




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 16 March 2016

PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (5.46 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Plumbing and Drainage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Whilst I was a member of the Transportation and Utilities Committee, I was fortunate enough to be on that committee when this bill was examined and I am now on the equivalent committee and it gives me great pleasure to report on the benefits of this bill to the people of Queensland.

As members can tell by the title of this bill, it is the plumbing aspect of the bill that has the immediate attention of everyone, but I want to emphasise that there is much more to the bill than just that aspect. On the plumbing aspect, though, we know that we do need a strong plumbing industry if we are to maintain strong public health. I think that came through very strongly from the previous minister and this minister as well. As a local councillor of many years, I know that with plumbing, sewerage and water you are only 24 hours away from a great social disaster if that is not fixed.

The Palaszczuk Labor government knows that we need to work with and not work against the plumbing industry. This bill establishes that dedicated plumbing industry regulatory body called the Service Trades Council that will sit within the Queensland Building and Construction Commission, the QBCC. I think we need to make it very clear that all submissions on this bill supported the establishment of a dedicated plumbing services regulatory body. The membership of this body will include a range of industry experts and government representatives and it will play a number of critical roles, including conferring on national policy development, licensing, discipline and other related matters and also reporting to the minister on all issues related to plumbing and drainage.

This bill gives effect to the Queensland government's election commitment to re-establish a dedicated plumbing industry regulatory body within the broader statewide construction industry regulatory organisation that will replace the Plumbing Industry Council, which was disbanded by the previous LNP government. When it was disbanded, its functions were transferred to the statewide construction industry regulatory organisation, the QBCC. I certainly got the impression about how popular this move was to reinstate this body when I attended the awards night last year for the Master Plumbers' Association with the then minister, the member for Algeester. This was a huge gala evening attended by about 500 people. I can tell members that from that evening all parts of the plumbing industry are very grateful that we are bringing back this regulatory board for plumbing. Plumbers and plumbing company owners constantly sought me out that night and complimented our government all around for bringing back their board.

At those awards, it was really good to see all the different plumbing businesses in Queensland and see what they have achieved. It was great to see so many innovative plumbing and related industry practices being developed and used by Queensland businesses. It is a large scale industry and it utilises a great amount of local innovation. For example, plumbing businesses have been very innovative in gas piping in domestic and industrial applications. Plumbing is an integral part of the burgeoning gas industry in Queensland, especially in regional areas where to some degree they are collecting and distributing gas in operations of different scales.

At that evening, it was made very clear to me that the Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland and the plumbers union are united in their strong support for the Service Trades Council. That came through very strongly. That tells us how necessary the industry regards this body that will be created. On that topic, it was also stated at that gala dinner that the plumbers are also very grateful that we reintroduced legislation so that only licensed plumbers could install water meters. That legislation was passed last year. When that bill was considered we heard from a variety of people, including local governments, that—

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr WHITING: My colleagues opposite said that that legislation would have dire consequences for Queensland, that it would hamstring water utilities and councils, that people could not get plumbers to do the work, that it would cost too much. From my experience as a local councillor, let me say that we need licensed plumbers to install water meters. When you get out into the streets in suburbia, you do not know what you could find. Sometimes what you find are illegal connections, very poor connections and multiple connections and no-one knows where they came from. Many things can go disastrously wrong when a worker who is not a plumber is installing a meter. You need an expert. The message that the plumbers gave me when that legislation was considered then and the message that they are giving me now is that they need the Service Trades Council, they need that assistance and we are listening. Both that bill and this bill are examples of how we are listening to the industry.

I heartily support this bill, because it also ensures that providers of social housing can get access to bond guarantees. Tenancy guarantees are part of the Department of Housing and Public Works' RentConnect suite of products that assist people to access and sustain private rental. Those of us who have dealt with a number of housing issues in their electorates would know how vital RentConnect can be. As we have heard, a tenancy guarantee is an undertaking to pay up to a stated amount if the lessor experiences a loss through a breach by a tenant and the bond does not cover the amount of that loss. We are already providing those guarantees to private landlords. By providing this guarantee to a broader number of housing providers, that is going to lessen housing pressure throughout the state.

I refer to a local housing provider in my area, Coast2Bay. Under this bill, this fine organisation will now be able to provide a fuller and better range of housing services to people in my area. Coast2Bay is an independent, not-for-profit company committed to providing safe, affordable and appropriate homes to individuals and families throughout the Sunshine Coast, Noosa, Moreton Bay, Redcliffe and Gympie regions. I know from working with that company and talking to them that they lead the way in developing community and affordable housing by working with their partners in government, the private sector and the community to expand local housing options. Coast2Bay manages over 491 dwellings through the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Their mission statement states—

Coast2Bay Housing Group is a professional and socially responsible community housing company working in partnership with communities, governments and the private sector. It delivers appropriate social and affordable housing programs that support and empower people to improve their lives, progress to independence and contribute to sustainable communities.

It is organisations such as Coast2Bay that will benefit from this bill as it endeavours to provide more housing options. It is wonderful that Coast2Bay can get partial support from this bill.

While I am talking about initiatives that deliver better housing options for Queenslanders, one of the most notable aspects of this bill is the action that it delivers on residential tenancy databases. As the minister said when this bill was introduced, we are delivering fairness to Queenslanders. We want to make sure that these tenancy databases treat Queenslanders fairly. If the database system is not working fairly, it can have a devastating effect on those Queenslanders who need housing. Through this bill, we are adopting the national standards.

This bill makes sure that these residential tenancy databases contain only current and accurate information. The bill recognises the rights of lessors and agents to list tenants on the database, but introduces limitations and obligations on lessors and their agents and makes sure that these limitations are used fairly. As we have heard, the bill makes sure that tenants have to be consulted before they are put on the list. Tenants have to be advised of the person who listed them and how they can challenge that listing. Lessors and database operators are to take steps to ensure that the information that they hold is accurate and remove information that is inaccurate and out of date. Crucially, this bill makes sure that tenants can be on the list for only three years. That is absolutely crucial. We know that people can be put on these databases for only small amounts outstanding. Five years is too long to be constantly denied housing.

In my previous life as president of a neighbourhood centre and as a real estate agent, I have seen what happens to people who are on these databases for all the wrong reasons. I know of people whose names were on lease agreements, they have split up with their partners and all of a sudden they are left with a debt that they did not incur. As we have heard, sometimes these people are single-parent families. One of the best aspects of this bill is that it makes sure that we have a fair system in relation to these databases. Therefore, I commend this bill to the House.