




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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PLANNING (INCLUSIONARY ZONING STRATEGY) AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (12.29 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Planning Act 2016 for particular purposes. I table the bill and the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the State Development and Regional Industries Committee to examine the bill.

Tabled paper: Planning (Inclusionary Zoning Strategy) Amendment Bill 2023 [509](#).

Tabled paper: Planning (Inclusionary Zoning Strategy) Amendment Bill 2023, explanatory notes [510](#).

Tabled paper: Planning (Inclusionary Zoning Strategy) Amendment Bill 2023, statement of compatibility with human rights [511](#).

Today I am pleased to introduce the Planning (Inclusionary Zoning Strategy) Amendment Bill 2023. Our inclusionary zoning bill is one more part of a broader Greens plan to get Queensland out of the housing crisis that Labor and the LNP have created. Combined with a real fall in wages, the housing crisis means that everyday working families can no longer keep a secure roof over their heads. On this government's watch, since 2018 the social housing register has nearly doubled and 46,000 of our most vulnerable people are living in insecure housing or are homeless while they wait for public housing. It is estimated that another 300,000 low-income Queenslanders are in critical housing stress due to record low rental availability and skyrocketing rent increases. Decades of Labor and the LNP protecting the profits of investors and developers has not led to increased supply and greater affordability like they said it would. It is time to stop treating housing like a commodity and start treating it like the essential public good that it is.

Queenslanders are in housing crisis. Decades of treating housing as a commodity rather than an essential public need, compounded with the pressures of the pandemic, have massively impacted Queensland's housing sector and have impacted everyday Queenslanders. According to a report published by Professor Paulsen from the University of New South Wales, 300,000 Queenslanders are in critical housing stress due to record low rental availability and unaffordable rents. Combined with a cost-of-living crisis and falling real wages, everyday working families are left to wonder if they will be able to keep a roof over their heads.

The government does not seem to have a plan to deal with this. Since 2015 the Palaszczuk Labor government has built just 1,395 new public housing dwellings. It has sold off so many social housing homes that there were nine less in 2022 than in 2015. For a government whose continual ineffective housing strategy has such a strong emphasis on public housing, that is damning. Meanwhile, over the past decade Labor and the LNP have pandered to wealthy property developers, approving expensive luxury apartment blocks that have done nothing to address affordability while developers have made millions off our communities. At the same time, the development of new social housing has colossally failed to keep up with the growing need in Queensland. It is time that we made property developers pay their fair share and actually deliver affordable housing by requiring developers to allocate 25 per cent of all new builds to public housing.

This bill sets out a plan for an inclusionary zoning strategy. Under this strategy, for all residential development projects and residential subdivision projects completed on or after 1 July 2024 at least 25 per cent of those dwellings are to be transferred to the government for public housing. A residential development project refers to development carried out by an entity other than the state and related to the construction of 10 or more dwellings. A 'residential subdivision project' is defined as any private development that subdivides one lot into 10 or more lots on which dwellings can be lawfully constructed. The strategy requires that public housing dwellings will be finished to the same standard and have the same features as other dwellings in the development, including size and floor area.

Unlike the government's complete lack of consultation, by its own admission, on housing amendments this week, we have consulted on this bill. I have spoken with people struggling to find a secure place to live. I have spoken to people on the social housing register, some of whom have been waiting for years. I have spoken to people worried about the future their kids are heading into. I have spoken with local community groups, peak bodies and NGOs, many of which are also calling for inclusionary zoning. In fact, inclusionary zoning is Queensland Labor policy. The Premier and the former housing minister committed to enacting inclusionary zoning in the housing strategy that they announced in 2017, six years ago. From what we have heard from many stakeholders who were in attendance, since October 2022 the government has consistently talked about inclusionary zoning at its quarterly round tables so where is the government's plan?

We know it is not just Queensland's most vulnerable who are struggling to find a secure place to live. Our essential workers are increasingly unable to find secure affordable homes close to their workplaces. Figures from the Everybody's Home campaign show that, for a hospitality worker to afford an average inner-city rent of \$572 a week, they would have to spend a shocking 81 per cent of their pay on housing. For an aged-care worker, it would be 77 per cent. Teachers and firefighters are spending an average of 58 per cent of their weekly income keeping a roof over their heads. Treating housing like a commodity, rampant rent increases and underinvestment in public housing is an attack on essential workers and everyone who relies on them.

In places such as Sweden not only those people who are most vulnerable but also teachers, nurses, construction workers and essential service workers are able to live securely in public housing. We could achieve the same here in Queensland with a simple inclusionary zoning strategy that would rapidly increase our stock of public housing. Public housing should be comfortable, accessible, well located and available to anyone who needs it. Inclusionary zoning would help ensure that we have affordable public homes in the inner city, meaning that workers, families and people with disability are not pushed further and further away from their families, communities, workplaces and support networks by requiring property developers to include a minimum amount of 25 per cent of public housing in all new developments. By requiring property developers to set aside one in four new apartments as public housing, we could provide good quality homes for thousands of Queenslanders, provide homes for the 46,000 people who are on the social housing register and build thriving, diverse and livable neighbourhoods.

