




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2016

PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (4.47 pm): I rise this afternoon to support the Plumbing and Drainage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In doing so, I congratulate both ministers for having the foresight to introduce this piece of legislation and the Transportation and Utilities Committee for its inquiry into the bill. The bill amends the Housing Act 2003, the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002, the Queensland Building and Construction Commission Act 1991, the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009.

This bill will deliver certainty and fairness for Queenslanders. The bill delivers on our election commitment to re-establish a dedicated plumbing industry regulatory body within the Queensland Building and Construction Commission. When I was campaigning prior to the 2015 election a number of people approached me with concerns about the previous government's involvement in removing the previous body. The reinstated regulatory body will maintain public health and the environment, and ensure we have a strong plumbing industry. The Palaszczuk government understands the benefits of a strong industry with the best possible standards. This government is committed to working with, not against, Queensland's plumbing industry.

The former government abolished the Plumbing Industry Council, transferring its functions to the Queensland Building and Construction Commission—a move opposed by the plumbing industry as it weakened the industry's voice. This government takes the concerns of the plumbing industry seriously.

In examining these bills and the amendments, the Transportation and Utilities Committee held an inquiry and made four recommendations to the House. The committee received 11 submissions from stakeholders. I would like to refer to one submission that I sighted in examining this bill. It came from Gary O'Halloran, the state secretary of the plumbers union in Queensland and the Northern Territory. He hit the nail on the head when he said in his submission—

It is critical that the plumbing industries of sanitary plumbing, fire protection as well as mechanical services ... have a dedicated plumbing industry regulatory body—

He went on to say—

... the industry has focused on achieving the best possible outcome for consumers as well as industry professionals. This focus has led to world best health and safety outcomes for the Queensland public.

I want to digress slightly and talk about something I was involved with in a previous career while in the Senate. I was extremely privileged to have been given the opportunity to go to Mozambique and Tanzania in Africa to examine AusAID funding into water sanitation. While you are over there, you start to realise how fortunate we are in this country to have our services, our water sanitation and our provisions. You do not really appreciate that until you get those opportunities to look at countries that are less fortunate. Unfortunately, that AusAID funding either has been removed or is minuscule now in terms of the current federal government.

When we went through the streets—whether it was Maputo in Mozambique or Dar es Salaam in Tanzania—I saw the benefits of that AusAID funding in respect of water sanitation and sanitary services for young children and residents of those countries. Once again, I understand why this bill is necessary and why it is important to have a regulatory body. I am not suggesting for one moment that we are heading down a path of getting to a level of having Third World sanitary conditions and water sanitation, but I am sure if countries like that had some sort of protection like this bill proposes they would be in a better position today.

The reinstated regulatory body, the Service Trades Council, will replace the disbanded Plumbing Industry Council. Establishing the Service Trades Council within the Queensland Building and Construction Commission will allow the improved service delivery outcomes being achieved by the commission to be maintained. Just recently, we had the misfortune of having to ring a plumber, something that comes naturally when you own a house. Only a few weeks ago, it got to the extent where I could not bear the toilet in the ensuite dripping and also the problems with the children's toilets, so I had to get a plumber in to fix it. I do not dare try to tackle those chores myself.

Mr Ryan: You're not licensed.

Mr FURNER: That is right. I will take that interjection, and that is another reason this bill has been brought on. The plumber who came provided an expert and professional service to stop that dripping so I can sleep with pleasure at night now, and the hot water system needed a bit of maintenance as well.

Mr Ryan: That's why you're so happy now.

Mr FURNER: I am very happy. It is important that we have plumbers who are licensed and governed by a regulatory body to make sure they do the right thing and make sure that Queenslanders are protected in respect of their rights. The Service Trades Council will have a number of critical roles in its representation of the plumbing industry. Some of these include: conferring on national policy development—for example, licensing, discipline and other related matters; and reporting to the minister on issues related to plumbing and drainage. The Service Trades Council will also be able to make recommendations to the Queensland Building and Construction Commission about the performance of any of the commissioner's functions under the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002. The Service Trades Council will establish a panel of industry and training experts to consider complex licensing applications, such as migrant applications, and provide recommendations to the commission on the appropriateness of issuing the applicant a licence. The council will also have an important role in the disciplining of licensees by taking on the function of internal reviewer for disciplinary decisions made by the commissioner.

Moving to the other part of the bill, the bill also delivers on our commitment to fairness for Queenslanders. For prospective tenants, out-of-date or inaccurate information on residential tenancy databases can have significant outcomes. It can have particularly significant impacts on our most vulnerable by placing them at an increased risk of homelessness. The bill seeks to introduce the national uniform law on residential tenancy databases to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 to provide extra protection for tenants. By ensuring these databases contain only current and accurate information, tenants can be protected from unfair disadvantage, and their rights when it comes to their personal information can be safeguarded. These provisions also allow databases to continue to be used as a screening tool by lessors and agents to manage investor risk.

Database operators are obligated to amend or remove listings consistent with advice from lessors and agents. Lessors, agents and operators who made the listing are obligated to provide a copy of the information on the database to a tenant on request once any associated fee is paid. The bill will also ensure listings do not remain on databases for longer than three years. The adoption of these provisions will help protect the rights of Queensland tenants. This government is committed to making sure all Queenslanders get a fair go and have the opportunity to get ahead.

The bill also seeks to amend the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 to ensure more Queenslanders can grasp the opportunity to sustain a private market tenancy when they are in a position to do so. The RentConnect product has helped thousands of Queensland families access the private rental market. Tenancy guarantees are part of this offering. A tenancy guarantee is an undertaking to pay up to a stated amount to cover loss or expense to lessors caused by a breach from a tenant where the tenant's rental bond is insufficient to cover the amount owing.

The bill further seeks to introduce a deeming provision to the Housing Act 2003 to allay potential concerns and to provide security and certainty for future owners and financiers in relation to public housing that may be transferred. The proposed deeming provision will provide that when and if

properties approved or used as public housing are transferred to another entity all development and building work has been done lawfully and in accordance with the relevant laws at the time. This bill is about providing security and fairness for Queenslanders who deserve it. On that note, I commend the bill to the House.