




Speech By  
**Yvette D'Ath**

**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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## **QUEENSLAND BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION COMMISSION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (8.27 pm): Today I rise to make a contribution to the Queensland Building and Construction Commission and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014. I note that my colleague the member for Rockhampton and shadow minister for public works has already made a detailed contribution on the contents of this bill, so I will confine my remarks to the aspects of the bill that amend the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2008 and the Housing Act 2003. As the member for Rockhampton has already indicated, the amendments before us today build on legislation introduced under the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 and the opposition will not be opposing them, as they are technical in nature.

The amendments before us today are required to facilitate the smooth transition of public housing to the community housing sector, regardless of whether it is undertaken in a methodical and measured manner, which in our view is the way it should be approached, or like a bull at a gate with a 90 per cent target such as those opposite advocate. However, many questions have been left unanswered satisfactorily by the government in relation to these changes.

In relation to tenancy agreements, the bill before us today will allow the state to terminate a state agreement and replace it with a community housing provider agreement to allow for the smooth transition of the tenancy. While that appears to be sound, I ask the minister: will the new agreements with the community housing provider be the same as the state based agreement? Will the transfer of the tenancy agreement from the state to the community housing provider allow for changes or amendments to occur to the tenancy agreement?

I note that the explanatory notes state—

The proposed amendments ... support the strategy goal of transferring management of 90 per cent of social housing to the community housing sector by 2020.

However, I note with interest that when comparing this legislation with that of other jurisdictions, the explanatory notes indicate—

... smaller scale management transfers have been undertaken in other places. However, under the 2020 Strategy, Queensland has committed to a more expansive program than other jurisdictions.

While this information is not new, it does put into context the way other jurisdictions are going about this, which is via a methodical approach, undertaking small scale transfers to begin with and then presumably working their way up gradually. This is an approach that the opposition supports. We believe that we should be working in partnership with the community housing sector and not just off-loading the responsibility of public housing to the community housing sector, abrogating our responsibility in the process.

If those opposite were genuine about their Housing 2020 Strategy, why have they not, to date, publically named the successful tenderer for their Logan Renewal Initiative project? As members would be aware, the Minister for Housing announced the short-listed organisations for the Logan Renewal Initiative more than 600 days ago, on 19 February 2013. Those organisations were Queensland companies Brisbane Housing Co., Horizon Housing Co. and Mirvac Queensland and New South Wales company Compass Housing Service Co., which I note has recently bought out local Queensland housing organisation 4walls Ltd.

While the opposition is aware that the New South Wales company Compass Housing Services Co. has been the successful tenderer, there has been no announcement by the government that we can find—not even an update, that I am aware of—indicating how the process is going. All we could find was a media release on the Compass Housing Service Co. website, dated 22 September 2014, which states—

Compass Housing services have been selected by the Queensland Government to play a key role in Queensland's largest ever housing renewal project.

It goes on to state that the project is the Logan Renewal Initiative. As this is the minister's flagship housing renewal venture, we would think that the government would be keen to be announcing the transfer arrangements to the new provider.

I note that during the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee's deliberations on this bill, the deputy director-general of housing services within the minister's department, stated—

The Logan Renewal Initiative and the Gold Coast Management Transfer Initiative are the first of these transfers, expected to commence in early 2015.

I ask the minister to provide a detailed update to this House about the status of these initiatives given that the Logan Renewal Initiative was announced more than 600 days ago and there has been very little movement on the ground nor, from my understanding, communication with existing public housing tenants. Why has it taken over 600 days to come to the point of awarding the tender to Compass Housing Service Co.?

In relation to privacy and confidentiality, the bill, as outlined in the explanatory notes, provides a better mechanism to transfer public housing tenancy leases to the community housing provider and also establishes legislation to allow the transfer of confidential tenancy records and information from the department to the community housing provider to enable the provider to continue the tenancy. While this is an important step to ensure that information is maintained, managed and used in an appropriate manner, I ask the minister what guidelines will be in place to ensure that confidential information is maintained and used in a correct manner once transferred from the department to the provider? Will the department have oversight and powers to investigate?