In fact, there was once a time in this country when one in every seven new homes built was public housing. Today, after decades of government neglect, a mere 2.8 per cent of Queensland homes are public housing. The share of public and social housing in the housing market has been declining since the nineties when Labor and LNP governments began gutting public sector capacity. Since 2014, the Labor government has sold more than 2,000 public housing properties. The government says that selling off this stock is ostensibly about reinvesting that money into new public housing but, according to the Parliamentary Library, since 2015 there has been an increase in public housing of just 1,395 homes, which is well short of rising demand. At the same time, both Labor and the LNP have continued to support tax concessions, kickbacks and incentives for rich property investors and property developers. Property developers have benefited from low infrastructure charges and a planning system that puts the profits of developers ahead of local communities, building quality and livable neighbourhoods.

The real estate and property development lobby has long said that if we cut red tape, give them handout after handout and deregulate planning and zoning then we would see house prices and rents come down; that if we just let the private sector do its things then we would see housing become more affordable. In fact, we have seen the opposite. The private sector has zero interest in delivering affordable housing to desperate communities. Their only interest is profit. After decades of a planning system that puts the profits of property developers first, we are now in one of the worst housing crises since the Great Depression. Gutting public sector housing capacity and protecting the profits of investors and developers has failed. It is time to make developers pay their fair share and actually address the housing crisis with an inclusionary zoning strategy that would see 25 per cent of all new builds opened up as public housing.

Our inclusionary zoning strategy is just one of a suite of straightforward measures that the government could implement right now to address the housing crisis. Our empty homes levy would bring tens of thousands of empty homes and Airbnb short stays back into Queensland's long-term rental market, addressing issues of supply. Our plan for a two-year freeze on rent increases, followed by capping rent increases at two per cent every two years, would bring immediate relief to struggling mum-and-dad renters. That needs to be underpinned by meaningful tenancy reform, ensuring people have security in their homes. We have been pushing the government directly to build more public housing. Our federal Greens colleagues are pushing to amend Labor's housing bill and their useless strategy of gambling on the stock market to instead include \$25 billion in direct spending on public housing. Our inclusionary zoning strategy is just one more part of the solution. It would mean thousands more public homes for not only our most vulnerable but also ordinary working people, putting downward pressure on rental prices for the benefit of all renters.

Some 2.8 per cent of Queensland homes are public housing. When we include community and social housing, this brings us still to just 4.3 per cent. This is well below our international peers and the OECD average. In Denmark, social housing makes up 21 per cent of all housing stock. In Austria it is 24 per cent; 17 per cent in Sweden; 24 per cent in Scotland; and in the Netherlands it is 29 per cent. That is as much as seven times the amount of social and public housing than here in Queensland. These places do not have a crisis in housing to the scale that Queensland has, yet in Queensland we have thousands of people sleeping rough under bridges and overpasses in major cities. We have retail workers sleeping in their cars. We have a generation of children going to school hungry because their parents are struggling to afford rent.

Unlike these other countries, we do not have rent caps. We do not have a vacancy levy. We do not have the high levels of investment in public housing that we need or inclusionary zoning. These are really straightforward measures that could address the housing crisis—all the things the Greens have been asking for and proposing in bills. It is not rocket science. We know that these initiatives work because we see them working elsewhere.

Inclusionary zoning is not a radical idea. It is a common practice around the world including in places such as Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, metropolitan areas of the US, Spain and Italy—just to name a few. It has also been introduced by Labor governments here in Australia. The Housing Plan for South Australia, introduced by the Rann Labor government in 2005, requires 15 per cent of new dwellings in significant development projects to be affordable, with at least five per cent allocated to high-needs groups. In 2007, the ACT Stanhope Labor government introduced a policy requiring 20 per cent of all new estates to include affordable housing. Once again, inclusionary zoning is this government's own policy. We just need the government to get on it, with a robust inclusionary zoning strategy that acknowledges the extent of the crisis Queenslanders are facing.

The seriousness of this housing crisis cannot be understated. Shelter is a fundamental need to support all aspects of people's lives. Without a safe, comfortable and stable home, how can we expect Queenslanders to continue to be able to carry out basic, everyday activities, let alone support their families, work, study or contribute to their communities? Yet it seems that this is what this government expects and takes for granted. Every day Queenslanders wake up to rent increases, no-grounds evictions and ever-deteriorating living conditions. When the dreaded time comes to begin yet another search for a livable home, renters face the lowest vacancy rates ever and increasingly expensive rents.

One pensioner recently told me that she has been waiting for public housing for 18 years. This constituent lives with a number of health issues, putting even more pressure on her weekly budget as she balances paying for medication and medical support. Another constituent shared that, after 25 years of tenancy, their rent will be increased to an unaffordable amount, pushing them out of the community they know and love. There are countless stories like this. I am sure that every MP is hearing these stories and has people coming through their doors or emailing their inboxes. To see the problem, we only have to look around. I am seeing tents pop up in Musgrave Park and more people sleeping rough by the river. These people put a face to the statistics that tell us that the waiting list for public housing in Queensland has rapidly increased. In fact, the register increased by 78 per cent in the four years to 2022.

