




Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (4.17 pm): This afternoon I rise to speak in favour of the Plumbing and Drainage and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This legislation seeks to implement one of our important election commitments regarding the re-establishment of an independent plumbing industry regulatory body within the Queensland Building and Construction Commission. The bill also proposes numerous amendments to do with housing and tenancy, including the regulation of a tenancy database to protect the rights of renters and the introduction of tenancy guarantees for private lessors.

Prior to 2014, the plumbing industry council had existed in one form or another for 64 years. It was a powerful representative body with control over occupational licences, disciplinary action and wider industry advocacy. In 2014, the Newman government abolished the council and transferred those responsibilities to the Queensland Building and Construction Commission, against the interests of both the Master Plumbers Association of Queensland and the Plumbers Union Queensland. Many industry organisations objected to the lack of consultation surrounding those changes and resented the fact that the industry was being handled by an authority that lacked the proper skills and experience.

This bill seeks to reinstate a separate plumbing industry regulatory body named the Service Trades Council under the QBCC. The government has developed this new model through a lengthy process of consultation with industry and stakeholders, and it goes further than just reversing the Newman government's changes. The Service Trades Council will reclaim many of the powers of the Plumbing Industry Council and will also retain the ability to internally review disciplinary decisions made by the QBCC. The council will also be required to report directly to the housing minister on any issues relating to the plumbing or drainage trade and make representations to the QBCC about the performance of the commissioners.

The bill also outlines the operational processes of the council and the methods by which members will be appointed. The bill requires that the council be made up of a mix of industry stakeholders, government representatives and consumer advocates. This model was released for feedback mid last year, and all respondents expressed support for the new proposal. I commend the work of both ministers on the fulfilment of this important election promise.

I will also speak to the proposed amendments to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act. Since being elected I have become aware of a lot of the problems faced by young people in the rental market. Due to my electorate office's proximity to two Griffith University campuses, we have seen many complaints from many young students, many of whom rent accommodation.

I know from my conversations with the previous minister for housing that the minister spent much of her time last year conducting a range of investigations into the way in which housing laws were falling short in protecting Queensland's most vulnerable. I know this important work is being continued under the new minister. I note that many complaints that have been brought to my office regarding tenancy

agreements have been resolved with the help of the newly refunded Tenants Union. While this is an integral safeguard, I am pleased to note that the government is still working to build legislative provisions to protect the rights of tenants.

The amendments in this bill relate to the regulation of the tenancy database under the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act. The proposed regulation will bring Queensland's system up to the minimum national standards that were adopted by the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs in December 2010. It is worth noting that Queensland Labor has long been at the forefront of the fight for tenants' rights. The previous Labor government would have implemented these minimum standards were it not for the change of government in 2012.

Tenancy databases are privately run information-sharing organisations that allow landlords to receive feedback about their tenants for the reference of future lessors. These databases are an important tool for the industry as a whole, but without proper regulation tenants can be left in a vulnerable position. As the minister stated in her introductory speech, many of the databases hold incorrect or severely outdated information. The information can prejudice potential tenants and in some cases this effectively leads to them being locked out of the market altogether.

The proposed regulations will require lessors to advise prospective tenants when they receive or send information to a database and to provide the contact details for the operators of the database. It will also impose standards on the operators of a database to ensure their information is correct and up to date. Information will only be permitted to be stored on any database for a restricted period of time. These regulations simply allow tenants to access and question the information that is stored about them. They implement a minimum standard of accountability and transparency to help protect the basic rights of Queensland tenants.

The government is committed to restoring the rights of tenants to enable them to stand up for themselves and their entitlements and to be able to seek reliable information when trouble arises. This regulation of the operation of the tenancy database is an important step. I commend the bill to the House.