




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (3.13 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill before us today. I say at the start that I do not think we need to declare if we are renters or own properties, although it is interesting to answer the call about what we are. In answer to the call from the member for South Brisbane, I can say that I have been a renter, I have been a property owner and I have been a real estate agent, but do not hold that against me. To answer the call from the member for Scenic Rim, I am not a communist. I do not know if there are any other declarations to be made. I know I have disappointed some here—

Mr Healy interjected.

Mr WHITING: I would have been the first communist real estate agent in Queensland! I note that the member for Ninderry criticised us on these housing issues, but he did not say a word about the role of the federal government. There was not a word about their policy settings and specifically about them walking away from the National Rental Affordability Scheme agreements. NRAS keeps rents down for thousands of people within our communities yet the Morrison government is walking away from that scheme. If they want to do anything about housing affordability, they should come back to the table on NRAS.

I believe the bill will better protect tenants, as the minister has spoken about. At this time it is very important that we do everything we can because, as we know, many Queensland tenants are vulnerable due to a lack of housing stock. I talked to the owner of a local agency whom I know. She said that people on her rent roll are being approached by competing agents who are saying, 'We can get you an extra \$70 to \$100 a week in rent if you come over to us.' A lot of mum-and-dad investors will say, 'No, that's not the right thing to do. We need to make sure that we're being fair.' Those are the kinds of pressures that we are seeing. To add to that, a lot of investors are selling their houses and moving back into their rental properties. All of those things are leading to a situation where the vacancy rate in and around Brisbane is generally sitting between one and two per cent and in some areas it is below one per cent, which means there is virtually no available housing stock. We know potential tenants will offer incredible prices or months of rent in advance just to get a roof over their heads.

What I am outlining is the great vulnerability that emphasises the need for this bill. Let us be honest: there has been vulnerability in the market for a long time and a lot of us will remember what it was like. I rented when I was at uni. We were always very aware that we could be evicted at the drop of a hat. We all knew that you lost the house if you complained, even if the floor was coming up or the tiles in the bathroom were loose. At one place we had a fig tree invading our bathroom like a slow-moving triffid. It stayed there for years while we were there.

I support the bill's introduction of minimum standards for a lease. That is very important. We should not underestimate the importance of having minimum standards in a lease. The premise must reach a basic standard where it has to be weatherproof and structurally sound; have sound fittings and fixtures; does not present a health hazard; is free of vermin, damp and mould; and has adequate hot and cold water. For those who have endured seriously substandard accommodation, this is a real

blessing. Perhaps when I was younger the quality of accommodation did not annoy me that much. However, if I was a single mother raising my kids in substandard conditions, in this market I may have some concerns about speaking out. That is why the protections in the bill from retaliatory eviction are so very welcome. It is important that we have those extra protections if tenants are to speak up about their new rights.

Another welcome protection in the bill stops property owners from ending a lease without-grounds. Owners will only be able to end a lease on specified grounds, including when the owner wants to occupy the property to sell or redevelop it or if it is at the end of a fixed-term tenancy.

Another important aspect of the bill is the protection it will give to the mum-and-dad investors about whom I spoke earlier. For many of them, this is their biggest investment apart from their own homes. It is a form of superannuation. People are using this investment to plan for their retirement. As we have heard, by investing in houses those people are playing a crucial role in our society. They contribute a massive amount of the housing stock that houses so many Queenslanders.

From what I have seen when liaising with many of these mum-and-dad investors, they are doing it because they want to give ordinary families a go. They want to make sure that they have something so that another family can have safe and secure housing. I applaud that and I think it is important that we note that the role of these investors is such an important part of our housing mix. With these reforms we can give them certainty around how tenancies can be ended. We can give them certainty over what level of investment they need to make in their property to make it safe.

I also want to point out that it is a great reform to have the option for a person experiencing domestic or family violence to leave the lease with seven days notice and their liability for those costs to be capped at the seven-day period as well.

I want to say that this bill is really important. It has been a long time coming. It really does deliver the balance that we need in this sector, and that is very welcomed. I want to point out it ties in so well with our \$2.9 billion investment in housing for Queenslanders. As we have heard, this is an investment which will be the biggest since World War II. I am especially proud of what we will be delivering in years to come in this sector. As we know, this area is a real challenge for so many Queenslanders, so many people in our electorates, but I want to point out that only Labor can deliver this reform and it is only Labor that can truly rise to meet this challenge in our society.