



Speech by

Dr Alex Douglas

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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ARCHITECTS AMENDMENT BILL

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (4.52 pm): It seems almost appropriate that this bill is presented for debate just after the release of the Parliament House Conservation Plan released on 14 April.

Mr O'Brien: You will speak on anything. Expert on everything.

Dr DOUGLAS: And the member is not. This coincides with the 150th year of the Queensland parliament. Rather than paraphrase the Speaker, who is responsible for this magnificent building, I would like to include something that may give another insight into this truly magnificent building. The bill presented is proposing to simplify registration of architects in Queensland in line with procedures approved by the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia and all Australian boards. It is already used in Queensland. It is also broadening the issue of practice provisions to include health assessments and criminal history checks. It also increases regulations and provides for stronger punitive and disciplinary provisions. In doing so, it provides more definition for paths to penalty provisions and also paths to restoration of registration for previously registered architects.

As I wrote this I was listening to the member for Algester describing her vision of community housing, which throughout the state is delivering accommodation with often too little parking, very poor access and densities that are unacceptable. They do so by virtue of exempting themselves from council planning regulations or public campaigns, deriding reasonable requests to provide modern acceptable accommodation standards. Architects have major roles in delivering Queenslanders not only housing accommodation solutions but proposing innovative methods that might just make modern domestic and commercial construction viable and energy efficient. The last point is a buzz word that this Labor government publicly states ad nauseum but in practice it is not always doing what is best or financially efficient. My best example currently would be the shocking example of the federal government insisting on a wasteful program of bats, paper, wool—really anything that could have been put in a ceiling—to enable a claim for a government rebate to be made. If they had consulted any architect or builder they would have told them that a whirlybird or its equivalent correctly parked in the roof under the tiles with adequate room ventilation and window glazing where appropriate is far more efficient and far cheaper. It also does not start fires, but helps to reduce the risk of them.

In Queensland architects have long championed the desire to alter the public's feelings and mindset about the absolute desire for brick veneer, four bedrooms, concrete on grade to ground with little regard to issues of fire, flood and weather—a point elegantly made by the member for Capalaba.

Queensland history is littered with names that have become synonymous with national history. It takes eight years to become a registered qualified architect in Queensland. It is very tough indeed and this bill will make it even harder by requiring health assessments to be undertaken, including a mental health assessment. It seems very uncertain who will do this, how much it will cost and how often it will have to be done. Architects have to do three years of design studies, one year of work experience, three years of architecture and two years or 2,000 hours of practice. In that time they must complete a logbook and then do a written and oral examination to become a qualified registered architect. For some it is just not worth it.

When they graduate they still have to use hydraulic, structural and electrical engineers and consultants under the direction of a licensed builder. Some of these only require four years of work and study. The demands are excessive and this adds another layer of regulation that is potentially unnecessary.

Architects run small businesses and are part of the 1.233 million small businesses employing half of our private sector workforce across Australia. We have to support small business because they are creating jobs and serving our community. We need lower taxes and smaller government. We need to not create regulation because red tape strangles business. Architects are struggling with the new rule for safety and design. Architects are now being made more liable for everything from people falling over in their own homes to some realistic problems. It is causing indemnities to significantly increase. The checklist is exhaustive to document. It is very time consuming. It does not make much sense and it is a massive cost to architects and their clients. It was passed into law over 12 months ago and it increases the architect's liability. Work that one out!

Wherever we walk, look, read and dream we can see the timeless work of colonial architect Charles Tiffin, the architect of Parliament House; JJ Hennessy, who designed the university; Robin Dodds; Wilbur Smith, who was an adoptee, an American; Robin Gibson; Geoffrey Pie; Eddie Hayes; Conrad and Gargett; Gabriel Poole's sail houses; Noel Robinson's open houses; Cottee Parker; Brett Saville and Todd Crighton, who designed the Q1 building and the Vision tower that is coming out of the ground at the moment. There are myriad newer architects—names that members probably have never heard of—such as Hamilton Wilson, who did the library across the river; Elizabeth Watson-Brown; Barry Lee; Paul Uhlmann; Baden Goddard; Brian Donovan; and Tim Hill, who did the magnificent Gallery of Modern Art, which is a spectacular building.

