




Speech by

John Hathaway

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

SOCIAL HOUSING, TENANTS

 **Mr HATHAWAY** (Townsville—LNP) (3.01 pm): I rise today to speak to an issue which I know is of high concern for many of my constituents in Townsville but which I cannot help feeling is far broader in reach than just my electorate, and that is one of tenant responsibility within public housing. This matter is a burning issue in a number of suburbs in Townsville and within those suburbs appears to be concentrated to a few streets or premises. This leads me to the conclusion that the majority of these issues arises from a very small minority of public housing tenants.

At the outset, I should point out that I have had numerous constituents raise this issue with me. These are people from all walks of life—owner-occupiers, private housing tenants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons and police. However, the vast majority of complainants are themselves tenants of public housing. The House will recall that I spoke of the importance for the government to govern with compassion and a fair go for all. I raise this in the House today because I see that we have a responsibility to act to protect those who cannot protect themselves. This is neither a NIMBY issue nor one of race nor a socioeconomic circumstance. I have been made aware of cases of disturbance of the peace, community violence, domestic abuse, frequent and repetitive alcohol and drug abuse and, in the extreme, physical and sexual abuse, child and senior abuse, and even cases of commercial drug labs.

In all these cases, I commend the actions and efforts of the local Queensland police and ambulance who, more often than not, are the first responders to many of these situations. I am aware that they do their best to maintain the peace and to isolate or apprehend the problem makers. However, their ability to respond over the years has been limited due to the frequency of events, a paucity of resources and, more frustratingly, the apparent impunity with which these people continue their antisocial and anticommunity behaviour without the risk or even threat of consequence.

Until such time as society has the ability to inculcate or impose a sense of individual responsibility and community behaviour norms, I fear this issue will continue to fester. I realise there are many reasons behind this behaviour of a small number of individuals—individuals who behave selfishly, thinking they can do what they want regardless of the impact on others in the community.

As I said earlier, many people impacted by this are themselves in need of a hand from the community and government simply to be housed and to survive. It is these people we seek to protect. I welcome the recent announcements by the Minister for Housing and Public Works in trying to address the many legacy issues left to us by decades of Labor governments such as the mismatch of tenants to the capacity of the house or unit, the changeover or replacement of old and neglected stock to reduce maintenance costs, and to provide more and more appropriate housing structures to better meet the specific needs of the tenants. The review of tenure of housing and density within locations and streets will also go a long way to address this issue. I encourage the minister and his department to keep working to these goals.

(Time expired)