




Speech By
Hon. Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

HOUSING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. TL MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works) (12.12 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

In opening, I thank the members of the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee and the chairman, the member for Warrego, for the deliberation and report on the bill. I would also like to thank those who made submissions to the committee. I greatly appreciate the time and effort taken to share their suggestions. I note that the committee tabled its report on 6 February 2013 and I am pleased to now table the government's response.

Tabled paper: Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee: Report No. 15—Housing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012, government response [\[2162\]](#).

The committee's report makes three recommendations including passing the bill. The government supports all three recommendations. The Housing and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 will pave the way for a sustainable social housing system that better meets the needs of our tenants. It is no secret that the current system is broken. It is no secret that something has to be done.

This bill enables the implementation of the national regulatory system for community housing providers—the NRS. Building a sustainable social housing system requires a significant expansion of the non-government housing sector. Our vision is for a number of providers to be capable of managing up to 15,000 dwellings. Currently, the largest community housing provider in Queensland manages fewer than 1,500 dwellings while Australia's largest manages only about 4,000. This is a big change but a necessary one and one that is welcomed by our community housing providers.

Other states and territories are also working towards the NRS. Like us, they realise that the old ways are no longer sustainable. When the Newman government came to office the public housing system was losing \$140 million a year. Maintenance bills were rising, rents were falling and the waiting list had blown out by about 50 per cent in the last three years alone. Without corrective action it would not have been long before the whole system collapsed under the weight of its own inefficiencies. Labor's solution has been to sell off properties to cover their losses, which of course is no solution at all. Unlike the Labor Party, the Newman government recognises the need for innovative ways of providing social housing. The NRS gives us the platform to do just that.

Under the NRS, social housing providers will no longer be bound by the existing prescriptive governance requirements which can be time consuming and costly. Instead, providers will only need to demonstrate their ability across a range of performance outcome areas, for example, tenancy, property and financial management. At present, most community housing providers do not operate across state boundaries because it is simply too hard. As well as needing to obtain separate licences to operate in each state, providers are also faced with different eligibility criteria and different regulatory systems each time they cross state lines. The new system will mean they only need to register once and that registration will be recognised Australia-wide.

The NRS is an opt-in system. In order to register, providers must demonstrate that they need the eligibility requirements set out in the national regulatory code. Providers will be registered under one of the three tiers of registration according to their size, scale and risk of their operations.

Decisions about funding will continue to be made by the chief executive of my department. However, it will be a legislative requirement that social housing providers must be registered in order to be funded. To manage the registration of community housing providers and oversee the regulation of the community housing sector, the amendment legislation establishes a community housing registrar. The registrar will be an independent officer and will make their decisions independent of the chief executive or the minister.

To protect the rights of tenants as well as those of the government and other investors interested in community housing, the registrar will have the authority to take action to bring a provider back to compliance where a problem is identified. One of the great tragedies of Labor's failure on public housing is the absence of any coherent network of support services. Too often people with limited life skills are provided with a roof over their head and then are left to their own devices. The high needs circumstances of the majority of new tenants in particular mean that they often require significant support in order to sustain a tenancy. The chronic shortage of resources brought about by Labor's neglect of the portfolio means that the department has not always been in a position to provide that support. Under the NRS that will change. Ancillary or wrap-around services will be an important feature of the new housing system to ensure that needy Queenslanders are not only housed but supported.

The amendments to the Housing Act recognise that organisations providing certain services do not need the same level of regulatory control as those managing tenancy and property assets. Organisations delivering only ancillary housing services, such as crisis accommodation, home modification and tenancy support, will no longer need to be registered under the Housing Act. The funding relationship with ancillary housing providers will be managed through contractual arrangements, further reducing red tape.

As with social housing providers, prescriptive regulations instructing ancillary providers how to run their businesses will be removed. It is a great irony that, under Labor, so much emphasis was placed on telling others how to do their job by people who failed to do their own. Under the NRS, funding agreements will be based on outcomes and performances, allowing organisations to get on with the job at hand: delivering services to people in need.

I now turn to the amendments of the Building Act and the Plumbing and Drainage Act. Currently, a new building approval is needed when demolition, removal and rebuilding work takes longer than six months. This can cost up to \$500. Changes to the Building Act will allow many applicants to avoid these changes by extending the time frame for this work from six months to one year.

Applicants will be able to obtain an additional extension of up to six months from their local government, bringing the total to a maximum of 18 months. This is a timely amendment as it may assist people rebuilding after recent floods across Queensland.

The notifiable work scheme, introduced in November last year, has already simplified the plumbing approval process in Queensland. By eliminating the need for a plumbing approval for routine work, competent plumbing professionals are freed from unnecessary mandatory inspections, cost and delay. They can save up to 28 business days and \$1,000, making the work easier, quicker and cheaper to complete. Local governments are also freed from the obligation to inspect this routine work and are instead funded to undertake audits, ensuring that the high standard of plumbing work demanded by the public is maintained.

In keeping with the scheme's goal of reducing complexity, these amendments will clarify the rules around the lodgement of notices for the new category of work and facilitate the ongoing audit program undertaken by the Plumbing Industry Council and local governments to ensure a high standard of work. The government's proposed changes will also facilitate easier licence renewals for certain building certifiers and pool safety inspectors.

These reforms will cut red tape and save people both time and money. This will benefit the building and plumbing industries and create real savings that can be passed on to Queenslanders. Feedback from the government advisory body, the Building Industry Consultative Group, other industry groups and local governments has shown strong support for these reforms. At its core this bill is about loosening the web of rules and regulations that were strangling the non-government sector under Labor. The role of government is to create the conditions which allow people to succeed, and that is what this bill does.

In conclusion, I return to the core business of this bill—that is, paving the way for the biggest revitalisation of social housing in Queensland’s history. This is a vital reform. Labor’s way has failed. Their failure to recognise this fact until it was too late is evidence of their neglect. This government is different. We are determined to house those people who have spent years languishing on Labor’s waiting list. We are building a modern, flexible, supportive housing system that better meets the needs of our tenants. I commend the bill to the House.