




Speech By
Hon. Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Record of Proceedings, 30 October 2013

**RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AND ROOMING ACCOMMODATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. TL MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works) (10.07 pm), in reply: I thank honourable members for their interest and their contributions to the debate this afternoon and tonight. In particular, I thank the members of the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee for their diligence and the hard work they put into examining the legislation. I would also like to thank those who made submissions to this bill and those who took their time to present their arguments before the committee at the hearing held on 1 October 2013.

I will now address some of the issues that were raised during the debate. I suppose it is only appropriate to begin with the contribution of the member for Bundamba, but I honestly do not know where to begin. I know I have been an MP for only a relatively short period, but I am struggling to remember hearing a more inconsistent, contradictory and, frankly, ill-informed set of so-called arguments. True to form, the member for Bundamba used the full quota of time allowed to her to engage in groundless scaremongering. This is a persistent practice of the member for Bundamba, who, over the past 18 months, has begun a scaremongering campaign among residents of government owned caravan parks, nursing home residents, people living in private rental and, now, social housing tenants.

One thing that has become obvious from listening to the member for Bundamba is the extent to which the Labor Party is really stuck in the past when it comes to this issue. It really shows a massive philosophical difference. The Newman government believes that social housing should, wherever possible, be transitional. We are about empowering people, about normalising the process of renting from the government and about helping people build resilience rather than reliance. In contrast, if the member for Bundamba is any indication, the Labor Party believes that the best thing that could ever happen to people is for them to remain dependent on the state for the rest of their lives. That is the Labor way. The member is perfectly entitled to hold that antiquated view, just as she is entitled to amuse herself with conspiracy theories about wholesale public housing sell-offs. Unfortunately, I fear that in doing so she simply reveals the extent to which she is out of touch with the people of Queensland.

Let me touch on some of the issues that she raised. I am proud to say that I have visited housing service centres all over this state. I have been to Bundaberg, Emerald, Buranda, Caboolture, Gladstone, Cairns, Capalaba, Inala, Ipswich, Maroochydore, Robina, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Mount Isa, Thursday Island, Townsville and Woodridge. Next week I will be at Chermside and Fortitude Valley. I will be able to say that in my first year as a minister I have visited every housing service centre in the state.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr MANDER: The incredible thing about meeting these front-line staff in the housing service centres, and the one thing that I do agree with the member for Bundamba about, is that these staff

are hardworking, compassionate and passionate people who do a brilliant job. One of the reasons that I have been visiting them is to tell them about our housing 2020 vision, about our Homelessness-to-Housing strategy, about our three-strike policy and talking about the future. These people are enthusiastically behind what we are trying to do. In fact, they are shocked that they have actually seen a minister. They have never seen a minister in the time that they have been in these housing service centres. I am committed to engaging with them and speaking to them about their future. I have had frank discussions with them about their future and about where they stand. We are still working those issues out at the moment as we talk about this.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Government members interjected.

Mr MANDER: But they are backing their own ability. They understand that they are an asset for the future. The member for Bundamba should be ashamed of herself for the way that she is trading in baseless speculation and again in fearmongering.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Government members interjected.

Mr MANDER: The member's speculation about property sharks masquerading as community housing providers just shows how ignorant she is of the community housing sector and the national regulatory system that will govern it. Can I also remind the member that the transfer of tenancies to the not-for-profit sector was fully supported by the federal Labor government. It has been acknowledged right across the country that this is the way to go.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Government members interjected.

Mr MANDER: We currently sit at 25 per cent of public housing managed by the community housing sector. The Labor driven federal target was 35 per cent by the end of next year. These are Labor driven targets from the previous federal government, but our target is very ambitious. We aim to get to 90 per cent by the year 2020.

I will just touch on the member for Bundamba's comments about the so-called retrospectivity involved in the transfer of tenancy agreements. The legislative amendments are designed to facilitate a smooth transfer of tenancy management to the not-for-profit community housing sector for the delivery of social housing. Community housing providers can provide a more localised, responsive and integrated service and are better equipped to engage the sort of wraparound support services many of our high-needs tenants require. The provisions of this bill mean that transferred tenants do not have to sign a new tenancy agreement since the amendments deem existing tenants to have a new agreement in place. This saves providers from having to undertake what would be a slow and expensive task, as well as placing a burden on tenants by asking them to sign a new agreement.

Before I move on, let us consider for a moment what the member is opposed to. She is opposed to tenancies transferring to not-for-profit organisations whose very reason for being is to provide supported accommodation to the most vulnerable members of society. She is questioning not-for-profit organisations like Mission Australia, Prescare, Churches of Christ Care—people who have worked in this sector for years and years and years.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr MANDER: She is aghast at the prospect of tenants continuing to have their rents capped at 25 per cent of their assessable income. She is appalled that tenants might have to pay a small bond or service charge for using excess water—never mind that they will have up to three years to prepare for these changes.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr MANDER: If the member truly believes that this somehow is a raw deal for tenants then she is even more out of touch than I thought. There are currently over 22,000 households on the waiting list for social housing. More than 4,000 of them are considered to be very high needs. The government considers that it is important that the tribunal also has regard to the needs of people on the waiting list awaiting housing assistance from the state. Existing public housing tenants will have until mid-2016 before being required to pay a bond and service charges such as for water that they use and they will therefore have two years to prepare to pay in the third year.

The member for Bundamba also claims that this new three-strikes policy goes too far. I am not surprised that she feels that way because the policy of the previous government barely made it

around the block. It is amazing that she has learned nothing from the failures of the past. Obviously she would prefer to go back to the days when tenants could be issued with dozens and dozens of breach notices without putting their tenancy at risk. She would prefer to go back to the days when bad behaviour would be erased from the record if you behaved yourself for 30 days.

Mrs Miller: We brought in the three strikes, you ignorant person.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Berry): Order! Under standing order 253A you can leave the chamber.

Whereupon the honourable member for Bundamba withdrew from the chamber at 10.15 pm.

Mr MANDER: The couch surfers she was apparently so concerned about are precisely the people that this legislation is designed to help. Obviously the member cares very little for them because she would prefer to leave them languishing on the waiting list while we go back to the days where it was almost impossible to move people on no matter how badly they behaved. The member for Bundamba and her colleagues need to make a choice: are they on the side of rogue tenants or are they on the side of tormented neighbours? With regard to the member's concerns about vexatious complaints and her clumsy attempt to conflate suspicion with reasonable belief, I simply reassure her that complaints will be thoroughly investigated within principles of procedural fairness and natural justice so people whose interests might be adversely affected by a decision have an opportunity to be heard. Any decision will be based on evidence and without bias.

I would also like to point out that earlier on the member was extolling the virtues of housing service centre staff, calling them hardworking, highly trained et cetera, which I entirely agree with, but now she claims to be worried about these same people, claiming that they are so incompetent or so corrupt that they would be unfairly evicting people without any recourse to any sort of appropriate appeal or review process. The member for Bundamba cannot have it both ways. The department has well-established processes and practices to ensure that the tenant is afforded natural justice and has a right of reply before notices are issued. If the bill is passed, the department will, where appropriate, update its processes and practices to cover the new provisions of the bill. Of course, if people feel they have been unfairly treated they can feel free to put the case before QCAT.