



Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**


**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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## **MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

### **Housing**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.36 pm): Queensland, as we all know, is in the midst of a housing and homelessness epidemic and this government is deliberately making it harder for people to get into social housing. There are around 200,000 households in housing stress and, according to the Community Housing Industry Association, that number will increase by almost 50 per cent by 2041. Queensland has historic low rental vacancy rates at the same time as more people than ever are relying on the private rental market, a market so weakly regulated that private landlords can exploit renters, drive up rents and kick them out with no good reason. We do not just need more houses that no-one can afford. We need affordable and social housing.

Under Labor's current plans things will only get worse. Over the next few years Queensland will lose almost 6,000 affordable homes from the scrapped NRAS scheme. That is equivalent to almost 10 per cent of all our social housing, but there is no comprehensive rescue plan to buy those houses for social housing. Meanwhile, this government's federal Labor colleagues plan to gamble public money on the stock market rather than just building new public homes, but that is the Labor way it seems. The state government has built just 4,000 units of social housing since 2014. During that same time they have sold more than 2,000 public housing properties into the private market. As far as any of us can tell, their Housing Investment Fund has not yet built a single home almost two years after its inception.

Because of this government, there is a shortfall of 31,000 social homes in Queensland, 46,000 people are on the social housing waitlist and it has almost doubled since 2018. But they have a neat solution to that pesky problem! Instead of housing people on the list, they will just prevent as many as they can getting onto that list in the first place. Over the last few years the government has quietly tightened the eligibility criteria for social housing to obscure the ballooning waitlist numbers. They have repeatedly denied it, but whistleblowers working in the housing department continue to contact me with clear evidence that the criteria have changed. Last year the Queensland Audit Office found that since 2019 the government has only accepted social housing applicants deemed as high risk, meaning countless Queenslanders, people in dire need of housing support, are falling through the cracks when just a few years ago they would have been eligible for social housing.

As well as meeting income thresholds and having a clear need to move, people now need to have multiple and complex wellbeing factors—like being homeless, having been evicted more than twice in the last three years or being unemployed long-term—before they can even register for social housing. This requirement did not exist prior to 2019. Last week the *Guardian* revealed that this tight set of criteria is compounded by the unusually low income thresholds the government sets for social housing eligibility. Limits on weekly gross income for a two-person household are lower in Queensland than in any other Australian state or territory with publicly available criteria, and they are lower by hundreds of dollars. This means that Queensland families like the Orlandos, whose story the *Guardian* reported last week, are being shut out from social housing.

Last year, Susanne and Richard Orlando, who is disabled, were evicted from their Gold Coast NRAS home which they shared with their autistic son, Wayde. They have struggled to find a rental in Queensland's hostile private market and have no income or assets other than Centrelink. They have been told that they are not eligible for social housing because the family earns more than the \$877 per week before-tax threshold. This is Queensland Labor's housing system working precisely as it is designed to. They would rather turn people away into homelessness than simply build more social housing. Q Shelter's Better Together framework, released last month, pointed out that the growth in social and affordable housing supply has not kept pace with demand in Queensland, not by a long shot. The 0.3 per cent annual growth is well below the 6½ to 7½ per cent growth that is required. People are sleeping in cars and tents while this government brunches with real estate lobbyists, making the crisis worse.

Let us be clear: real solutions to the housing crisis are bad for the real estate industry. Public housing and rent caps would make it harder for private property investors to charge extortionate rents. Real solutions are bad for the bottom line of Labor Party donors and the property portfolios of Labor ministers. That is why they do not want real solutions. Real solutions are what the thousands of Queenslanders in housing stress need. That is why the Greens will continue to fight for real solutions to increase the supply of social and affordable housing—real solutions like a rent freeze, a real cap on the amount of rent increases, an empty homes tax on vacant properties and Airbnb short-stays, inclusionary zoning and building more social homes.