

## CARAVAN PARK RESIDENTS

### *Grievance*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [9.15 am]: I am very pleased to present this grievance to the Minister for Housing. I am also pleased that the Premier, Deputy Premier and some other ministers are also here, because this issue crosses other portfolios. In the public gallery are some representatives from the Aqua Caravan Park and Belvedere Caravan Park in Mandurah. The people from the Aqua Caravan Park received termination notices of their tenure at the caravan park just before Christmas—a great Christmas present for them! The residents will need to be out of the caravan park by June. Up to 200 residents of the Belvedere Caravan Park on Mandurah Terrace received notification that a development guideline plan has been presented to the council and is now in the public consultation stage. This notification has created huge uncertainty about the medium to long-term future of the Belvedere Caravan Park and its residents.

The affordable housing option provided to people in those caravan parks, and other caravan parks throughout Western Australia, is gravely under threat. For decades caravan parks have provided not only a great tourism destination for people in the state and from outside the state, but also an affordable housing option for the increasing number of people on fixed incomes, retirees, pensioners, and low-income earners. The housing for those people is now under grave threat and many of them have nowhere else to go. I have literally dozens and dozens of letters from people living in these caravan parks that highlight the uncertainty and the angst that the residents face given that they do not know where they will be in the medium to long term. I want to very quickly refer to a letter from Betty Campbell of Belvedere Caravan Park. She bought her park home for \$65 000 in 1997, 13 years ago—it was her own personal investment using her life savings. She has spent money on repairs and painting. Betty Campbell writes —

I was expecting to live here until I can no longer look after myself, as it is close to amenities.

I have a car which is now over twenty years old, I was planning to get a gopher when my car gives up.

I am 78 yrs old and have no serious sickness except for arthritis.

As I am a pensioner and most of my money went into the purchase of my park home I cannot afford to pay for the removal to another site unless I can get some help.

The problems outlined in Betty Campbell's letter are replicated in Di and Bill Walker's story and, as I said, the stories of dozens and dozens of people who now face grave uncertainty over the future of their accommodation.

This issue is impacting and threatening not only the people in Mandurah and the Peel region; it is widespread throughout Western Australia. I know members have people in their own electorates living in caravan parks who in the future will face what the people of Belvedere and Aqua face right now. It is my firm view that this government must act absolutely urgently on the recommendations of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee in its report "Provision, Use and Regulation of Caravan Parks (and Camping Grounds) in Western Australia" released in 2009. I was a member of that committee. In the report is a series of recommendations that are clearly aimed at government departments taking responsibility for fixing this issue and giving security of tenure to people such as those in the gallery and for making sure that people who choose the caravan park lifestyle—it is a good lifestyle and an affordable housing option that we should preserve in Western Australia—the government must act now. In the report, a series of recommendations call on the government to locate and identify crown land—which obviously exists under government tenure—in regions in WA, particularly those regions under threat such as Peel and the South West, or purchase caravan parks that may be coming up for sale.

The government needs to say that it wants to see caravan parks maintained in the state, and the government has to act. The market is not doing that; the market is reversing. The market is selling them off. The owners are selling them off and they are becoming developments that none of these people will ever afford to be able to live in. I urge the minister to look at the report and recommendations and to take the lead. The problem we have now is that this spreads across a range of portfolios. We need one minister to take up the cudgel on behalf of these people, and I believe it is the Minister for Housing's responsibility, because these parks provide affordable living for many Western Australians, most of whom are very vulnerable. Many of them have invested all of their life's savings in park homes or caravans. People have written to me from Belvedere and Aqua, who I have met with as well, who invested tens of thousands of dollars in park homes that at this moment are literally worthless or, if not, are worth a few thousand dollars, because they have nowhere to take them; nowhere to go. They need assistance. They need the minister to act on their behalf. I will work with the minister to find the solutions; I will work with any minister.

This is about housing and tourism, but I am not concerned about the tourism aspect essentially, because I have the housing needs of 200-plus people to be concerned about. Implications for tourism also are massive. If we see

caravan parks continue to decline and to be sold off for development, from a tourism perspective there are implications for people throughout Australia who tow their vehicles around the state.

This is a time for the minister to act. I think he can, and I think he will. It is absolutely crucial that these people are given some security and some strong support, whether they have to be shifted or assisted in their relocation, but land has to be found; it has to be allocated, it has to be given secure tenure for caravan park use only so that people who choose caravan park living now and into the future have absolute security for the rest of their lives. They deserve to live those lives out without being threatened, as they are now.

**MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Minister for Housing)** [9.22 am]: I thank the member for Mandurah for raising the issues, and I thank the people who have travelled up from his electorate to listen to the points that he has put to me today. The member is right: this is not just an area that affects his electorate. Although I have not met the people, I am aware of the situation at Aqua caravan park in terms of the notice to close and also at Belvedere. The member may also be interested that further up in Rockingham, the Palm Beach caravan park has also recently been placed on the market, so this is a rolling series of issues. I have had discussions in this house previously with the member for Wanneroo and the member for Forrestfield about caravan parks and residents, more importantly, for exactly the same thing in their electorates.

