




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 13 October 2021

HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (2.00 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. In a climate where equity is being lost due to increased pressure on the housing market, this is an important piece of legislation. The Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 regulates the residential rental market in Queensland and sets out the rights and obligations of renters and property owners in their tenancy arrangements.

On 24 April 2020, the Queensland government made the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020 to implement temporary regulatory measures to support the residential rental sector manage COVID-19 pandemic impacts on their tenancy arrangements, including protections for renters experiencing domestic and family violence. From 30 September 2020, the transition back to normal tenancy arrangements commenced with the eviction moratorium and measures implemented to support it coming to an end. Some important measures continue to 30 April 2022, including domestic and family violence protections, limited reletting costs for eligible renters and protection for renters against being listed in a tenancy database for COVID-19 rent arrears.

This bill is informed by the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027, which is a 10-year framework driving key reforms and targeted investment across the housing continuum to ensure Queenslanders have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. The Housing Strategy aims to ensure confidence in housing markets, improve protections and certainty for consumers and industry by reforming and modernising the housing legislation framework.

The Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2017-2020 committed to regulatory reforms to improve consumer protections for all Queenslanders accessing housing in the rental market and provide greater certainty for industry. The Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 reaffirms the Queensland government's commitment to deliver rental law reform, including minimum housing standards, that better protects renters and property owners, and improves stability in Queensland's rental market, which we all know is very volatile at present.

The Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 delivers key Housing Strategy objectives including to review and modernise rental laws; ensure vulnerable community members are supported to sustain tenancies to facilitate their social, economic and cultural participation; and support a fair and responsive housing system that enhances the safety and dignity of all Queenslanders.

I recognise the role of the Community Support and Services Committee, of which I am a member, and my comrades on that committee.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SKELTON: Of course. I acknowledge the work of the chair, the member for Mansfield, the secretariat and their hard work, Hansard, the departments and of course Minister Enoch—and what a comprehensive opening statement she made! Unfortunately, some members on the other side were not listening. I would also like to thank the thousands of individuals and representative bodies who

contributed to the rental reform process either through the Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation program, providing feedback to the consultation regulatory impact statement or by making submissions to the committee.

The committee took into consideration almost 900 separate submissions including those from Tenants Queensland, Q Shelter, the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition, the Queensland Law Society, REIQ, the Urban Development Institute of Australia Queensland and the Property Council of Australia. There are so many groups that I cannot mention them all. I am proud to be a part of the Palaszczuk Labor government delivering on its commitment to make renting fairer for the 1.8 million Queenslanders who rent in this state. I am one of them and consider myself fortunate to have a good relationship with my landlord.

These new laws will ensure all Queensland rental premises meet minimum quality standards, ensuring homes are weatherproof and structurally sound; fixtures and fittings are in good repair; locks are appropriately fitted to all external doors and windows; premises are free of damp, mould or vermin—unless you have the LNP organiser living two doors down; and the tenant's privacy is adequately provided for.

The bill provides clear approved grounds for how a tenancy can be terminated. For a lessor, this can include: end of the agreed term under a fixed-term lease, significant repair or renovation needing to occur, sale of property and owner occupation.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

Mr SKELTON: I take that interjection from the member for Buderim, but it appears he is mumbling. For a tenant, this can include property not being in good repair and not complying with minimum standards, or the lessor provided false or misleading information about the lease or property.

Mr Mickelberg: I'm surprised you can read.

Mr SKELTON: I take that interjection from the member for Buderim. I had the benefit of a great state school education, so I can read. Most importantly, this bill removes the ability for lessors to issue a notice to leave without-grounds, providing tenants with increased certainty and stability in a time of increased housing volatility.

The bill makes it easier for tenants to keep a pet, requiring a lessor to have reasonable grounds to refuse and respond in writing to any request within 14 days. The lessor will not be able to charge a pet bond or increase the rent in response to a request to keep a pet, ensuring renters with pets are on the same level playing field as those without pets.

This provision for the keeping of pets recognises the very real need for people in our community to have a place to call home. There are so many who are living alone or coping with illness. It is a fact that animals are therapeutic. It is also a fact that, for young families, pet ownership teaches children responsibility and care. It is long overdue in this country where pets mean so much that people now have a right to keep them in a rental property.

Also, the bill gives the landlord rights to refuse if the pets are unsuitable for the property—obviously no horses in flats and that type of thing.

Mr King: No ponies in flats.

Mr SKELTON: Yes. It opens a constructive dialogue between both parties that aims to protect the rights of both.

An honourable member: Small horses.

Mr SKELTON: There are mini horses. I take that interjection from the member.

Considerations have been made within the bill for those Queenslanders experiencing domestic and family violence while living in a rental property, making permanent the temporary provisions included in the COVID-19 regulations to enable those experiencing DFV to end their tenancies with seven days notice, with costs capped to that period, more easily accessing their bond refund without notifying other parties and ensuring that their information is handled confidentially. All parties agree to that. I think that is very important. This is a very important protection for people who are most in need from a compassionate government that is looking after vulnerable Queenslanders.

There are many more amendments that enhance the bill that it replaces. It is a significant piece of work. Like the other tenants in this state, I am glad of the changes and feel easier in knowing my rights as well as what is fair and reasonable to the people whose home I rent in. They are mum-and-dad investors like those we have heard about. It is my belief that most people whom this bill affects do the right thing.

This could have been contentious legislation—and some are trying to say that it is—if you are inclined to watch *A Current Affair* and see neglectful and destructive tenants or, in reverse, property owner slum lords. These types of incidents are rare and in the minority. This bill should go some way to allaying the fears and anxieties that are promoted by some in the media.

This is another great example of the Palaszczuk Labor government ‘getting things done’ for the people of Queensland. This legislation, alongside a record \$2.9 billion commitment to social housing, is indicative of a government turning every wheel to provide equitable housing and look after the welfare of all Queenslanders.

With this bill we have been come at by the far right and the extreme left. There were some interesting conversations before when a member in the chamber alluded to the fact that I might be a communist. If he is aware, Karl Marx famously said that property is theft, and we are aiming to protect those who own property—so go figure.

It is my view that the bill meets the aims it is designed to reach, the legislation is adequately balanced and considered, and the rights of lessors have not been unduly compromised, whilst inclusions have been made to accommodate tenants’ rights. I will concur with the deputy chair that until tested we will not know where we are at, but we have to make these changes. I commend this bill to the House.