




Speech By  
**Amanda Camm**

**MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

**HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms CAMM** (Whitsunday—LNP) (2.49 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This legislation is important. It will impact a large proportion of our communities, whether that be electorate by electorate or more broadly across the state, with regard to those who rent property and those who own rental properties. In the Northern Beaches of Mackay, which sits in the southern part of the Whitsunday electorate where I live, one in six Mackay region residents resides there. It has the highest proportion of residents in the Mackay local government area and 39.5 per cent of the dwellings are rental properties. It is home to a large proportion of the mining sector's drive-in drive-out workforce. The area has one of the highest suburban rental localities across the region compared to the Mackay city area of 31.5 per cent, so I know that the changes in this bill will have a direct impact on my local community.

In the northern part of the electorate in Cannonvale and the Whitsundays we have seen a shift in population and demographic and a significant increase due to the incredible lifestyle that people can achieve and experience in the Whitsundays and also the attractive remote working options as an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen a significant increase in population growth, and in that part of the community that means that a significant number of properties that were rental properties have now transitioned to owner-occupier properties. That is putting significant pressure on the rental property market in that we have seen a significant decrease in availability which is causing significant impacts in my local community when it comes to affordable housing and also being able to even access a rental property.

Today on realestate.com.au in the Cannonvale and Airlie Beach area there are only 23 properties for rent and in Mackay and the Northern Beaches of Mackay where there are 22,000 residents there are only 34 properties currently available for rent. Why that is important to provide context is that the obligations and responsibilities that both parties have—whether you are a landlord or whether you are a tenant—are that of a symbiotic nature. It is a relationship that needs to be managed carefully. It is also very important that any legislation that passes in this House ensures the rights of both parties are upheld and respected, and that is why the LNP will not be opposing this legislation.

There are parts of this legislation that we strongly support, and I want to talk more about the domestic violence amendments in this legislation. One in six women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner from the age of 15. Family and domestic violence is the primary reason that women and children seek specialist homelessness services and it is the leading cause of homelessness. Where women have had to return to the home where a perpetrator lives or where they are trapped because the cost is too great to escape a home, the measures and amendments in this bill will ensure that women and victims of domestic and family violence have choice and have options.

Housing is a critical factor in ensuring safety when escaping domestic violence and the cost implications, at times, can be a deterrent to sourcing a safe place. The Women's Legal Service of Queensland submission also outlined its support for these amendments. It is important to note and

highlight in the legislation and demonstrate my support for the way in which the assessment of domestic and family violence within these amendments can be granted—that is, a report by a specialist, whether it be a health practitioner, social worker, refuge or crisis worker, domestic violence support worker, caseworker or solicitor and even Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical services. There is a much broader and more specialised way in which evidence can be provided in representing victims of domestic and family violence, and that is incredibly important. It is important to ensure that the system is not abused yet provides safeguards for victims of domestic violence.

One issue that I will raise as a matter of clarification I seek from the minister is around sexual assault and whether that is a sexual assault in a domestic violence setting or if it is a standalone sexual assault. That was raised in the submission by the Cairns Sexual Assault Service. For the benefit of sexual assault services across the state in terms of an isolated incident of sexual assault that may occur in a rental property, whether that be a room-mate or whatever the situation may be, it is important that we seek clarification in the legislation around that because I know that that is something sexual assault advocates will be keen to understand.

I also raise concerns around the unintended consequences to what potentially could happen to victims of domestic and family violence with regard to the broader real estate sector, and the concerns that I raise are ones of just caution. It is very important that with this legislation and these amendments education across the real estate sector is undertaken in conjunction with these changes. As was reported by the committee, many across the sector were not even aware of the COVID-19 changes and therefore, in response, advocates had to work a little harder on behalf of domestic violence victims to be able to advocate when sometimes they cannot advocate for themselves.

It is also very important to highlight that a potential unintended consequence is potential discrimination of, in particular, women and single mothers with children when it comes to rental applications in the future knowing that the terms to be able to end a lease now are within seven days. Like many members in the House, I can declare that I do not own a rental property but have owned rental properties in the past. In terms of the way in which a landlord is represented by their agent, sometimes they may not know the full details in the way in which their agent represents them. Therefore, I wanted to raise this issue and put on the public record that this practice and the way in which the regulations are implemented should be monitored to ensure that natural justice occurs and that the intended provisions are delivering safety and security in the way that they are intended.

As outlined by the shadow minister and member for Everton, the LNP will not be opposing the housing legislation but in fact will be moving two amendments. I certainly support those amendments. It is important that the House considers these amendments given our rental vacancy rates across the entire state and the housing pressure that exists in social housing given the lack of community housing investment that we have seen and the need for flexibility. Therefore, we seek the support of the House with regard to the amendments, in particular around the elimination of periodic agreements. Currently those agreements provide flexibility to not only landlords but also tenants in some instances. It is important that we ensure that we look at things in a holistic manner whilst also understanding that there are many tools in the toolbox that may need to be utilised in a time when we are under enormous pressure in the housing market.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the committee. I went through a significant number of submissions and I thank the committee for the thoroughness in the way in which stakeholders' views have been articulated and have been developed in line with policy for domestic violence victims and survivors. This is a modern element to housing legislation and is something that women across the state will very much value. With that, I will be supporting the bill.