

Motion to establish a Select Committee inquiry into Affordable Housing. Speech notes:

Mr President,

I rise to move that the Legislative Council establishes a select committee to examine the issue of affordable housing in Tasmania.

Mr President, members will have heard me speak on the issue of affordable housing on several occasions since I entered this place in 2004.

I'll admit that prior to entering parliament; housing was not an issue in which I envisaged taking a leading role as a parliamentarian.

Indeed, prior to entering Parliament I strongly held the view that the real estate boom Tasmania had experienced in the early parts of this decade was an overwhelmingly positive thing.

My background managing a real estate agency in the 80s, and as a keen student of the real estate market thereafter, I am very aware of just how depressed the housing market was in Tasmania during the 80s and 90s, and therefore what a positive change it was to experience such dramatic and sustained capital growth in the market over a relatively short period.

And I think every one of us would have a personal anecdote about someone we know who got into the market just prior to the boom, or just missed out, someone who purchased a property for \$100,000 that's now worth five times that, or whose old family-shack on the east coast that has been passed down through the generations and is now worth a small fortune in land-value.

The housing boom has been a great thing in increasing personal wealth, further opportunities and enhanced lifestyles for many Tasmanians.

But, Mr President, now we know that there has been a deep dark side to this housing boon;

Housing affordability in Tasmania is at an all time low.

Indeed, the entire nation is experiencing a housing affordability crisis

But in Tasmania, where we continue to have the lowest incomes in the nation, and with some of the relative increases in property prices, the housing squeeze on low-income earners has been as profound as it has been in the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne.

We have all heard the figures,

The last ABS census data reported that over 2,000 Tasmanians are homeless on any one night

Waiting lists for public housing hovering around 2,500 mark with no indication that they are ever likely to fall dramatically

Over 700 Category 1 housing applicants, which according to the commonwealth-state housing agreement, means that the applicant has high needs, such as dependent kids, or is practically homeless.

The National Centre for Economic Data has identified a further 20,000 Tasmanian households in housing stress, where over 30% of the total household income goes to meet housing costs.

The Housing Industry Association has said that first home buyers in Tasmania represent just 13% of all property transactions, when that figure should be at around 20% in a healthy, robust housing market.

But Mr President these stats of course only paint half the picture;

There is the human face to these numbers,

Whether it be the young mum that came into my office in Glenorchy the other week in utter desperation and asking her local politician to try and help with the housing Tasmania waiting lists,

Or the elderly pensioner who has been renting the same unit for ten years, where the rent has been continually increased by 10% year on year, while the pension has only increased by CPI;

Or the young couple trying desperately to save a deposit for their first home;

And of course there is the passion of the tireless workers at Housing Tasmania and the community service organisations struggling day by day to get a roof over the head of every one who comes through their door asking for help;

And even the frustrations of Government departments and service organisations trying to do the right thing and get a development approved for an accommodation facility, only to have it fall over at the planning grounds.

Mr President, this select committee is timely and needed.

It is the appropriate forum to consider the extent of the housing affordability shortages in Tasmania; it is an opportunity for us elected representatives to hear evidence directly from those experiencing the housing crisis firsthand,

Already just since I tabled this motion last week, my office has had several calls from ordinary Tasmanians wanting to tell their story about how the lack of affordable housing has affected them and their families

I expect the committee will also hear evidence from the building and housing industries, community service organisations, local government, economists and housing-finance professionals, along with policy makers with an interest in housing affordability and social policy.

Mr President, the committee will also look at the effectiveness and limitations of current policy responses to the housing crisis from all levels of government;

The committee would examine the long-term sustainability of Housing Tasmania and public housing, the new opportunities presented through the state Government's much-lauded affordable housing trust, as well as examine how this initiative is actually going;

It will also obviously consider issues concerning the commonwealth first home owners grant, stamp duty, land release and local government planning process in relation to affordable housing developments.

Mr President, in reference to the proposed terms of reference, these have been developed in consultation with several of honorable members as well as the Clerks of the Council.

I have asked key non-government stakeholders, including TasCOSS, Anglicare Tasmania, Shelter and the HIA, to advise on what issues should be considered by the committee.

The outcome of this, I believe, are terms of reference that are sufficiently broad to encourage a robust examination of the major issues relevant to the housing debate.

I think that a relative success of any select committee depends on its capacity to engage individual Tasmanians directly affected by the issues

I acknowledge that the Government has already indicated its support for the committee, as indicated by the Leader's comments last week.

I trust the Government's initial enthusiasm for the process as expoused through the Premier's media release last Wednesday, will continue through its ongoing participation in the committee. I genuinely hope a Labor Member of the Council will join the committee and the Governemnt will urge its departments to openly participate in the inquiry.

Mr President, I believe this select committee a practical way for this council to make a positive contribution to improving housing policies in this state and through this, improving the housing outcomes for the many Tasmanians experiencing housing stress.

I have every confidence that the committee will be able to achieve its rather broad and ambitious agenda,.

I urge honorable members to support this motion.