The legacy that we have by virtue of their collective inspiration has left us not only with enduring monuments to that vision but practical buildings that we Queenslanders can all enjoy. Not everyone loves them, some do not even notice them, but many do grow to love them. We all notice when some of the buildings change or their removal is threatened. These architects are largely locally trained people. Many have travelled and we are fortunate that they have returned to share their dreams with us all.

I only know a little of what architects endure, but I know how seriously they take their profession. I support the comments made by the shadow minister with regard to the issue of architects who are teaching. My cousin Tim O'Rourke teaches at the university. He has passion and skill. He actually did medicine and then went back to teach architecture. He shares a great passion for it and he enjoys it. There are plenty of other people doing exactly the same thing. These changes to the law reflect the fact that they remain architects and that is wonderful for our teaching environment. There are wonderful courses at QUT and Griffith in landscape architecture.

I know that architects see themselves firstly as artists, secondly as professionals, thirdly as technicians and finally as managers. This really is quite a challenge. Most people would be content with only one of these jobs. Architects do this in an environment of competition, budgets, building and credit cycles, the vagaries of market pressure, deadlines and maybe even ignorance. The greatest architects have been in equal measures the most withdrawn, humble and subtle people to the most bombastic, aggressive, loud, self-interested and demanding ones. In fact, that was highlighted by the member for Capalaba—interestingly, his daughter has gone into architecture—and I think that goes to show the sort of people who do this and the passion they have. Occasionally the scale of the projects may require some or all of these traits. I wonder whether the great architects are the true chameleons of our public art and construction industry.

I had the great privilege of being in Korea with two of Queensland's outstanding architects who have had input into our latest visionary buildings. Brett Saville and Todd Crighton have designed arguably the most amazing building in Q1 and they proposed the Vision tower here in Brisbane. Hopefully it will be built. I saw a presentation to a global audience that electrified that audience not only with what they had done but also with what they were currently doing and what they were further proposing to do. They not only clearly showed how it could be done efficiently from a base here in Brisbane, on time, within budget and affordable, but delivered us all to a better place. It demonstrates that we do not need to copy anyone. We have something great to offer, and Queensland trained architects have done this and they have done it all over Queensland—Brisbane, Gold Coast, Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton—and taken it to the world stage.

The story of the University of Queensland is as interesting as the history of the Queensland parliament. It might assist the minister to understand what has happened in our own environment. The University of Queensland is actually based on Trinity College in Dublin. For those who might not know, Christopher Wren and Swift were involved. TB Beirne commissioned John Hennessy, his son-in-law, to conceive, propose and design a plan on the site provided by James Mayne and his sister at St Lucia on the Brisbane River. The sandstone construction, set in an ellipse with a centre green, is quite spectacular. The

gargoyles, which people have wondered about over the years, on the facades were placed there because that is part of the original design. It is truly a magnificent testament to vision and benevolence and true benevolence for the whole of Queensland to enjoy for the rest of time. TB Beirne was my great-grandfather. He started here as a penniless Irish immigrant.

Similarly, Tiffin was asked to build a parliament house after a competition which he either won or did not win. Arguably, the design was a combination of Tiffin and Backhouse and it was finished by FG Stanley, Tiffin's former assistant. He completed this grand dome that is French inspired, based on the Louvre and the Tuileries, which are wonderful French buildings—a little baroque. When one stands on the veranda here looking down to the botanic gardens to the north-east, if one imagines smaller trees and looks down towards the fountains one can only truly appreciate the magnificent result Tiffin, Stanley and maybe Backhouse have achieved for all of us and the whole state. This is living architecture because this is a living building, with offices, halls, the red chamber, which was the upper house, the green chamber, which was the lower house, the Speaker's Green, the Strangers Dining Room, the members bar built from the old *Lucinda* and wide verandas that mark Queensland as unique.

The parliament was never really committed to the south-west in its original design. This was the Colonial Secretary's office and the Treasury's office. The Annexe was built to face the south bank. Doug Watkins, under the supervision of Peddle Thorp and Harvey architects—another wonderful Queensland firm—gave us the equally imposing, practical and very useful building that we use today.

