



Speech by

## RACHEL NOLAN

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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Hansard 27 May 2003

### PUBLIC HOUSING

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.24 p.m.): I am a big believer in public housing. I support it philosophically because it provides security for vulnerable people, and I support it because of what it has done for my family. My grandmother was left with no money to raise three children on her own, and that is what she did. All of the three have had successful careers and made a huge contribution to society. My uncle is CEO of one of Australia's top 100 companies.

The family were brought up in a housing commission house in Warwick, and there is no doubt that without the security of that home they would not have even stayed together, let alone grown up to be so strong. No-one can raise a family while battling a greedy landlord, finding someone to get the stove fixed and being shunted from dump to dump all over town, but in Ipswich today that is what is happening to families. Families evicted from the closing Riviera caravan park are searching for somewhere to go. People are stretching friendships by staying over with friends. Women are finding it hard to get out of violent situations, and every day support agencies are turning people away.

Today the Queensland Council of Social Services is labelling Queensland the homelessness state. That is how big an issue this is. There are many reasons for the rise in homelessness. Tenancy databases run by cowboys are keeping people out of the private market. The recent stock market boom and bad publicity about so-called tenants from hell are keeping middle-class investors away from rental property, and in Ipswich the huge rise in house prices has pushed rents up. The big reason, though, is that the federal government is walking away.

Since 1998 the Beattie government has increased its own commitment to public housing from \$330 million to \$475 million. We are in the process of pushing through world first legislation to regulate tenancy databases, and we are leading the nation in exploring innovative approaches, like the Brisbane Housing Company. When it comes to housing, though, the Howard government does not care.

Since the Second World War, when Australia initiated public housing to cope with returned soldiers and the baby boom, the federal government has been primarily and unarguably responsible for public housing. But the Howard government does not believe in public housing. It has withdrawn \$90 million from housing in Queensland over the last four years and is planning cuts of \$174 million over the next Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. It has cut so much money that, while in the early nineties there were around 2,000 new public houses being built each year, there are now around 300. The Howard government does not even have a minister for housing. Rather than funding public housing, the Howard government has an ideological agenda to put its money into rent assistance and into the incredibly inequitable \$7,000 first home buyers grant.

The Howard government wants to put a bit of money into people's pockets and let the market do the rest. But the market is not doing the rest. Last year an Ipswich domestic violence and housing forum, organised by Carmel Brown, Amy Stockwell and others, was told that in one year Booval Community Service turned down 719 requests for housing, while the Ipswich Independent Youth Service was around the same. The issue for these agencies is that, while we can get people into emergency housing, there is then nowhere for them to go.

The quality of low-cost housing on the private rental market in Ipswich, as I am sure it is elsewhere, is very poor and rent assistance does not help that. It is not just the supply. A very respectable single mother friend of mine recently pointed out the vigour with which some real estate agents enforce social prejudices. You might have rent assistance in your pocket, but if you are a

woman with two kids and a dog or if you are Aboriginal you will find trying to find a cheap place to live on the private rental market a very demoralising experience.

I am the first to acknowledge that this issue is more important than to be turned into a political football, but I do believe that when it comes to housing the community sector and the state government really are working. The primary responsibility for housing funding is now and has always been federal. The housing shortage is affecting real people right now. Unless the federal government realises that the market is not going to fix this, it will get worse. Without a real commitment to quality public housing, we will see more homelessness in Ipswich and right across Queensland, and that is something for which we will all pay.