

DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH

HON GUY BARNETT MP

Homes Tasmania Bill 2022

check Hansard for delivery

Mr Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a second time.

The Homes Tasmania Bill 2022 delivers on the commitment made by this Government in February this year to create a dedicated housing authority. This authority will be responsible for delivering improved housing services and increasing the supply of social and affordable homes in Tasmania.

Following consultation feedback, the authority will be called Homes Tasmania. This reflects the importance of having not just a roof over your head, but also a place to call home, and the broader role that the authority will play in ensuring the wellbeing of those in need of housing and homelessness services, as well as in building liveable communities.

Mr Speaker, housing is a basic human need and is critical to our community's health, wellbeing and financial stability. Every Tasmanian deserves a roof over their head. The Rockliff Government has a plan to achieve this. But we need the right structures in place to address the increasing need for housing solutions.

This Homes Tasmania Bill establishes a new framework; the right framework to future proof housing for many decades to come. This Bill represents a historic change in our approach to delivering housing for Tasmanians in this State. No one in this House can deny that we don't need to do things differently. The need in our community is critical. We must be innovative, agile and responsive and we need to change the way we've been doing things to be more contemporary to prepare for the next decade and beyond.

Housing is a whole of community need. Where and what we build determines the fabric of our communities, the services and supports we need to ensure our wellbeing, our culture and connection to each other and the world around us. Urban design and renewal is integral to this and is what makes liveable communities. This legislation creates a role for Homes Tasmania in broader housing considerations, beyond what the current department has historically held. This means it can consider our community housing needs and how our vulnerable are supported within this. It also means it can play a role in key worker accommodation and how that fits within a broader housing need, particularly in regional areas or areas of high demand.

Homes Tasmania is established to promote the development of affordable housing, to enable the provision of housing assistance to, and improve the housing conditions of, eligible persons, to support the provision of affordable housing, housing support services and community support services to persons who require housing or services, to assist in developing policy for housing, and any other related purposes.

Homes Tasmania will be responsible for delivering the Tasmanian Government's record capital investment of \$1.5 billion to build 10 000 homes by 2032. We know this is an ambitious plan, and we know we need to partner with the building and construction industry in order to deliver this record build program. We have started this through the Memorandum of Understanding 'Building Tasmania's Future' with the industry signed in May this year, which seeks to address challenges in our supply chains, improve processes and build resilience in our industry. However, we cannot stop there.

We must change how we have done things in the past to allow for more innovation, more efficiency and faster development to get houses out of the ground and providing homes for people who need them as quickly as possible. At the same time, we need to make sure these homes are the right types of homes and are built in the right places to meet the needs of vulnerable Tasmanians, both now and into the future. We also need to make sure they represent value for money and demonstrate a responsible public investment. The Homes Tasmania Board will help bring in the expertise needed to deliver these homes through modern and contemporary partnership models, complimented by the work we are already doing.

While delivering these homes, we must not forget who we are building these homes for, and what they need. We must remember that these people need support and a home right now. We must continue to work closely with our community service providers and sector partners in ensuring a cohesive and integrated approach to homelessness and housing services across Tasmania. This means working across all our communities, both in the cities but also in the regions, and understanding and meeting their unique and different needs. This Bill will not change that. Homelessness and wrap-around services will continue to be a core focus of the Authority and this focus and priority will be enshrined in my Statement of Expectations. This includes putting a focus on those most in need, our vulnerable youth under 25, women with children and those leaving their homes due to relationship breakdowns or family violence; those with a disability or specific needs and elderly Tasmanians.

We want the people of Tasmania, our government and non-government partners to work together to build the communities of the future. Our sector partners and businesses will be integrally involved in shaping and delivering on these plans, as will the Australian and local governments.

That is why we have convened a new Ministerial Reference Group on housing and homelessness. The first meeting was held in mid-July and attended by 17 community service providers, peak representative bodies and the Local Government of Tasmania. The Reference Group is working closely with us to develop a 20-Year Housing Strategy for Tasmania. I expect this Strategy to be complete in mid-2023 which will guide Homes Tasmania in ensuring we build the right homes in the right places, and provide the right services to those who need them, when and where they need them.

We will leave no stone unturned in delivering the homes and housing support services Tasmanians deserve. This is the very reason why we are establishing Homes Tasmania. This Bill establishes the authority and sets the framework for an organisation that will be guided by a Board. This allows us to work more closely with expertise from across our community and leverage our collective knowledge in addressing Tasmania's housing challenges. The Board will be supported by committees, that will bring in the lived experience and representative knowledge of the relevant sectors, such as homelessness services and the building and construction industry to help guide and balance the Board's decision-making. The need for these committees was a key piece of feedback we heard through the consultation process and I believe will only work to improve and enhance decision making. This will bring more representative views into housing and homelessness decisions than ever before in Tasmania.

The Board will be directed through a Statement of Ministerial Expectations, which sets the direction from me as Minister on the priorities and focus of Homes Tasmania. I have tabled a draft Statement with the Bill to demonstrate the function of this document and how I intend it to drive transparency and community outcomes of the authority. I intend to hold the Board and the Executive Management of Homes Tasmania to account for delivering against my expectations, which will be tabled in Parliament once finalised.

Mr Speaker, the Homes Tasmania Bill replaces the *Homes Act 1935* in its entirety and provides a new structure and new governance arrangements that will enable the delivery of more homes for Tasmanians, especially those in need.

There has been criticism over many years about the limitations of the Homes Act in providing the right framework for a broader, more strategic legal setting in fitting with the diversity of housing needs in the Tasmanian community. I applaud the efforts of the then housing minister, the former Hon Jacqui Petrusma MP, who ushered through a series of changes in 2016. These were key changes that have been reviewed in their operation and improved on in the Homes Tasmania Bill.

