I think we have trended away from the true suburbia or village feel that we should have in our suburbs. Some people who live in the suburbs get quite lonely as they are either on their own or they are elderly and are not able to walk to a place where they know people or feel that they belong.

I want to raise the issue regarding the Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. I see the local government minister is in the chamber. I know that the association has written to him about this matter as well as to the Minister for Natural Resources and Water.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Darling): Order! Is this to do with the bill before the House?

Mr HORAN: Yes, it is. Absolutely. It is to do with the review of the Far North Queensland Regional Plan, which I see is mentioned in all the matters to do with this bill. The minister is nodding his head. The Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association is concerned about being involved in some of the discussions and consultations about the use of land in far-north Queensland. The basis of the association's letter is that, although they accept and want to maintain good prime agricultural land, there are occasions where that land is unable to obtain water through a sale or the transfer of water rights or the unavailability of water rights. That changes the usage of that land and the value of that land. The association raised some other issues in that letter, but mainly it stated that it wanted to be involved in the planning process, because the association covers an area of Mareeba, Dimbulah and other areas, and it has quite a bit to contribute in some cases. There may be land on the edge of the town or land that is of low-grade value in terms of its ability to produce compared to other better soil types. I think if the minister can take note of that letter then certainly we will assist those people in feeling that they belong to the process.

The development industry sometimes gets pilloried but if you look around south-east Queensland you can see some absolute quality developments. I know in my own area of Toowoomba we have had developers, and my predecessor in this House has been the major developer there for many years. As I have said before, he has always provided quality subdivisions. I have always spoken highly of the way in which he provided value for money for young families. He held blocks of land for young couples when they got engaged until they had the money to be able to buy them.

I remember not very long ago he said that a block of land over \$50,000 was hard to sell. Just a couple of years back he was saying he was trying to keep his prices under \$75,000 for a block of land. We all know now what the price of land is in south-east Queensland, in Toowoomba and elsewhere. It does make it difficult. If people want to make a start in life, the first thing they have to do is buy a block of land, and if it is \$150,000 or more that is a big ask in itself.

This situation is contributing to demographic change. Couples have to wait longer before they have a family in order to get on top of the initial costs that they face. We are also seeing a move to blocks of land further away from the CBD. We are seeing in areas surrounding Toowoomba farm land, or land that is in undulating, ridge type country, being cut up into blocks of land and people are able to buy that. They are getting one and a quarter acres but getting it at a price around \$135,000, so it is not as dear as it is in town.

These are very important issues of planning. I do not have a problem with good strategic planning to try to get it right. I do not have a problem with trying to anticipate some of the demographic changes. I do not know who had the foresight to put Queen's Park in the middle of Toowoomba but it was one of the greatest things that ever happened for our city. We need to have that sort of foresight in future development that occurs. We do not particularly want to have little pocket handkerchief bits of ground here and there amongst subdivisions; it is better to have a nice big piece where there is a botanical garden, a sports field and a place where people can have a barbecue. It really adds dimension to a suburb. Who had the foresight to put in place Yeronga Park? What a great place that is for that part of the city. That is what is needed in all towns, be it Brisbane or other towns throughout Queensland. Planning has to be about amenity, practicality and affordability but it also has to be about ensuring that wherever people live in the future they are within walking distance of conveniences. It should be an environment where people can enjoy each other's company and where those who are disadvantaged can feel that they are part of that particular village.

As I said at the outset, we are supporting this bill, but we have a number of concerns. Our shadow minister will be addressing those concerns by way of amendments. If those amendments can be considered, despite the fact that this bill has been rushed through in about a week and a half, then that could give some real strength and potential to this legislation and housing affordability in the future.