While on the topic of transfers, which is the key objective of the Housing 2020 Strategy and which these amendments pertain to, will the minister outline in his reply what stage the transfer is up to? What regions have started to transfer their stock? I refer to the Department of Housing and Public Works fact sheet entitled 'Transfer of the management of social housing to the non-government sector', dated July 2013, which outlines indicative time frames for starting housing management transfers. I note that it indicates that by now the housing service centre areas of Woodridge, Robina, Redcliffe, Maroochydore, Gladstone and Cairns should have commenced transfers, with Mackay, Rockhampton, Emerald, Bundaberg, Maryborough and Caboolture occurring in the current 2014-15 financial year. Have any of these actually commenced?

I can advise that no such transfer will occur in Redcliffe because the Newman government instead chose to unilaterally close the Redcliffe housing service centre last year without advising the community or even leaving a note on the door as to where people could now get assistance. I also note that the document indicates that the Logan Renewal Initiative, which I have already referred to, commits to the management transfer of approximately 4,732 units of accommodation from the Woodridge housing service centre. As stated, the government has not yet publically announced the successful provider. Can the minister outline how this target will be met, with no publically available plan or timeline in place?

With such a high number of dwellings proposed for transfer from the control of the Woodridge housing service centre's jurisdiction to the community housing sector, what will happen to the existing hardworking public servants working in those centres? What thought has been given to the future of existing hardworking public servants, currently working on the front line with Queensland's public housing tenants?

I understand from reading the record of the 2013 budget estimates hearings that the minister did not give a guarantee about the future of public servants working in the housing service centres to which this legislation will be applied via the transfer of management. I believe his words were—

If they are passionate and are doing as good a job as I think they are doing, they will be snapped up by these community housing organisations.

Although that might be the case, that does not provide any reassurance to our hardworking public servants that their jobs will be safe. Couple this with comments made by the deputy director-general of housing services from the Department of Housing and Public Works at a recent hearing of the parliamentary committee on 27 August 2014, where he stated under questioning by the member for Woodridge—

I would have thought, however, given the nature of the task, there would be significant interest from a community housing provider in the very good staff that we have within housing services.

These two statements, by the minister and his department, do not give our current hardworking public servants any comfort. The opposition has been contacted by many public servants who are worried about their futures as the en masse management transfers commence. I ask the minister today to provide a guarantee that our hardworking front-line public servants, jobs will remain safe and that there will be no further job cuts in his department as a result of the transfers.

In conclusion, while the opposition will not be opposing the amendments pertaining to public housing management in Queensland, we do believe that there are a number of issues that the minister and those opposite need to address. We believe that there are a number of potential consequences that will result from the management transfers, including the loss of further public servant jobs. We have seen public housing tenants in Queensland come under attack by those opposite, such as introducing the draconian temporary absences policy, which they have only tweaked at the edges when they were caught out by the opposition.

We are now hearing from Queenslanders who are contacting the opposition that public housing tenants' rents are going up by more than the \$7.50 a week cap the minister stated would be applied. While we believe that the community housing sector has a role to play in public housing in Queensland, we believe that the transitions need to occur gradually—similar to what is happening in other jurisdictions—after tenants are well informed of the changes and with strict rules and conditions in place to ensure that public housing tenants are not disadvantaged.

We believe that the focus should not be just to outsource the public housing system en masse, as quickly as possible, but to ensure that there are adequate support services available to actively assist tenants. There also needs to be proper and meaningful consultation and an information campaign regarding the changes to public housing tenancy arrangements.

While I note that on the surface there may not be any difference from the tenants' perspective regarding their lease and day-to-day tenancy, public housing tenants in Queensland have gone through a roller-coaster of change since the Newman LNP government came to power, with many feeling they have been victimised and attacked by those opposite. I would appreciate the minister outlining how he proposes to actively and positively communicate the transferring of management changes to existing and new public tenants in Queensland. As the shadow minister for housing, I and my Labor colleagues will continue to monitor and watch the public housing space in Queensland to ensure that public housing tenants and indeed all tenants in Queensland receive a fair go and are treated equally.