Maybe we have seen the correct link that can be achieved between buildings built 100 years apart, which is what happened here. Both buildings are a testament to foresight and determination, and the parliament in no short means actually delivered this. Public Works had a great role to play. I have the book here which I will talk about in a second. I have the great privilege to be a fourth generation politician, and I really see what leadership can do over time when people come together. For those members who are unaware, I urge them to obtain their own single copy which is available from the Table Office downstairs. I congratulate the authors, Jinx Miles and Judith McKay. There is a box of them available and members might be able to take one home.

What comes of this is a pride in our state that shows who we are, where we come from and what we stand for. Whilst a building or a structure is merely something that over time will gradually fade, corrode and fall into disrepair, the statement made by former Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen in the then coalition government in the eighties to totally rebuild Parliament House and link it to the Annexe is without parallel in a modern democracy. Even in Victoria, its magnificent parliament building is falling into partial disrepair and unfortunately is not being maintained to the standard it was originally built as a result of gold rushes in Ballarat in Bendigo.

Currently Campbell Newman is equally showing that vision and has thrust himself into rebuilding Brisbane City Hall to its once great magnificence. He is not an architect.

Mr Hoolihan: He's an engineer.

Dr DOUGLAS: Yes, he is an engineer. The member for Keppel may not know that the internal dome is based on Christopher Wren's great dome of St Paul's Cathedral in London at Ludgate. It is the highest point in London. Basically it was a statement of thanks to God made in 604. It was rebuilt for the fourth time after the Great Fire. People do not build and forget. They do not take short cuts. They do not vacillate. They do all of the ordinary things as well. They watch the budget and they show great vision. Many years ago I had the great privilege of seeing Leonard Bernstein take the orchestra in City Hall from the cloisters. We are going to have this inspired opera house vision delivered here in the city. City Hall is not a bad second to the Opera House in Sydney. I truly wish to see it regain its grandeur.

Equally, on the Gold Coast I do hope that residents, by virtue of careful planning, under the stewardship of the careful and independent Gold Coast City Council, will be delivered an inspired cultural precinct at Evandale for all to enjoy. It is a magnificent community driven process, with all sorts of designs submitted and considered. The current centre is much loved, used and in great need of expansion. Sadly, a discontented rump of former failed political candidates have sought to deride, abuse, letter write, falsely accuse and influence local residents to oppose any and all of the current initiatives. They will not succeed, and I ask local journalists to champion the needs of the great city of the Gold Coast. For those who do not know, technically a city actually requires a cathedral to be considered a city. But I wonder whether in this case we can build a group of public arenas, with links to our local council, to fully state that the Gold Coast is no longer emerging—to say that it is a true city in its own right. Of course, my electorate of Gaven is part of the Gold Coast.

My electorate of Gaven is one of Queensland's oldest habitats, for those who may or may not know, and it was settled mainly around providing timber, primarily to England but also to the rest of Australia. Most of the township has not really survived architecturally. There are a few memories of its once grand

places. The names of the streets have survived. We have a wonderful group of local architects—Frank Smith, Craig Hope, Design Imagery, Steven Woolard, Myles Parching, Richard Mason and Paul Wilson. Between them their output is prolific, as one would expect.

This bill needs to reflect something of the depth of gratitude for the contribution that architects individually and collectively make to all of our lives. I sincerely hope that the changes are embraced warmly. The difficulties that have been raised should be considered for the attention of everyone, and we need to reflect on their inappropriateness or harshness. We can only hope that all of these tests do not actually make these ‘artists beyond canvass’, as they describe themselves, prevail in such a way that they withdraw from the profession and they lead us to a generic age and to a state where things are probably not quite as bright, not quite as happy, not quite the living environment that we want to live in. Architects tend to improve all those things. They are part of the professional arsenal to build our communities. They are small businesses. They need to be fairly dealt with.

Labor has a tendency to overregulate when times get tough and there is no money in the bank. This puts pressure on working families, with increases in costs of living and when there is no money in the bank for it. Small business needs to be rewarded, not penalised for having a go. The massive Japanese modular home buyers are considering entering the Australian home building market, and if that happens we may see a major change in the role of architects and building suppliers. We may see generic homes that might reflect even less of Australia’s unique built environment. Without passing judgement on the appropriateness of these Japanese environments, I do not think it is what we need here but the budget might dictate it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Gaven, I have been listening very carefully for some time. I direct your attention to the purposes of the bill and I ask you to come back to the purposes of the bill.

Dr DOUGLAS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.