




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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PLANNING (INCLUSIONARY ZONING STRATEGY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.51 pm): Wow! I am almost impressed at how impressed the member for Kawana is with himself. That is impressive.

I rise to support the bill introduced by my colleague, the member for South Brisbane, which would ensure the Queensland government enacts an inclusionary zoning strategy by 1 July this year. Under the inclusionary zoning strategy, developers would be required to hand over 25 per cent of all new multi-residential developments or newly subdivided lots to the state government for public housing. Importantly, the public housing stock would have to be of equal character and quality to the rest of the development because everyone deserves to live in high-quality housing in a wealthy state like Queensland. This is what a genuine response to the current housing crisis in Queensland looks like. In addition to freezing and then capping rent increases, taxing vacant properties and winding back federal tax concessions that incentivise property speculation and drive up prices, we need a mass build of public housing here in Queensland.

Last week, the latest Anglicare affordability snapshot confirmed that the rental crisis is the worst it has ever been. Queensland has historic low-vacancy rates and, at the same time, more people than ever are relying on the hugely inflated and insecure private rental market. Home ownership rates are steadily in decline, with more finance going to property investors than owner-occupiers. The ratio of housing prices to incomes has absolutely skyrocketed since the early 1990s when governments doubled-down on treating housing like a commodity rather than a basic necessity.

In the midst of a housing crisis, housing supply cannot and should not rely on property investors being able to return a profit. Throughout history in Australia and across the world, public housing has been used as a positive social investment to meet the population's housing needs, yet successive Labor and LNP governments have effectively privatised the provision of housing, outsourcing its delivery to the profit-driven private market. At the end of last year there were almost 44,000 people on the social housing waitlist in Queensland, and those are just the ones who made it onto the list. The Labor government tightened the eligibility criteria to squeeze people out and obscure just how drastically they are failing on social housing in this state. Based on Productivity Commission data, Labor has delivered only 1,845 new social homes since winning government in 2015. They sold off more than 2,000 to the private market in the same time frame. Their so-called Housing Investment Fund has not yet delivered a single home, as I understand it.

The number of people directly impacted by the housing crisis or who work on the front line supporting affected residents and made submissions on the bill is instructive. A disability support pensioner from Runcorn wrote—

As someone living in domestic violence I am unsafe and my life is at risk. I am on a wait list for public housing but I know housing will not be available to me before my current lease runs out. I will be homeless by the end of the year through no fault of my own.

One mother submitted—

I and my five kids are currently facing homelessness. We have been put on the waitlist for a house and told by housing that our car counts as a shelter.

A resident in Taringa, in my electorate, said—

I am currently living in a unit block with cracked walkways, water damage, and unrepaired electronics while my real estate agent is seeking a 10% increase in rent ... I do not believe any decent human can sit with a straight face and say that it is normal for housing to sit so far outside of reach for workers, and particularly younger workers.

Clearly, we need new approaches to increase the supply of social housing. That is why we are proposing an inclusionary zoning strategy.

So far Queensland Labor's approach to the housing crisis has been offering concessions to private developers who hold more and more power in this state—developers whose primary motive will always be profit. They are not philanthropists; they are for-profit businesses. The closest Labor has come to including public housing in new developments, such as we have proposed, is the vague suggestion in their housing plan that says they will pursue 'inclusionary planning' but, like so many of Labor's attempts to feign action on the housing crisis, the detail does not support the headline.

The government is considering relaxing planning restrictions as a trial for developers that set aside some dwellings for affordable housing—not public housing but affordable housing. They said they would aim for about 20 per cent affordable housing but here is the real kicker: 'affordable' means practically nothing. It is tied to a volatile, inflated housing market that will not improve unless we build more public housing. Unless developers are required to provide public housing, it is absolutely foolish to think that they will. Developers do not actually have any interest in doing anything that will bring housing costs down because the most important metric for them is and always will be profit. We know developers will not deliver housing because it is needed; they do it to make money.

Right now developers are sitting on a huge backlog of land zoned for housing. Last year across Queensland there were 100,000 residential lots that had been approved for housing but not yet completed, including 60,000 in the south-east. The founder and director of property developer Meriton said openly—

I am holding a lot more than I am selling at the moment, and as the value of property goes up the value of what I have kept rises. A tax on vacant land could help address this but, most importantly, it demonstrates that the overriding imperative for private developers will always be to maximise profit, and they have been raking it in for years. This bill is about getting back just a little bit for Queenslanders.

In a bunch of jurisdictions, including in Australia and internationally, they have adopted some form of inclusionary zoning where developers are required to set aside some units of social housing. As the member for South Brisbane said, the vast majority of submissions on the bill support mandatory inclusionary zoning to increase the supply of affordable housing. One social worker in Banyo wrote in their submission—

I work in a homelessness service for women and children, and we are forced to turn away women and children daily, who are living in cars, tents and unsafe situations ... Plans to decrease strain on the private rental market HAVE to include well-planned developments that include an increase in social housing.

By mandating 25 per cent public housing in new multi-residential developments or subdivisions we go some way towards providing a genuine alternative to the private rental market and one that will bring rental and house prices down. We would also create more diverse communities with a better mix of housing options instead of concentrating disadvantage in particular areas, as is all too common in the current social housing model. Public housing should be well located, well designed and available for people on low incomes to live alongside essential workers. Inclusionary zoning is a great way to achieve that.

Here is an example of how inclusionary zoning could look in my electorate. I have previously written to the housing minister suggesting that the state acquire the Toowong Central site where Woolworths used to be. Now it is sitting empty, destined to sit idle or at best perhaps be a car park while the private developer figures out what to do with it after ditching their previous plans to construct units. I think the government should acquire that site. They could work with council to deliver new public green space as well as public housing and community facilities that would act as a significant public asset for years to come in a highly densified and increasingly densifying suburb instead of leaving it for the developer to land bank and then profit from. Failing that, what if we require the developer to set aside a quarter of any new apartments as public homes? Students and other low-income people struggling to pay rising inner-west rents could have access to the shops, services, public transport network, schools and job opportunities available in Toowong.

They would be able to live in high-quality, beautiful homes just like their neighbours. The state government would benefit from rental payments. Access to affordable housing would put competitive pressure on surrounding investors to offer more reasonable rents. That is what this bill could do for Queenslanders. Public housing used to be built for ordinary working people and their families, not just an increasingly small group of the most vulnerable people in our society. Decades of underinvestment means that public housing now makes up less than 2.8 per cent of all housing and even those with the greatest need are unable to get a home.

Meanwhile, developers are cashing in on the housing crisis. Both developers and the major parties have been treating housing as a tool for profit, not a home for regular people. Housing should be treated as a fundamental human right. Queenslanders deserve better. We need to prioritise high-quality, affordable public housing over damaging property speculation and private developer profit. Developers are not going to deliver affordable homes out of the goodness of their heart. They just will not. We need to mandate a proportion of new homes be set aside for public housing if we want any chance of catching up with demand. I urge the House to support this bill, to support the Greens proposal for an inclusionary zoning strategy that mandates at least 25 per cent of new homes as public housing.