I think it is important to understand, though, the regulatory framework in which we operate. As the member would be aware, caravan parks of this nature are regulated under the Residential Parks (Long-stay Tenants) Act 2006. That was a piece of legislation that the former government brought in. I have to say it did have bipartisan support, but there were some statements made around the passage of that legislation through this place that created expectations that the legislation could never fulfil in terms of permanency of tenancy. That is the major issue here. The unfortunate reality is that the people who own the caravan parks are working through a lawful planning process. They are providing the determination notices required by law. That is of absolutely no comfort to people who have to move. As the member rightly pointed out, removal is very difficult in these cases in which people have often invested the balance of their life savings into a suitable form of accommodation. It is difficult in some cases because a building is just not capable of being moved. In other cases it is just too expensive for people to have to pay the costs of moving and in other cases people simply have nowhere to go. Again, as a member pointed out, the Economics and Industry Standing Committee report stated that there is an extreme shortage of caravan parks.

In relation to some of the comments the member made about crown land, I talked earlier to the member for Dawesville, the Minister for Tourism, and he is willing. I am meeting with the Peel Development Commission on Monday and we will search high and low through the Peel area to find suitable parcels of crown land that we can develop as caravan parks. That is going to take some time. We have tried to do this in other areas and it is incredibly difficult. Getting approval for caravan parks is something that often meets significant resistance from other people. The member would have picked that up when he was a member of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee and travelled around the state and did all that research. The Minister for Tourism has indicated his willingness to head up our efforts on that front at the member's local level.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Minister, look at places like Waterloo caravan park down in south west Bunbury, where they exist, but they also potentially are under threat. We have got to protect what exists.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Every caravan park is under threat. There are basically two forms of long-stay accommodation in caravan parks: there is the increasingly popular lifestyle village concept, where there is a long-term attachment to the plot of land by way of a lease—there is generally not an issue there—but what we are talking about is more long-stay residents in traditional caravan parks.

What else can we do and what else are we doing? I had discussions with the department when I was previously the Minister for Housing and Works and again recently. I asked the department to look at caravan parks it can purchase when they come on the market. I asked it to look at bits of land it can obtain to develop. They are not going to be solely caravan parks once the Department of Housing develops them, but the type of accommodation that people currently enjoy in caravan parks will still be provided there. It will be part of an affordable housing mix that I think we need to be providing.

What else are we doing? I reflect on the history of what we had to do at Kingsway Tourist Village in the member for Wanneroo's electorate and at Springvale Village Caravan Park in the member for Forrestfield's electorate. These are very traumatic transitions for people. The Department of Commerce and the Department of Housing work very closely with the residents to try to help them through that transition, because often we do not have a short-term solution. The things I have talked to the Minister for Tourism about—finding more land—or the Department of Housing entering into projects to develop affordable housing options are going to take some time. The department will work very closely with them. I am pretty sure that has been happening at Aqua to try to help people, where they are eligible, to move into social housing. It worked reasonably well in Kingsway, and my understanding is that it worked reasonably well out in Forrestfield at Springvale. We can also provide and we

have provided in those last two places act-of-grace payments. Some people may argue they are too generous; others may argue they are not. They are around \$3 000 a person just to help them in that transition, if they meet the criteria. The department will take a very active role in supporting people as they transition through that process.

The member referred to the Economics and Industry Standing Committee. Right through that report—I had another look at it this morning—it highlighted the trend of increasing long-term accommodation in caravan parks and the issues around dwindling supply. The member is right: the report referred to using crown land; it referred to land tax. This government removed land tax for caravan parks in the last budget. Those short-term issues are being dealt with. It also talked a lot about the planning regime. The state has a role to play in that, as does local government. Let us not forget that often these are applications. The member mentioned the Belvedere caravan park where there is an application to redevelop the site. Initially, if that redevelopment does not involve a change in zoning—and often that is the case; it stays within the tourism zoning and goes from a caravan park to a bigger hotel; it is a local government decision—all well and good. If it involves a rezoning, the state has a role to play as well. More work needs to be done and is being done in that area, but again the unfortunate reality for the people who have travelled up today is that that process is not going to be able to assist them, because that is medium to long term.

The summary answer to the member's question is that this is a major challenge. There are probably another 18 to 20 caravan parks that could potentially go through this transition.

**Mr M.P. Murray** interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I am saying it is a local government issue and a state government issue. It is a cheap shot to get up here and blame someone.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I am not doing that. I think there is a need for the minister to take this on as the lead agency.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** The land tax we have addressed. Certainly, in terms of trying to acquire caravan parks and have the state provide a role in helping these people transition into alternative forms of accommodation, we will do that. I met with the department the other day to discuss that.