




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.24 pm): I rise to contribute to the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill. I wish to declare that my partner owns rental properties. Before I talk about the bill I want to read an email from a constituent who is struggling from the failure of this Labor government to address her housing needs—

My name is Anna Marie Ebsworth, I am a 44 year old Indigenous/Aboriginal mother of 8 children. I have my 5 youngest living here with me at Charleville.

My family and I have faced a number of challenging times since returning to Charleville and it has become necessary for my family and I to relocate to Brassall (Ipswich area) to access a number of services including medical, social, emotional, cultural, educational and overall wellbeing support.

I have had a housing transfer with the Department of Housing Toowoomba Office since 13 September 2019 assessed at Very High needs level.

I am not sure why it has taken this long for the transfer and I have been struggling.

...

I am writing this email in the hope that you can help me get clarity—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. Member, this bill does not relate to the Department of Housing. I am listening to your contribution carefully, but I am failing to see how this relates to the long title of the bill. I would ask you to come back to the long title.

Ms LEAHY: When we have an underinvestment in housing these are the situations that occur. People do wait for three years, like this lady, on the waitlist. In November 2019 the Queensland government released *A better renting future reform roadmap*. The government set out a two-stage reform pathway. The road map followed on in 2018 with the Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation. In the Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation radical aspects of rental reform were canvassed, including the right for tenants to make minor renovations to a property and the right for tenants to keep pets and push for long-term fixed leases. After a campaign run by the Real Estate Institute of Queensland the majority of the extreme reform proposals have been removed as part of the government's proposed reforms.

The LNP will support the bill as we believe there are positive reforms for retirement villages and those suffering from family and domestic violence. However, the LNP holds concerns on some aspects of the reform that are proposing amendments to two key issues—that is, periodic agreements and pets. Our amendments will ensure that periodic agreements can be reasonably ended by a lessor as is the case under the current tenancy laws, keeping flexibility and ensuring landlords and tenants have the benefit of this flexibility.

The amendments ensure that lessors are given the ultimate authority to refuse the right for a tenant to keep a pet without reason, as is the case under the current tenancy laws. I know the government will say that people with pets are important, and they are, however, many of the older buildings are not fit for purpose for animals: they do not have the appropriate facilities for animals and

animals have to share common areas such as lifts which can result in unintended consequences. Unfortunately, it is members of the body corporate who have to then deal with the complaints which result from those situations that occur from those unintended consequences.

I urge all members to support the LNP amendments. There needs to be a balance for both landlords and tenants, and the LNP amendments seek to find that balance. I fear without these amendments being supported many private landlords will withdraw their properties from the market and that will cause a further shrinkage of the private rental market. Regional communities cannot afford to have any further shrinkage. Some, like the Richmond Shire Council, have no rental properties available.

Regional communities need more housing available for rent and any disincentive will hamper the ability to increase the housing stock. The state government cannot afford any private rental shrinkage. They are already struggling to provide housing for public servants in regional areas. For instance, in the Barcoo shire, an instance arose in the town of Jundah when the town's director of nursing went on maternity leave and there was no accommodation for her replacement. In the Blackall-Tambo council area, the current accommodation for key workers in the local hospital and nursing homes is at capacity. There is a need for more housing for those workers. There is nowhere for those workers to rent. In the Balonne shire, state government employers and other employers struggle to find quality housing for staff. The demand for housing means that leases are filled within an hour. In the Paroo shire there is a shortage of government housing for government staff in Cunnamulla, forcing departments into the private rental market, which also is very tight.

In the Etheridge shire, government housing is falling into disrepair. I look forward to seeing how this bill will help and how the government will make sure that the minimum standards apply to government housing in the Etheridge shire. People in the Etheridge shire are greatly concerned about why that housing is falling into such disrepair. That needs to be addressed. In Mount Isa, the state government is selling off the housing stock and moving its staff into the private market. Similarly, public housing stock is being moved into the private market. State government employees struggle to find appropriate housing in Mount Isa.

I am fearful of the unintended consequences from this legislation, especially for many of the rural and regional communities. The housing situation is already tight. If the balance is tipped any further, in regional communities the outcome will be catastrophic. Unfortunately, good people in rural and regional communities are homeless now.

I commend the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils for their *Housing solutions study* report. I would like to know if the housing minister has read a copy of that document. If not, I am happy to provide her with a copy. Those 22 local governments from Karumba to Cunnamulla have invested in and worked jointly with the Regional Australia Institute to produce the *Housing solutions study*. It is a sobering read on the housing problems for rental and private accommodation. However, it also seeks to find solutions to the chronic and severe housing underinvestment across 60 per cent of that area of Queensland. Many people would like to have somewhere to rent but they cannot because of that underinvestment, which is not confined just to the private sector.

The report uncovers that there is a problem that the state government has with its own housing stock for employees in Western Queensland. The report identified that, across the 22 member councils, the shortfall in housing is 1,480 dwellings. On top of that, council supplied housing needs to increase by some 296 dwellings just to house council staff. A further 248 council owned dwellings are in need of major refurbishment. Over 1,500 homes are needed. Through the QuickStarts program, the state government is only planning to deliver 98 homes into this region. That is a long way short of the 1,500-plus dwellings that are needed.

The report canvasses three solutions in detail: the western Queensland Alliance of Councils to establish an unlisted residential property fund, the state government to renew its government employee housing and the federal government to introduce a regional new home guarantee. I look forward to working with the councils to bring about more housing because people have been offered jobs that they cannot take up because they cannot get rental accommodation in the communities. The jobs are there but there is no housing to rent. I look forward to working with the councils so that we can increase private ownership in this region. I call on the state Labor government to work with the councils. I call on the government to do the same and deliver homes to the regions.

The regions want renters. They want people. They have jobs. They will make sure that those people can stay in the community. They want families to come. However, they do not have access to housing so they do not get the renters, and we do not need any disincentive to investment in those areas. I call on the state Labor government to deliver homes to the regions. I have heard of people in Bundaberg who are homeless. They are good people and great renters. They never thought that they would be homeless, but now they find that they are because of the shortage and the underinvestment in housing in this state.