



Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2022


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.26 pm): I place on the record that the estimates process went very well for us on the day. While I have five minutes, I will talk about the neighbourhood centre program and acknowledge the increased funding. It is very welcomed. With the minister in the House, I thank the minister for acknowledging the issues at Agnes Water. It was nice to talk to the minister. I saw the minister's social media post the other day. I thank her for that. It is important that we put on record that 6,000 people at Agnes Water are desperate to see a neighbourhood centre. Again, the extra funding is welcome. Our inquiry over the last year or so highlighted how important those particular services are.

In terms of child safety and youth justice, I recollect that the department is struggling to keep the investigation and assessments of child safety under control. According to departmental figures, in March there were 1,660 investigations not yet finalised. Of those, 522 had been outstanding for more than 100 days. Of course, we do know that the department's practice manual talks about statistics and about how the notification and assessment process needs to deal with that.

The doctor-shopping issue was raised. It was not denied by the department. We have to acknowledge that if foster carers do not get the answer they want it is not unusual for them to go and find a different outcome. We heard that only six young people have been fitted with GPS trackers since the legislation was enacted in April last year. We still have not seen the Bob Atkinson review of these reforms. I urge that document be made available for the benefit of all.

An issue that I want to talk about more—it is an issue right across the state and the nation; people around Bundaberg and Burnett in particular are crying out for help—is the housing crisis that continues to hit the region hard. The waiting lists are exploding. Of course, we know that 600 people in the Bundaberg and Burnett electorates are on a very big waiting list. It is something that a lot of members are experiencing in their communities.

I continue to urge the government to genuinely consider the findings of the Auditor-General's report into social housing and to take real action on this housing crisis. We have not built enough homes in Queensland to keep pace. In estimates I did ask about the capital investment in housing. We heard that there was \$42 million for the whole of Wide Bay. I point out that that is for Winfield, Eidsvold, Kingaroy, Gympie, Rainbow Beach, Hervey Bay and Maryborough. The director-general gave me a figure of 50 homes or thereabouts.

The fact remains that doing the same things repeatedly will not give us the result we want. We need to work together to ensure the housing needs of Queenslanders are met. I continue to call for the release of more freehold land. Affordable and social housing must become a priority for us all. Over the last seven years we have started to see an acknowledgement that community housing providers are a solution. We need to be more aggressive in engaging with private sector housing providers to leverage housing stock and ensure the most vulnerable in our community have a roof over their heads and have security.

We heard during the estimates process about the selling off of homes by the government. While I am not openly critically of that, those homes should have been repurposed by developers. That land should have been used. The issue for the government is that they have plenty of land. That is where the value is. We should have repurposed the homes and put some more fit-for-purpose homes on those blocks. The 67 empty blocks of land should have gone to a community housing provider to provide housing solutions right across the state.

The member for Cook raised the issue of housing for her Indigenous and Islander communities. My takeaway from the estimates process is that councils should be empowered to get on with the job of providing solutions for their own communities. It has been mentioned that there is \$100 million on the table for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This funding is needed to address housing needs in these regional communities. The capital housing program of the former federal government has been in place since 2019 to alleviate overcrowding in Indigenous communities. We know that the most disadvantaged people in our state often live in these remote communities. It is time to address these issues.

There was a question on notice around the Torres Cape Indigenous Council Alliance leaders calling for the issue of overcrowding to be addressed. I put on the record that we have heard that there does not look to be any capital funding from the department in Canberra. We had a meeting about that the other day. It is very disappointing to see that that is the case.

The Auditor-General's report on social housing exposed that there is no real modelling to identify the needs of Queenslanders into the future. We all need to work to ensure we know what we will need and what we are going to build. The most vulnerable in our community need to know that there will be a house for them on the horizon and their families will be safe and secure. We all have a role to play in doing that.