However, it is important to note that we have continued to face many barriers given the structural difficulties in the operation of the Homes Act. As you well know, laudable attempts to modernise old laws over time can over-complicate and even render unworkable many of their provisions. While ever we rely on the Homes Act, there will

continue to be many constraints on the provision of more homes for Tasmanians, especially those more vulnerable members of the Tasmanian community.

The Bill provides substantial clarity about the roles and functions of the new housing authority in the modern context. It retains the best features of recent improvements and builds on these to ensure Tasmania has the most integrated, whole of system approach to developing land, building, procuring, maintaining, modifying and disposing of homes that may have passed their used-by date.

This new legislative framework provides the right underpinnings to consolidate efforts across government to increase the supply of homes, deliver more affordable homes and ensure housing and support services are as integrated as possible.

The purpose of the Bill is to:

- to increase the opportunities for vulnerable Tasmanians and persons on low or moderate incomes to live in safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing
- enable the provision of housing assistance and housing support services
- to encourage the development and implementation of short-term, medium-term and long-term housing strategies
- to facilitate the ownership, leasehold, or occupation, of residential premises by vulnerable Tasmanians and persons on low or moderate incomes
- to encourage the development of flexible and innovative financial arrangements to improve housing outcomes
- to enable the strategic acquisition of land, and land and premises, primarily for the development of housing
- to promote an efficient and effective system of administration of housing services, housing support services and community support services
- to assist in ensuring the existence of a viable and diversified sector for the provision of housing assistance and housing support services
- to ensure appropriate transparency, scrutiny and direction of the performance and exercise of the functions and powers of Homes Tasmania.

Homes Tasmania will perform and exercise the functions and powers currently assigned to the Director of Housing under the Homes Act with relevant new functions and powers added under the new structure of Homes Tasmania.

The functions and powers conferred under the Bill provide the foundation for Homes Tasmania to effectively plan for and manage the housing and homelessness system as well as to acquire, develop or redevelop and manage homes in line with the purposes set out.

A key feature of the Bill is the strategic focus on building communities so that our housing developments are planned and coordinated with our communities as they grow and change.

This Bill represents the first step in establishing an authority with the necessary powers and remit to deliver the homes Tasmanians will need into the future. We believe that there is more work to do to provide new residential development to house our growing population and reduce wait times for those on our Housing Register. In order to do this, we will work closely with our stakeholders, the Ministerial Reference Group and across government agencies to achieve the right balance between protections and progress. There is also further work to be done in how tenancy laws apply to social housing so that vulnerable tenants are appropriately protected. Our Government has made a strong commitment for further work to be undertaken to improve housing outcomes for Tasmanians. We want to be able to work with the Board of Homes Tasmania on this work, meaning it is important that we establish the authority as a first step.

In addition, I want to make it clear that this Government is committed to pulling all possible levers to addressing our housing challenges. This includes our ambitious planning reform agenda. We are delivering our Tasmanian Planning Scheme, which while taking longer than anticipated is already in effect in 15 local government areas. We are drafting Tasmanian Planning Policies and updating our regional land use strategies to allow more proposals for the rezoning of land to residential purposes to be considered on their merits. We have also commenced a review of our State Planning Provisions to ensure that we have the settings right and that our planning rules are not standing in the way of appropriate development. These processes are already underway, and I look forward to working with my colleague, the Minister for Planning, Michael Ferguson to facilitate their progression to deliver the outcomes we need.

I want to make it very clear that this Government is strongly committed to tackling the current housing challenges being experienced by many Tasmanians. I look forward to working with stakeholders and those in this House to work through these challenges and propose solutions. If required, I will bring forward legislative changes to implement reforms back to Parliament during 2023. Mr Speaker, there are a series of amendments contained in the *Homes Tasmania (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022*. These amendments are necessary because they interact with the roles and functions of Homes Tasmania.

The *Homes Tasmania (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022* repeals the Homes Act and makes the following substitutions where required in all relevant Acts:

- Replace the *Director of Housing* with *Homes Tasmania*.
- Replace references to the *Homes Act 1935* with *Homes Tasmania Act 2022*.
- Replace references to the *Housing Agency* with the responsible Department in relation to the *Homes Tasmania Act 2022*.

- Replace references to *Government land* with *Homes Tasmania Act land*.
- Replace references to *Homes Act land* with *housing supply land*.

Changes have also been made to the State Service Act 2000, adding the role of Homes Tasmania Chief Executive Officer to Schedule 1 of that Act.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank all those contributors including peak bodies, our built environment partners, sector stakeholders and community members who made submissions on the draft Bill. Many suggestions have been incorporated in the Bill and I think the Bill in its current form, is better as a result. Examples include a stronger focus on housing being a basic human need in the Bill's objectives, including a focus on liveable communities and sustainability and including representative views in Board decision-making through the advisory committees.

I recognise that the establishment of Homes Tasmania represents a significant structural change in the way housing and housing support services will be delivered into the future. I want to reassure current staff that their employment conditions will not change and there will be no redundancies or job losses associated with the establishment of Homes Tasmania. I can also reassure sector partners that current funding arrangements will remain in place under Homes Tasmania.

I also want to reassure Members of this place that their interactions with me and my office as the responsible Minister for Housing will remain the same, and that I will continue to be actively engaged and drive the Government's agenda to improve housing for all Tasmanians, particularly those most in need. I'd also like to thank all those Members who have engaged with myself and my Office on the consultation on this Bill. It's been a productive and positive experience and one that I believe represents the type of bipartisan approach we should all be bringing to the table on an issue as fundamental as this.

I look forward to working together constructively with colleagues and remain optimistic we can enact this good law in the interests of all Tasmanians, but particularly, those who need our help the most.

Mr Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.