




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.18 pm): I rise to address the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and to support those amendments foreshadowed by the shadow minister for housing and public works. By way of background, the genesis for this legislation came about following a 2018 consultation process by the state government to identify priority issues for housing and rental reform. In 2019, the Palaszczuk state Labor government released its so-called *A better renting future reform roadmap* in response to the previous year's consultation process. As a part of this road map, the Palaszczuk state Labor government chose a two-stage process to enact changes to renting and housing legislation.

Accordingly, the legislation currently before the House will be making amendments to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008, the Retirement Villages Act 1999, the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Regulation 2009 and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020.

There are undoubtedly major and substantial reforms that are proposed in this legislation which will have significant impacts upon both renters and lessors. Indeed, the passing of this legislation will deliver a fundamental shift and reframing of the relationship and interaction between renters and lessors. While there is plenty of goodwill and positive intention that these changes will lead to constructive and encouraging reforms, as I have said previously, you simply cannot legislate for goodwill alone.

As addressed by my colleagues and the shadow minister for housing and public works, this legislation proposes considerable and consequential reforms including how a tenancy can be ended, including specific grounds by which a tenancy can end. Also, there are aspects which will introduce a new process to enable tenants experiencing domestic and family violence the ability to terminate their tenancy promptly. This is a welcome step and one that is certainly overdue.

As an elected representative I have met with and assisted constituents and community groups who have shared with me difficulties with rental accommodation following domestic and/or family violence situations. The ability, therefore, to leave quickly, with end-of-tenancy liability for only seven days, is a positive step forward. I heard the contribution of the member for Stafford in relation to electorate staff. I would say that all members of the House are dealing with those complex and difficult circumstances. We certainly acknowledge their contributions when they have to talk to people who are fleeing very complex and difficult family and domestic violence situations. I think it is important that we acknowledge them. I join with the member for Stafford in his acknowledgement of all electorate office staff.

I would also like to acknowledge our community service providers, particularly those providing services with respect to homelessness and those that assist with domestic and family violence. When I was the shadow minister for communities, disabilities and seniors in the last parliament, I met with many of those service providers and saw the amazing work they do there. I know that the member for Surfers Paradise, given that he currently holds that shadow minister role, is also meeting with them and hearing about their work right across Queensland.

I would also like to take the opportunity during my contribution to note that there will be minimum housing standards prescribed with respect to safety, security and reasonable functionality. As a part of the legislation it is envisaged that greater compliance will be encouraged, with further clarity given around repair and maintenance obligations and legislative enforcement.

With respect to home safety, I would also like to mention that I recently met with local Moggill electorate constituent Mr Clem Capdevila of Clems Electrical. Mr Capdevila has been an advocate for greater electrical safety, especially in existing built premises, and the need for greater electrical safety protection and education for all tenants, as well as home owners, landlords, apprentices and electricians, to mitigate and eliminate the risks of electric shocks and other adverse events in housing environments. As a result of advocacy and public campaigning, the Queensland government produced a landlords webinar. This demonstrates that positive outcomes can follow when the Palaszczuk state Labor government listens to those on the front line and acts in the interests of all Queenslanders.

Turning to other reforms in this legislation, perhaps the most well known aspect of the bill before us relates to those amendments with respect to the keeping of pets. These amendments will require that a lessor can only refuse a pet request from a tenant on prescribed reasonable grounds and which cannot be rectified by reasonable conditions. We all know that pets are important. They can certainly help with people's mental health and wellbeing in terms of companionship. There also need to be reasonable circumstances in terms of how they are kept within particular forms of housing.

In reality, these reforms will remove a lessor's right to refuse a tenant to keep a pet on the lessor's property without reason. This will have significant ramifications for what it means to individual property rights and the rights of lessors. It is for this reason that the Liberal National Party will be moving the foreshadowed amendment to 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 current tenancy laws.

There is no doubt that reforms aimed at the rental sector and the interactions between renters and lessors are an incredibly complex exercise. Given the current state of the renting and housing market, there is perhaps no better time for these changes to be debated here in the Queensland parliament. Unfortunately, Queenslanders know all too well that a lack of housing investment has been compounded by poor planning and foresight by the Palaszczuk state Labor government and, in fact, that a less than optimal approach by the state government has contributed to a demand and affordability crisis here in Queensland.

Indeed, when it comes to the approval of new dwellings in Queensland, residential building approvals have decreased across the state by close to 40 per cent since 2014-15. It is therefore critical that efforts aimed at renters and lessors must also be matched by a renewed effort from the Palaszczuk state Labor government to increase housing stock for freehold, affordable and social housing. With that in mind, given that there is such a tight rental market and growing cohort of both renters and lessors in Queensland, what must ultimately be recognised in this debate is the importance of understanding both rights and responsibilities and the need for the Palaszczuk state Labor government to achieve an appropriate balance in the interests of renters and lessors alike.

Tenants should have rights and opportunities that are aligned with a modern society; however, this must be matched, in respect, with an equal obligation of responsibilities to the lessor and ultimately the property owner. Equally, this applies to lessors and property owners, who have a duty, obligation and responsibility to their renters which must be matched by reasonable rights. On this point, whilst improvements have been made throughout this legislation, there is still more than can be done, which is why the Liberal National Party is proposing key amendments in order to ensure a greater balance can be achieved. I would certainly encourage all members to give their due consideration to these amendments.

Finally, all renters and tenants should be able to live in safe housing. Many reforms in this legislation will achieve this outcome; however, all members in the Queensland parliament must accept that the interests of landlords and small investors must also be considered. A balance must always be achieved when it comes to legislation here in Queensland.