Inclusionary zoning is just one part of a comprehensive suite of housing policies the Greens have been pushing for to address this dire, desperate and urgent situation which is impacting people in my electorate and right across the state but which clearly has been forgotten by members of the government and the LNP in this chamber. This bill is born out of the experiences of renters—their stress, their heartache. It is the culmination of thousands of conversations at people's doors, in parks and in community halls. Will the government listen to Queenslanders or push on with weak policies that barely scratch the surface of the situation? Will it continue to bury its head in the sand and roll out the red carpet for property developers, or will it support housing policy that will actually effect change?

It seems that members of this government do not want solutions, because the reality is that they would rather protect the profits of their mates in the real estate and property development industry. This government does not represent renters, people sleeping rough or people struggling to pay their mortgages. This government represents property investors and developers, including the many property investors who are sitting in this room right now, all of whom are benefiting from a housing crisis and soaring rents, siphoning off working Queenslanders' wages to fund their own retirements.

Right now, countless former MPs from both sides of the chamber sit on the boards of banks and real estate corporations—the same ones that are then paying to have fancy lunches with politicians in this room. I remind people that Anna Bligh, former leader of the Queensland Labor Party and a former premier, is now the chief executive of the Australian Banking Association. In recent years the banking industry has managed to take huge government bailouts and then make extraordinary profits. This is not an industry that is here to look after everyday people.

The worse the housing market is for ordinary people, the better it is for the banks, developers and corporations that control our major parties. The longer this crisis continues, the more the landlords sitting in this very building can profit from their own investments and the more of them will end up with cushy jobs in lobby groups, like Anna Bligh. This government does not want Queenslanders to consider that the cause of the housing crisis lies with the LNP, the Labor Party, their wealthy donors and the property portfolios of their MPs and their mates in corporate boardrooms.

The solutions are simple. Those countries and cities that have implemented the policies that we have been suggesting—inclusionary zoning, a vacancy tax, putting a real cap on rent increases—are not seeing the kind of dire housing crisis we are seeing here. It does not seem that this government has a genuine interest in fixing a broken system that it has created, because it is acting in the interests of itself and its corporate mates.

Of course, this policy needs to be combined with direct investment in public housing construction and public sector construction capacity. While developers continue to make millions and the number of development approvals continues at a steady pace, the construction industry—the people doing the actual building—is under increasing pressure. We are seeing spiking costs for materials, supply chain issues, rising capital costs and rising costs of borrowing money. A housing sector that is driven solely by profit is vulnerable to these kinds of risks and, as a result, we are seeing an increasing number of construction firms fold. The government is in a much better position to manage and absorb these kinds of risks than the private sector.

In addition to ideas such as inclusionary zoning, the government needs to have a much stronger hand in controlling the construction and development industry for the sake of Queenslanders. Our bill gives the government a mandate to do that. It needs to be combined with direct investment in public housing construction and public sector construction capacity. At the federal level, the Greens are calling on the Labor government to directly invest \$2.5 billion in public housing construction to fill the gaps left by a failing private sector and to stabilise the construction industry. The federal Greens have been very clear that we are not going to support Labor's plan for a stock market gambling fund. Federal Labor's current Housing Australia Future Fund Bill will only see the housing crisis get worse. The existing future fund lost 1.2 per cent last year. This would have translated to a \$120 million loss if the housing future fund—

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I have been following your contribution quite carefully and have given you some degree of latitude, but you seem to be straying in many various directions that do not necessarily relate directly to the objectives of the bill or the long title of the bill you have introduced. I ask you to continue your contribution by focusing your remarks on the bill itself, which is the general convention when introducing a bill in a first reading speech.

Dr MacMAHON: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. The point I am making is that an inclusionary zoning bill needs to go hand in hand with other measures to address the housing crisis—direct investment in public housing at the scale that we need to address the rising number of people who are in housing stress. That is what our federal colleagues are doing right now.

Queensland is a wealthy state. We have the means to build beautiful, quality housing for everyone. The problem is not a lack of resources but an excess of profit and greed. Housing equality necessarily means addressing the unequal power that banks, developers and the very rich have over ordinary people. Ordinary people make up this state: First Nations people whose land this is and always will be; the workers who stack our shelves, who run our hospitals, who literally build homes; the people living alone or caring for loved ones. Everyone deserves a home and everyone could have one. It was not so long ago that both major parties built public housing for teachers, nurses, plumbers and painters—not just our most vulnerable but for ordinary workers and their families—but in a matter of decades we have reached the point where we cannot even house 46,000 of our most vulnerable.

It is not a mystery what needs to be done: build public housing, freeze rents, bolster funding for housing services, tax vacant properties and land, and introduce inclusionary zoning. This bill is a great start to ensure we get the public housing that people need.

First Reading

Dr MacMAHON (South Brisbane—Grn) (12.49 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to State Development and Regional Industries Committee

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee.