



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (7.39 pm): This bill we are debating tonight is about a number of things, but particularly it is about putting sustainable and affordable design features in houses. It introduces a number of matters that the shadow minister has spoken about that make sense. But, as he alluded to, the real problem with the bill is in the detail. The sustainability declaration imposes some almost crazy measures and creates more red tape.

This bill deals with a number of matters to do with the affordable design of houses. Yet the minor reductions in cost that might be achieved by some of these measures pale into insignificance when they are compared with the massive cost increases that most people are finding in the cost of buying land and building a new house. That cost increase has been brought about as a direct result of the massive debt that this government got itself into in the boom times.

Home affordability is very important, particularly for people buying their first block of land on which to build their first home. For example, in Toowoomba \$6 million in annual grants have been withdrawn. As a result, headworks charges have gone up massively. This bill brings in measures such as allowing people to have one garage instead of two under a covenant, but at the same time in most cases the price of land for people, particularly young couples who are buying their first block of land for their first home in a subdivision on the outskirts of town, has gone up massively by tens of thousands of dollars because of this government withdrawing annual grants from councils and the forced amalgamation of councils, costing councils many millions of dollars.

Mr Wallace: I rise to a point of order. The member for Toowoomba South is misleading the House. The government has not withdrawn any grants to councils.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr HORAN: As I said, the annual grants that were announced in the budget this year have been withdrawn. They are no longer receiving those grants. Toowoomba is going to miss out on \$6 million a year.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members to my right, will you cease interjecting. If you have a valid point of order, please raise it. Apart from that, the member for Toowoomba South has the call.

Mr HORAN: So whilst we are debating tonight some measures that allow for the pitch of roofs, the orientation of buildings and so forth, people are facing massive increases in housing costs, mainly through increased headworks charges, because of the forced amalgamations of councils and because of the taking away of the annual grants to councils.

The issue of 'ban the banners' has some merit, but I suggest that a bit of caution is also needed. Over the years we have seen the development of covenants in various estates. The majority of people who buy land in an estate and who put their hard-earned money, their savings and their borrowings from a bank

into a home like to think that the estate is of a good standard. So gradually covenants have crept in, such as houses in suburbs being built in brick, having a certain coloured roof, having landscaping and so on.

We often make comment that a lot of young couples now go into a new home and they have everything—the landscaping, the curtains and everything else is there. For some people, because of their financial circumstances, it might be a lot easier for them to be able to do those things in year or two. My wife and I raised our first two kids in what used to be called a temporary dwelling. It was 28 foot by 12 foot. People were able to do that on acreage on the outskirts of town. People lived like that for two or three years until they had enough money to build a house. It saved them from paying rent. I would not recommend it, but that is how a lot of young couples got started—by living in a caravan on their block. That way they got a start without having to pay rent.

I am not suggesting that we should have that style of living. I think some of the provisions in this bill make some sense, provided that eventually, if a standard is trying to be met for a suburb—and the modern planning of suburbs is about having koala corridors, parklands, wastewater collection areas, recycling areas, a good standard of roads, landscaping and everything else—that standard is met at some time. But again, I say that you have to treat those measures relative to this massive increase in the cost of land that is occurring because of red tape, forced amalgamations, the withdrawal of grants and so forth.

The sustainability declaration, which is an integral part of the bill, is another example of how Labor likes to get into everybody's lives. One of the members of the opposition said that a total of 56 questions had to be answered. We have heard some people from the government side—particularly the member for Brisbane Central—wax lyrical about how easy the form was to fill out and how they were able to do it in five minutes. People sell houses in all sorts of different circumstances. Some people who are selling are very old. They live on their own and they want to move into a retirement village or a nursing home. Sometimes those people do not have any family with them. Other people who are selling are still in the stages of grief, or job transfer, or tragedy, or whatever. Be that as it may, the very first question on the declaration talks about an energy equivalence rating. It states—

This is determined by an energy assessor.

We all know that when legislation is introduced into this House all we are doing is adding to red tape, the bureaucracy and process. So much of life and so much of the cost of living today revolves around process. There are very few people who are making things that can be sold or exported compared to the number of people who are involved in process. We have people sitting down tapping away at their computers checking forms, signing them off—doing all of these sorts of process things that we introduce all the time in this parliament. Every time we bring in legislation it has associated with it more and more red tape.

Members can stand here and say, 'We don't mean to do this and we don't mean to do that.' The minister can say, 'They don't have to answer one or two of these questions' but this process will develop. The form is mandatory. At the very end of the form people have to sign it and it states—and this will frighten many old people—that they are aware that it is an offence under the Building Act 1975 to provide misleading or false information. That is how serious this form is. The lawyers will have a field day with this form. Anyone who wants to pull out of a sale can say, 'That greywater tank is not actually 500 litres; it is only 250 litres.' Even though it is buried in the ground, they will be able to get out of the contract. There will be that many loopholes to get out of a contract with this form being introduced.

When you look at the energy segment of this form you really start to wonder what on earth it is going to achieve. The energy that is used in a house depends on how many TVs there are—or whether the TV is a 48-inch TV or a 20-inch TV—how many electric clock radios there are, how many microwaves there are, how many jugs there are, how many vacuum cleaners there are or how long the kids leave the lights on for. None of that information will be on this form. This form just asks you to list the total amount. What is the minister trying to do with this form? It makes absolutely no sense at all. It does not prove anything whatsoever.

