




Speech By
Joan Pease

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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HOUSING LEGISLATION (BUILDING BETTER FUTURES) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (4.39 pm): Today I rise to speak to the Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Bill. I want to make a couple of comments with regard to the contribution made by the member for Southport, who spoke very passionately about tenants in manufactured home parks. What a shame you did not stand up and make representation on their behalf during the Nicholls-Newman era.

Mr Molhoek interjected.

Ms PEASE: The Nicholls-Newman government defunded CAMRA, which provided advocacy and advice for residents in manufactured home parks. That was a disgrace—an absolute disgrace! Some of the most marginalised people in our communities were impacted and devastated.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! Member for Lytton, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair please. Member for Southport, please do not debate across the chamber.

Mr MOLHOEK: Mr Deputy Speaker, I would ask for your protection then because the member is not debating the bill; she is just having a go at me about the past.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ms PEASE: I will continue my contribution to the legislation that we are debating today. In terms of minimum standards, we are talking about rental properties, not investment or purchased properties. I say that as a reminder. I often speak in this place about good Labor values, and this Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Bill 2017 is another example of good Labor values and reforms that protect vulnerable people in our communities, because that is what Labor people do. The Palaszczuk government's Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 was released in June 2017 and a key action under the housing legislation 2017-2020 action plan was to ensure consumers are protected and to reform and modernise Queensland's housing legislation framework.

The Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Bill 2017 delivers key objectives of the Housing Strategy and action plan. The bill amends the Housing Act 2003, the Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Act 2003, the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002, the Retirement Villages Act 1999 and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008. These amendments will ensure that vulnerable community members are supported to sustain tenancies in appropriate and secure housing that facilitates social, economic and cultural participation and support a fair and responsible housing system through reforms to legislation and regulations that enhance the safety and dignity of all Queenslanders, because that is the core of Labor values—that everyone has the right to a safe, secure and affordable place to live and that that home should be safe and secure from financial exploitation and that rental accommodation should meet minimum standards. I reiterate: rental properties should meet minimum standards to again ensure safe, secure and appropriate housing.

For most of us, including me, we have at one time or another been a tenant. In fact, more than one-third of Queenslanders live in rental accommodation and many raise their families in rented homes. My first experience of renting a property was in 1976 in a house at Kangaroo Point. This house had been flooded and had a quick touch-up job to get it back on the rental market. It was not great, but it was affordable. I was on a low income and could not afford anything fancy. After living there for a period of time, I realised that fancy this was not. The house had been split into two and my room was under the front veranda. I had to go outside to access my room and had to go back outside to get into the bathroom. I could not stand up due to the height of the ceiling and, as members can imagine, my room and, in fact, the entire house was full of unfriendly and unwelcome visitors—insects, rats and people from the street due to its location. However, for me and my fellow tenants, it was all we could afford. As members can imagine, I did not extend my lease and neither did my fellow tenants!

The Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Bill 2017 will enable new minimum standards to be set around ventilation, cleanliness, protection from damp, the dimensions of rooms, laundry and cooking facilities, privacy and security, amongst other issues. Perhaps if this had been in place in 1976 I may still have been living in Kangaroo Point. These minimum standards are serious. In fact, they can be a life or death matter. Members may remember that in 2010 a Yeppoon father walked on to the front balcony in his rented home while holding his seven-week-old daughter in his arms. A rotted floorboard gave way under his foot. He fell forward and his baby girl tragically fell to her death. The Coroner in her findings recommended that Queensland law be amended to ensure that verandas are checked and found to be safe before homes are placed on the rental market.

The Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act establishes the rules for residential and rooming accommodation in Queensland and sets out the rights and obligations of tenants, lessors and agents. In 2015 the Queensland government committed to prescribe minimum housing standards for private rental accommodation that will be extended to social housing as an equity measure. Amendments to the act are required to allow the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Regulation 2009 to prescribe the minimum housing standards for rental accommodation. This will ensure a consistent standard of rental properties, thereby improving access to safe and secure housing. Minimum rental standards are good for tenants and they are also good for business. Local governments support minimum standards. In fact, just last week on 18 October the Local Government Association of Queensland passed a motion to lobby the Queensland government to grant regulatory powers to enforce building maintenance on residential rental properties to an acceptable standard.

I know firsthand of the issues that residents of manufactured homes face. During 2012 I worked for the Caravan and Manufactured Home Residents Association, which provided advocacy and advice for residents of caravan parks and manufactured homes. I worked there until this important service, like so many others, was defunded under the Newman-Nicholls government. Some of these families who live in manufactured homes are amongst the most vulnerable members of our communities. Sadly, sometimes some park owners make life very difficult for residents, with unscheduled site rent increases, the reduction of services or amenities, general bullying and other tactics. The objective of the amendments to the Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Act 2003 is to increase transparency in the relationship between park owners and home owners and strengthen consumer protections to provide more security and confidence to home owners. Increasing transparency in the relationships between park owners, staff and home owners will be achieved through improved precontractual disclosure processes and will provide clear, enforceable behaviour and management standards for park owners and home owners. It will also provide a process for in-park dispute resolution before matters are escalated to QCAT.

Consumer protections will be strengthened by providing more security and confidence to home owners by limiting rent increases under the site agreement to one per year and to increase the transparency of market rent review calculations. These amendments will address concerns for home owners who may have entered site agreements without fully understanding their rights and obligations and provide improved precontractual disclosure processes to introduce a two-stage process prior to the final execution of the site agreement. This will mean that disclosure of the home owner information document and site agreement is made progressively and precontractual disclosure documents will contain strong recommendations to seek legal advice. The department will also produce fact sheets and a series of videos to help people understand what is involved in buying into a residential park.

We must ensure that our Queensland seniors can enjoy peace of mind in their retirement years by giving them stringent consumer protections that they need and deserve. Our seniors and retirees have given so much to Queensland over their working lives. It is only fair and proper that they and their families should be able to retire with peace of mind and security. The amendments to the Retirement

Villages Act 1999 will increase transparency in the relationships between operators and residents and provide greater security and confidence to residents and provide protections against potential financial exploitation.

Many of the amendments also address residents' and consumer advocates' concerns raised recently in the media and with government across Australia about issues in the retirement village industry, and these include improved precontractual disclosure to ensure prospective residents understand the costs of entering, living in and leaving the village; mandatory payment of exit entitlements 18 months after the resident leaves the village, except in cases of operator hardship; enforceable behaviour standards; and the introduction of standard form contracts and improved financial transparency. These reforms will bring peace of mind to not only residents but also their families. Indeed, these amendments are important to each and every one of us. We have family, friends and constituents who will all benefit from these sensible reforms.

I would like to thank everyone who lodged a submission and those who attended our public hearing. I thank the chairman, the member for Kallangur; the secretariat; and my fellow committee members. This legislation is yet again another example of the Palaszczuk government delivering important reforms that will ensure that Queenslanders—seniors, families and tenants—can enjoy peace of mind either in their retirement or in their tenancy by giving stringent consumer protections that we all need and deserve. I commend the bill to the House.