




Speech By
Hon. Samuel O'Connor
MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2026

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (SUPPLEMENTARY 2024-2025) BILL;
APPROPRIATION (SUPPLEMENTARY 2024-2025) BILL**

 **Hon. ST O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Youth) (5.58 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the housing and public works portion of this Appropriation (Supplementary 2024-25) Bill, which is an important piece of legislation that does something very necessary: it fills the gaps that Labor left behind in their last budget. For the benefit of the member for Greenslopes, our housing pipeline is now at over 6,000 social and community homes, and 4,200 of those alone have been contracted in the relatively short period that we have been in government. I am being generous by just counting the contracted ones. We should be counting all the ones that are under construction, given all the feedback we hear from those opposite about projects that apparently are not underway. However, contracted alone, since the Crisafulli government was elected, we are delivering over 4,000 social and community homes, or two-thirds of the pipeline. We will very happily compare that number of over 6,000 to the average of 509 that were delivered each year over the last decade of decline. We will compare those numbers any day of the week. It is part of our plan to increase our housing delivery to four times the number of homes per year that Labor delivered.

The update we have here shows that the Labor Party were very good at making announcements, but they were not very good at ensuring those announcements were actually funded or delivered. What we inherited was a whole series of shortfalls—big funding gaps that put a lot of pressure on frontline services, on housing and on the very Queenslanders who rely most on that support. This bill ensures those budget black holes left behind by Labor are fixed.

Within my portfolio, it delivers an additional \$120 million for homelessness services, \$114 million of which was to plug a really big hole left in Labor's Immediate Housing Response program. This was the hotel and motel crisis accommodation program. Without the funding that we provided, these services that support some of our most vulnerable Queenslanders would have been forced to close and we would have seen people out on the street. It really meant that on top of failing to deliver enough social homes—social housing grew at barely a third of the rate that our population grew over the last decade—Labor did not even properly manage the hotel and motel accommodation that they had people in in the meantime. If we had not provided this funding, those Queenslanders would not have had the support they needed.

The IHR program is there to provide urgent short-term crisis accommodation and help for people who genuinely have nowhere else to go. However, under Labor it was a complete mess. There were no rules around that program. There was no policy framework. We had numerous reports of existing social housing tenants who were abusing that program to have a free holiday. There was one case I remember where someone who lived a couple of hours inland in a social home had gone to the coast and told the people in the housing services that they were homeless, and they were given a taxpayer-funded hotel while their taxpayer-funded house sat empty. It was extraordinary!

In another case I remember, the individual was clever enough to call my electoral office to ask for the case to be looked into, and that alerted us to it. They claimed they were homeless, and when we looked into the details of the case we found that their mate had been housed in the hotel program in a location that had some great waves on the southern end of the Gold Coast. They said that their mate had got a free hotel room and the waves were really good, so they wanted to get one courtesy of the taxpayer as well. It was absolutely extraordinary!

Just over 12 months ago we sat down with the services which run the IHR program and looked at some of the parameters that a few of them had in place—there was no state policy in place—and we adapted that to make a policy that they all could get behind. We have seen some really good numbers. Before this, we were seeing numbers of hotel and motel operators who were pulling out of the program. Damage, of course, was out of control as there was no framework and there were no consequences for the small number of people who were doing the wrong thing. It meant that motel operators, particularly in regional Queensland, were pulling out of the program; we were losing a lot of them. So, we put a clear framework in place.

As I outlined in question time this morning, since September our housing teams have been working with our specialist homelessness services, and we have seen 649 households go out of that hotel and motel accommodation program and into long-term housing. That is our priority as a government. This funding was to step in to ensure the homelessness services could keep their doors open so that Queenslanders were not turned away in the housing crisis created by Labor.

This bill also delivers \$62.5 million for social housing maintenance—maintenance that under those opposite in far too many cases was allowed to deteriorate. There was a backlog that was allowed to grow year after year without proper funding being in place. They were constantly playing catch-up. This was not just about missed budgets; it was about a system that was no longer being properly managed. Labor made the decision to stop rent and tenancy eligibility checks over five years ago and to not restart them with the election coming up. They did not want to make that hard decision, but that meant that the housing fund was no longer being properly replenished to support that maintenance. There was less revenue coming in, less maintenance being done and public assets—people's homes—were being left to fall into disrepair. We are turning that around.

I want to commend QBuild for the efficiencies they are driving. They are ensuring every dollar counts. They are bringing a commonsense approach to how they are programming these jobs and they are batching them together, particularly for regional communities.

Our housing investment in this bill is about restoring the dignity that all public housing tenants should have and ensuring that people who live in the homes we manage have safe and well-maintained homes. Again, it really is about playing catch-up. We are dealing with the consequences of years of underinvestment and years of neglect and mismanagement.

We inherited a significant maintenance backlog and a funding shortfall in the housing fund which was frankly structurally broken, but we are restoring the proper checks and proper settings to make our housing system sustainable. That means reinstating those appropriate checks, which occurred on 1 July last year, rebuilding the funding base for the housing fund and systematically working through the backlog that was allowed to grow under those opposite.

We had a system where nearly half of our tenants had not had a rent or tenancy review in over five years. Our teams have now initiated 36,333 of those reviews to ensure our tenants are still eligible to be in the social homes they are living in and to ensure they are actually paying the correct rent. We even had examples of tenants who were paying too much rent because they had not been checked in years. So far, we have found well over 200 tenants who were living in households with incomes of over \$100,000 while other Queenslanders were sleeping rough on the streets. It is not right and that is why we had to change it.

These items we are funding in this update are not optional extras; they are the core responsibilities of any government, ensuring critical services are properly maintained and public assets are responsibly managed. Those opposite talk a lot about housing and homelessness, but when it came to their budgeting they did not do the hard work of making the numbers add up. We are. We are ensuring our homelessness services have the funding they need for the first time over multiple years. We have taken that funding out to 2028-29. We are ensuring public housing is maintained and that the backlog of works is better managed and will ultimately reduce over time, and we are ensuring that Queenslanders can have the confidence that their government will deliver, not just make announcements.