




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (2.09 pm): Queensland is in the midst of a housing crisis. This is not a warning. This is not something coming down the track. The housing crisis is a reality for thousands of Queenslanders right now. For thousands of Queensland families who rent it is a daily battle to find and secure affordable, safe and secure housing. Meanwhile, we have a growing divide between those who can afford to own property and those who cannot.

While we have people in this chamber who own two, three or four investment properties, we have Queensland families struggling to find affordable rental homes, sleeping in cars or tents or couch surfing with friends. While it is easier for investors to buy their fourth or fifth investment property, we have kids being pulled out of school because their lease has not been renewed and they have been priced out of their neighbourhoods. As Queensland has started to recover from COVID-19 we have seen our state's housing market increasingly squeezed as investors take advantage of low interest rates. We have heard hundreds of stories over the past few months from renting families on the struggling side of the wealth divide. A renter in Miller, a parent of young children who has had to move seven times in 12 years, wrote, 'The shortages are real, the wealth divide is growing exponentially and the fact is housing is the absolute foundation for everything.'

The minister acknowledged that more Queenslanders are renting, and renting for longer, and we need modern laws, but where are these modern laws? To be clear, the government bill does next to nothing to change this growing wealth divide. It does nothing to address the unequal power relationship between lessors and tenants. There are no changes to lessors' powers to increase rents; no-grounds evictions continue. Renters are still not allowed to make minor modifications. The power around pets sits firmly with property investors and landlords. The committee noted that the government bill will have negligible impact on rents, supply and affordability.

Yesterday I gave the government the opportunity to properly debate the measures that Queensland really needs: to debate this bill and my private member's bill in cognate, but that was refused. It is clear that the government lacks the courage to take on their real estate lobby mates. Off the back of this performance why should Queensland renters believe that stage 2 will include anything of substance? In choosing to do nothing about affordability or security of tenure Labor concedes to the power of the real estate lobby—an industry that cares little for 1.8 million Queensland renters. The member for Everton basically confirmed that this morning. The government concedes that they are completely disconnected from the lives of these 1.8 million Queenslanders. They concede that the profits of the property investors among their own ranks are more important than the thousands of Queensland families doing it tough.

If you think this bill strikes the right balance you have no idea what Queensland renters are going through, which is why I will be moving that the second reading debate be halted until MPs who are landlords who own investment properties recuse themselves from the debate. That is one in three

members in this chamber. It is unacceptable that MPs who directly benefit from skyrocketing rents and lax eviction laws are allowed to take part in this debate or to vote on this bill. I will be moving to amend the second reading motion. I move—

That the words 'now read a second time' be deleted and the following words be inserted:

'considered further once all members of parliament who are landlords excuse themselves from voting on this legislation due to a conflict of interest.'

As landlords, you have a clear conflict of interest when it comes to renters' rights—

Ms Richards: Are you a renter?

Dr MacMAHON: I am a renter. You benefit from retaining the status quo when renters have such little power, and it is because renters lack power in the relationship. Let's hear from some of the voices Labor does not want to hear in this chamber: the renters on the other side of this wealth divide. A renter in Cooper said—

After a storm, the walls of my room were damaged and covered in black mould. The owners agreed to fix it, but told me it would take a couple of weeks. I said fair enough, but I obviously would not be paying rent in the meantime and referred them to the relevant law on the RTA website. They told me if I didn't suck it up they'd kick us all out in a few weeks when the lease was up. I slept in the living room, paying full rent, for weeks.

The minister says they have removed no-grounds evictions, but they have simply given them a new power. In fact, landlords have an expanded suite of reasons to evict tenants without addressing this power differential. All renters' rights are undermined by the continuing fear of eviction without fair reason.

The inquiry into this bill and my private member's bill heard fanciful arguments about the nature of property. It was argued that ending no-grounds evictions would breach landlords' human rights. Thankfully, the Human Rights Commissioner put these arguments to bed. In balancing Queenslanders' rights to housing with the property rights of landlords, the Human Rights Commissioner cited the housing crisis and the rights of families and children as clear justification for limiting landlords' rights.

Originally, the government was going to allow tenants to make minor modifications to their homes. This would help parents of young children to install baby gates; elderly people could install safety aids; people with disability could install vital fixtures like grab rails, allowing them to live independently; and survivors of family violence could install safety equipment. A young mum with a baby son living in Algeester told us how, as he becomes more active, she is wary of seeking her landlord's permission to put in furniture anchors. She cannot enforce the rights she has because of the terrible consequences of being evicted. She asks, 'When will people have to stop worrying about being evicted from somewhere for simply wanting to be able to feel at home in a house?'

Sixty-five per cent of respondents to the Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation thought the government should make these changes. The changes even appeared in the government's 2019 regulatory impact statement, but in response to pressure from the real estate lobby they have mysteriously disappeared. Is the government here to represent renters or craft legislation for the REIQ? We are seeing the answer now.

I will also be moving a broader suite of amendments to this bill, including a genuine end to no-grounds evictions. My broader amendments will allow tenants to make minor modifications to their homes. There will be an end to rent bidding, which is still perfectly legal for landlords to accept, and a cap on rent increases to CPI to be applied no more than once every two years. A renter from the Mansfield electorate told us—

During an inspection my wife asked the agent what we could do to make our application look better. 'Offer rent up-front' was his answer. To get our current property she was encouraged to offer more weekly rent in our application.

My broader amendments will ensure tenants can keep pets unless the landlord successfully applies to QCAT for an order to the contrary. They will ensure that minimum housing standards cover topics like lighting and ventilation. They will prohibit discriminatory rental applications and require landlords to disclose better information about the property. They will extend notice periods for entry to the property, in some case doubling them from 24 to 48 hours. They will require landlords to forward water bills in a timely way, ensure tenants are not required to use third-party payment platforms and enhance the protections available to survivors of family violence. These longer amendments include critical rental law reforms that will transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders who are doing it tough. These reforms are critical to tackling the housing crisis.

But these reforms could also cut into the profits of property investor MPs, so before we debate them I am moving that every MP who owns two, three, four or more properties recuse themselves from the debate. Only then can we have a fair debate on rental law reform. Rents are skyrocketing, 50,000

people are waiting for social housing and there is a severe lack of affordable housing right across Queensland. Tonight families across Queensland will sleep in their cars and tents as a result of the growing rental crisis, but not everyone is struggling.

Over the last year there has been a surge in wealth for property owners as house prices across Australia have spiked. Currently, home owners and investors receive 90 per cent of the benefits from housing policies, such as negative gearing and capital gain tax concessions, while renters receive next to no benefits. There is a huge divide and a massive power imbalance between property investors and renters, and property investors stand to profit. When we have property investors making the laws, it is little surprise these laws are stacked against renters. Today I am giving the government a final chance to do something to tackle the housing crisis: get your property investor MPs to recuse themselves and let's debate real rental reform.