How will people deal with issues such as '3-star WELS>>(or AAA rated)'? This will grow; people will want something else on the form. Half of this is about access and safety. It is nothing to do with sustainability. What do walking in on the same level or going up two steps, or one hob-less—step free—shower or grab rails have to do with sustainability? It has nothing to do with the environment or sustainability. This is crazy. I can see some jobs in the process.

The doozy is that when we get down to the household report card it asks for the annual household electricity costs. As I said, it depends on how well the head of the house polices whether the lights are left on or not, whether the outside light is left on or not, how many electrical appliances there are in the house, how long they are left on, whether they are left on at night—and on and on. Annual household electricity costs would mean absolutely nothing to the buyer because it would depend on the discipline and the system that that household employs and the number of appliances that they use.

Then it goes on to greenhouse gas emissions. A person has to work out using a formula the approximate kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions from the annual household electricity use. Do not say that this is looking at reds under the bed, because it is not. There will be a figure and it will not be long before the government will think up a little scheme. Half the population thinks that greenhouse gases and global warming might be true; the other half think it may not be true—

Mr Wallace: Do you believe it?

Mr HORAN: I have read a lot of things.

Mr Wallace: Yes or no?

Mr HORAN: I take the interjection. I have read a lot of interjections—books. I will write a book about interjections one day so that people can read about some of the inane ones that have come from the member for Thuringowa. As the member knows all too well, we were once covered in ice so I guess we have had climate change forever and ever. This form will deliver a greenhouse gas emission figure for every house. That leaves the door open for a tax on the house and a tax on the family. That will happen one day. A person has to fill this form in. It is mandatory. A person cannot sell their house unless they fill it out. Then there is the offence and the penalties under the Building Act if they provide any misleading information.

This government cannot seem to allow people to run their own show. In normal advertising for real estate people have the sense to say that they have three 10,000 gallon rainwater tanks. Everybody now has to do it. Business runs properly without the need for all this sort of stuff. We will end up with people who will say, 'We will fill this out for you. We will only charge you \$250 or \$300 or \$500. We will get it accurate. It might help you sell the house.' We will just see the red tape grow and grow. It is Big Brother again. This is the nanny state. It seems to be the way that this government works. This government has no big ideas to make things really happen like—

Mr Wallace: Like the pipeline to Toowoomba?

Mr HORAN: There was not much thought from the Premier or the Deputy Premier when I went to see them about putting a weir on all the stormwater that flows out of Toowoomba down Gowrie Creek. It is only 17 kilometres to pump it to Cooby Dam on the same altitude. You would be right into the reticulation system.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Toowoomba South, your comments will come through the chair.

Mr HORAN: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I take that interjection. It would have been a fraction of the cost. The minister is aware, with that interjection, that the government is charging Toowoomba \$112 million for that at the same time that the council is losing its annual grants from the government. The government provided a water grid for the people of South-East Queensland for free. The minister did not do much for Toowoomba. He provided everyone else with something and then charged the people of Toowoomba \$112 million.

The issue of water tanks is a far bigger issue than filling out forms. If people have proper tanks attached, the average house, with the average rainfall that most towns and cities in Queensland have, can actually catch the bulk of the water that it needs for a whole year. In an area that gets 30 inches or above in rainfall, it is not difficult for a reasonably sized house with the adequate number of tanks to catch 250,000 litres a year from the heavier falls that might come during the summertime. That would certainly be a lot better for people.

The form deals with solar electricity. One of the problems people have is that they go to the expense of putting in solar power and then they are charged an access fee. I get this complaint from many people. They put in a solar system and they provide all their own power, yet they still have to pay an access fee because the power runs past the property. It certainly does not provide a great deal of encouragement for people because of the capital cost that they have to meet to put in the solar power system. It certainly does not provide much of an incentive.

This bill deals with the restrictions that are involved with covenants on new subdivisions. I certainly hope that, whilst allowing young people to build and to move in in an affordable way, it does not downgrade the quality of a suburb or a housing estate for everybody else in the future.

The bill also deals with matters to do with the Queensland Development Code and building surveying technicians. I know that we will be dealing with this issue of the declaration when it comes to the clauses, but I just want to reiterate that this is red-tape overkill. Here is another process. We have already had put in place in the contract of sale process all these sentences that have to be in big words and warnings and so forth. We have a cooling-off period in the process for selling a car. People should be able to say, 'I will wait and I will make up my mind later on.' All of this involvement in and interference with the way that people live and work makes for more red tape. It will complicate the whole process of selling a house. It might be easy for people with education who have time, computers and the records of what they have in their house. Other people do not know because they have bought from someone else. It will be

very difficult for some people and will cause problems. It will add to the transaction cost of selling a house and will make doing business in Queensland a little more difficult. It has become expensive enough to do business in Queensland with the new petrol tax, the greatly increased registration costs and the massive increase in electricity costs.

On the subject of electricity, the sustainability declaration has columns on the side talking about the average cost of electricity to a home. Those opposite will be changing that dramatically with the way they are going. With the 45 per cent increase over a period of two years they will be printing a new form three times a year. It will certainly show up the massive increases that are coming, in particular from the complex system of water supply they have set up that is predicted to increase the cost of water by 300 per cent for the people of Queensland between 2007 and 2013.

This declaration is bureaucracy gone mad; it is bureaucratic overkill. It is setting the scene for every household to have a figure for their greenhouse gas emissions. Members opposite can say what they like about it, but it will be there. Every house that is sold will be required to have a figure for the greenhouse gas emissions of that place. That could introduce all sorts of temptations in the future for a cash-strapped government that will owe about \$100 billion and will be looking to introduce some sort of a crazy additional tax scheme.

(Time expired)