




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (4.34 pm): While the LNP is not opposing this bill, as the member for Gregory I must say for Western Queenslanders entertaining this bill at this time is like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, because Western Queensland is facing a housing crisis. Other members have spoken of the tight rental markets in Queensland generally. In Western Queensland the rental markets are so tight they are teetering on the edge of non-existence. Removing landlords' rights might just see them snuff out altogether. If members do not believe me, consider this: the Labor government, via the Queensland Department of Health, recently gazumped a young couple in Longreach in order to secure their rental house for a government employee. The young couple had their private rental lease terminated and had to vacate the home. They were paying around \$400 per week. The Queensland government offered \$680 per week. Score for the Queensland government; homelessness for the young couple!

To be listening to the noble nonsense about housing rights being sprouted by Labor and Greens MPs is just an insult to Western Queenslanders. More nonsense from the Labor government is that it never sells public assets. In Western Queensland it has sold so many houses. The private rental markets are so small in Western Queensland that it has become imperative that both the state and federal governments act with the utmost care and responsibility in terms of how their policies and actions will impact the private market.

The state government's employee housing requirements, combined with its social housing requirements, easily match or even outstrip the number of houses available through the private rental market. Neglect of this housing responsibility is not only leading to a great inequality of housing standards for government employees in the west; but also creating housing shortages for private employers and employees who are needed in transport, tourism and agricultural production, just to name a few.

As for social housing, it desperately needs both upgrading and expansion. For example, most social housing in the west has the old evaporative air conditioner. There are two drawbacks to this: firstly, they are located on the roof and it is so dangerous to access for cleaning and servicing and, secondly, they require a constant supply of clean water in order to function. Many, if not most, western communities are reliant on artesian water with a high mineral content, so the air conditioners constantly break down. The residents are then left waiting until QBuild outreach visits are scheduled. Too bad if it is right through the hot months where the days are in the high 40s. I recently made representations for constituents in Boulia that it would be far more sensible to install the more electric, refrigerative air conditioners for their comfort and health. They would be more reliable, easier to keep clean and they would not require the scarce water to run. The response was that the repair of the broken and old evaporative systems had been added to QBuild's Mount Isa to-do list when it gets around to Boulia.

The Western Queensland Alliance of Councils recently released the region's first region-wide housing market study covering 22 council areas in Western Queensland. It revealed that an area spanning 60 per cent of Queensland's land mass is short nearly 1,500 houses. As the InQueensland

news website reported, this housing shortage is an underlying cause of community corrosion and economic stagnation. The housing shortage is a major reason employers cannot recruit new staff. In good news for outback Queensland, COVID restrictions have seen more tourism out there in 2020 and 2021, but where can we house these employees to work in our hotels, our motels, our new glamping and ecoresorts? Where can we put the staff required to operate our expanded museums, galleries and other attractions?

I am not sure if the Treasurer is shrugging his shoulders at the moment and saying that he is giving stimulus to new home buildings as part of Unite and Recover from COVID, but the truth is harsher than that. At a time of a huge shortage of both materials and labour in the building industry, Western Queensland is at the end of the line on both categories and needs focused and active help. The per capita level of investment into housing in Western Queensland is less than one-fifth of what occurs in Greater Brisbane. I just want to underscore that this is not a total figure with differences in population creating an exaggerated deficit; this is the per capita figure. Again, this is the per capita figure. Per Queensland, if you like, Western Queensland receives less than a fifth of the money directed into housing down here in Greater Brisbane. In dollar terms, over the three years to June 2020, the average value of approved residential building work, be that a new house or housing renovation, was \$2,675 in Greater Brisbane and in the 22 western LGAs it averaged a measly \$320.

We have a chronic shortage of housing due to a shortfall that can only be described as drastic. Our existing housing desperately needs investment to bring it up to standard. I urge the Labor government to look at small home renovation packages for Western Queensland to lift the standards of our existing housing stock before it deteriorates further. There are many seniors in Western Queensland shires living in older housing stock who desperately need a hand to fix the roof or repaint the walls. Without that help eventually the disrepair of the home may mean that they can no longer continue to live independently. But where do they go then? The options are few.

I implore the Labor government to set funds aside to rebuild government employee housing stocks as new builds. This would not only help us recruit and retain our doctors, nurses, police, ambulance, teachers and our departmental employees across roads, agriculture, land and resources, but also free up rental housing to remove the current choke on private workforces. Similarly, I beg the government to increase and improve its social housing stock. These are the homes of many of our disadvantaged. The hot, substandard housing they endure is not good for the health of residents, but it is their only option. These residents simply cannot afford to play in the tiny private rental market, especially not when the state government is competing for that limited housing stock.

Given Western Queensland's dire infrastructure shortfall, we also need Western Queenslanders to be incentivised to consider investing in a rental house in their home town, be it a rescued and renovated house or a new build. Every Western Queensland should feel insulted by this bill which will actually create disincentives for western residents to take up the provision of private rentals in their own communities.

I have my eye on the clock and I do want to move on to the retirement villages reforms, but first I want to highlight that in prescribing the tenants' rights in the way it does the bill removes the capacity for landlords and tenants to negotiate. Looking at the provision relating to tenants' rights to have pets, I predict many landlords will remove all the fencing at their rental houses rather than be coerced in this way. This is very sad. The bill not only removes lessors' property rights, it shuts the door on the possible human negotiation and interaction. Like the REIQ, I also have a big issue with the concept of deemed consent. The bill sets a two-week deadline between the tenant's request and the landlord's refusal.

Our housing situation in Western Queensland will only be worsened by this bill, as it has been made worse by the government's housing policies across employee housing, social housing, seniors housing and disability housing. I note the bill makes a number of positive changes, in particular in relation to domestic violence issues. I genuinely welcome this as the housing crisis in Western Queensland disproportionately affects the vulnerable, which includes victims of domestic violence. I also welcome the amendments to the Retirement Villages Act 1999 and I hope this may help in creating solutions to the lack of retirement options in outback Queensland. I take the opportunity of urging the minister to review and amend the Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Act 2003. I have previously made representations to the government on this issue. Thousands of Queenslanders recently signed a petition about the problems with this act.

The shortage of housing is a real issue for Western Queensland. When government employees and those with government subsidies compete in the private rental market, it is hard to get people to come and live in Western Queensland. I ask that the state government invest in Western Queensland by building new houses for departmental employees—for police officers, teachers and ambulance officers. It will not only help the rental market in places like Longreach and Winton but also stimulate

the economy in Western Queensland. It will allow some of those rental houses to be freed up, which we so desperately need. I ask the government to put some real effort into fixing the housing situation in Western Queensland. My colleague from Warrego has similar situations in her electorate. It is the same in many regional areas.