




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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LAND TAX AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EMPTY HOMES LEVY) AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (12.50 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Land Tax Act 2010 and the Land Valuation Act 2010 for particular purposes. I table the bill, explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the Economics and Governance Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Land Tax and Other Legislation (Empty Homes Levy) Amendment Bill 2022 [1655](#).

Tabled paper: Land Tax and Other Legislation (Empty Homes Levy) Amendment Bill 2022, explanatory notes [1656](#).

Tabled paper: Land Tax and Other Legislation (Empty Homes Levy) Amendment Bill 2022, statement of compatibility with human rights [1657](#).

Across the state, rental availability is at an historic low, less than 0.4 per cent in some parts of the state. Every week we see more and more stories from families moving into caravans, cars and tents because they cannot find anywhere to live. Yet we know from census data that there are around 87,000 homes sitting empty long-term across the state while thousands of working Queenslanders are struggling to find an affordable place to live, paying hand over fist for a roof over their heads or raising their kids in caravans.

Today I am introducing a bill for an empty homes levy, a levy on residential properties that have been sitting empty, encouraging wealthy investors to rent out those empty properties—

Mr BROWN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order under sections 174 and 175. It is my understanding that appropriation bills must be accompanied by a message from the Governor before their introduction. This is similar to the big bank levy that the member introduced a couple of years ago or a year ago that was ruled out of order. I understand that this is in a similar vein and should also be ruled out of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Member for Capalaba, I have sought advice about your point of order. At this point in time, while the bill is still being introduced, it is not possible for that point of order to be considered. That is the advice that I have been provided with. Your point of order is noted, but the member for South Brisbane has the call as she is still introducing the bill to the parliament.

Dr MacMAHON: Today I am introducing a bill for an empty homes levy, a levy on residential property that has been sitting empty, encouraging wealthy investors to rent out those empty properties, boosting rental availability so that we can house those Queenslanders struggling to find a place to live and bring down the skyrocketing rents we are seeing across the state. To clarify, the goal of this bill is to gather no levy whatsoever but to bring over 20,000 homes back onto the rental market.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are 87,000 long-term vacant homes in Queensland sitting empty and unused while kids are growing up living in cars, workers are sleeping on couches and pensioners are moving into tents. There are tens of thousands of homes that wealthy investors would rather sit empty than house a Queensland family.

Governments across the world are tackling this head-on. Cities like Vancouver and Paris already have levies on vacant residential property. Places like Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Barcelona and Ireland are all implementing a range of policies to tackle the issue of long-term empty homes, from vacant property taxes to forcing the sale of empty properties. These policies have been a resounding success. In Vancouver, an empty homes levy on vacant residential properties has brought a quarter of that city's long-term vacant properties back into the rental market.

It is time that a levy on vacant homes in Queensland was implemented. We could see more than 21,000 homes that were once sitting empty house a family, house a working Queenslanders, or house someone's grandparents. An empty homes levy is a straightforward solution to boosting supply, but this government has been dragging its feet on actually addressing the housing crisis. We have an undersupply of social housing, we have uncontrolled cost-of-rent increases, yet there are tens of thousands of vacant homes and the wealthy real estate lobby is calling the shots.

I urge the government to listen to everyday Queenslanders, listen to housing advocates and even listen to their own Labor counterparts in the Brisbane City Council or in Victoria. The government's Labor counterparts in Victoria introduced a vacancy levy five years ago. In the last month, Labor councillors in the Brisbane City Council backed a Greens motion to increase rates on vacant properties.

I urge the Premier and the housing minister to take this bill and our rent-freeze bill, read them, put them forward at next week's housing summit and implement these straightforward measures to address the housing crisis.

The empty homes levy bill introduces a levy for any residential property which has been left vacant for more than six months of the year for no good reason. It will target tens of thousands of vacant properties that could be used for housing people right now. Any residential land that is left vacant without good reason will be subject to a levy equal to five per cent of the capital improved value of the land. To clarify, the goal is to gather zero dollars; rather to bring 20,000 homes back onto the rental market.

The levy will incentivise property investors to use these properties to house people, rather than speculate on property prices. The empty homes levy will also apply to empty land that is reasonably suitable for building new homes. This levy will discourage land banking during a housing crisis and encourage the development of housing in high-demand areas. Investors who do not want to pay the levy on empty land will have to put it to use or sell it. If investors want to avoid the levy, they need to house people or they will need to sell it to someone who will.

Again, this is not a novel idea. Across the world, governments are taking genuine action on high rents and low vacancy rates. We know that this works. Dublin and Singapore have restricted short-term accommodation like Airbnb. New York, Scotland and Berlin have frozen or capped rents. Spain, France and the Netherlands all have levies on vacant properties. The federal government has also implemented a vacancy tax for foreign owners. In Seoul and Washington DC, governments tax empty, undeveloped land in the inner-city, encouraging developers to build housing or sell it to someone who will. Cities around the world, from Washington DC to Seoul, are already doing this. Governments across the world are recognising that residential properties should be used to house people first and foremost and not used as a tool for property developers to get even richer. This bill looks to some of these global examples to create a more humane, sustainable and economically sensible housing system that actually provides people with homes.

It is worth noting that the average investor who already rents out their property will not be affected by this levy. Only those property investors who are wealthy enough to leave a house empty for no good reason in the middle of a housing crisis will be impacted by this levy. Only those property investors wealthy enough to sit on a block or a home for years and years waiting for a rezone or for property prices to rise, while mums and dads raise their kids in caravans, will be impacted by this levy.

We only need to listen to renters to hear what everyday Queenslanders are going through. The picture is grim. Record low vacancy rates, skyrocketing rents, bullying by real estate agents, no-grounds evictions—my office hears these stories every day, and I am sure every MP in this place is hearing these stories, too. These stories of desperation and suffering are happening in every electorate in Queensland. A renter in West End has said—

I am living in a one-bedroom apartment in West End. Trying to find a place to live was an atrocious experience. Every open inspection had at least 30 people, and on many occasions I overheard prospective tenants tell the property manager they are willing to pay more rent than advertised.

A tenant in Coorparoo said—

After the recent flooding in and around Brisbane, I was forced to find a new place to rent. Because so many people have been displaced at the same time the competition made finding affordable housing increasingly difficult, on top of which my then roommates and I had to split up to find somewhere suited to us and in our price ranges. I ended up going from paying \$190 to \$340 a week.

A person in Carindale writes—

I was personally forced to vacate a property two months ago due to a rent increase and haven't been able to find housing since. I've been applying for a total of four months for housing in Brisbane and have been unsuccessful for every single one. I am tired. I am overwhelmed. I cannot settle down or relax or be at home.

The empty homes levy will make it less lucrative for those wealthy few who would rather let a perfectly good home sit empty and wait for property prices to rise while people across our state are crying out for housing. We could implement this now and bring over 20,000 homes back into the rental market. The government that puts the interests of investors and their ludicrous property portfolios ahead of kids having a home to grow up in is a government that has lost touch.