

HANSARD 14 APRIL 2011

PARK HOME RESIDENTS

Motion

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [5.07 pm]: I would like to make a few statements in support of the motion. As chairman of the committee that the member for Mandurah referred to, I would like to make a couple of comments.

When we set up the committee, the member for Mandurah was not on it; he was a co-opted member. The reason he asked for, and we accepted, his co-option was because we knew it was a particular problem in his area. For many, many years—decades—it has been a major centre for caravanning, and most of us would have gone down there with our kids or otherwise. It had become clear to us that a large number of the caravan parks were being closed down and turned into other things, and that a large number of parks were under threat. Also, a large number of parks had been converted from recreational caravan parks to long stays. What the member for Mandurah said today did nothing more than update what we found a year or so ago when we undertook the inquiry.

This is an extremely serious issue for not only the metropolitan area, but also the regions, as he mentioned. The problem stems, as the member for West Swan said, from a combination of rising land prices, a lack of rental accommodation in the private market, huge queues for Homeswest properties, and the fact that the people who live in these caravan parks are not wealthy, generally. They have spent their money on a caravan, and they are being evicted with very little alternative value to, or use for, their caravan, and very little tenure. There were also some structural legislation problems that I think that the act that has been criticised in this place tried to deal with, but it has probably not dealt with them adequately.

My personal view is that, overwhelmingly, the issue comes down to finding alternative land for caravanning and to change the zoning arrangements for those new places so that they cannot subsequently be rezoned for alternative use. We do that for industrial land and for other purposes. We need to find additional land and to lock in the zoning for caravanning. Some of that land should be for temporary recreational caravanning, some for long stays and some should be a mix. That is the priority.

One of the things that people have to realise, and one of the major problems here, is that the land that was set aside for caravan parks was often set aside in pristine areas by the seaside, river or lakes. If members look around the metropolitan area, they will see that in any area that has a view of water, the price of land has risen sharply. It is a problem of proximity. I argue that many of the new sites cannot be in those same pristine areas—at least those for long-stay caravanning. We have to find alternative sites, maybe close by, but not sites that are as highly valued close by the ocean or otherwise.

It also comes down to tenure arrangements and educating people so they know what they are getting into when they buy into these parks. To a large extent, that is a problem of the past because the decision has already been made. They might not have been well informed in the past, and we have to fix the problem they are in. But there is an education aspect.

Finally, one of the issues I would like the ministers to consider is what the committee found with what are styled “lifestyle villages”. There is a commercial outfit that operates as National Lifestyle Villages. I am not advocating that we use them, or otherwise. This organisation uses temporary homes.

It buys land and puts temporary homes on the land in quite large numbers of 200 to 300 homes, which are very densely built on small blocks. The residents have a commonality of interest, with many of them being 55 years and over. The key aspect is that they are developing these lifestyle villages on land that is not zoned or reserved for housing, but reserved often for agricultural purposes.

They are buying the land at a lower price than they would if they were going to buy land zoned for residential purposes. They can do that because they operate as a caravan park. That allows them to buy the land, and using transportable homes, they can put a home and land package together for people, which is quite nice—we visited many of these—at a much lower price than people could get in the used market, the new market or that Homeswest can build in the temporary accommodation range. That is what we need to do.

These villages are also in locations, as the member for Mandurah said, where these people prefer to live. They are also in a lifestyle setting—a communal setting where the people who are in the caravan parks are now attracted to. Although it was not clear, I formed the view that the planning authorities do not really like these lifestyle villages because they jump over the planning process in that they build villages on agricultural land, or on lower value land—that is, land that is not already gazetted for housing—and also they are not necessarily contiguous with the process by which the authorities plan amenities with hospitals, schools and other services.

All I can say is that, overwhelmingly, the people who live in the caravan parks are not interested in schools because they have moved on in age a bit. They may require other amenities, and want to be closer to hospitals, but we can get land closer to hospitals and other services that occupants of caravan parks would need.

I urge the minister to look perhaps at a Homeswest lifestyle village-type option to absorb the increasing demand for people being evicted from existing caravan parks, and not only to put those in the metropolitan area but also in the Peel and other areas where the report identified the hottest demand. One thing is clear: this problem has been going on for about 15 years. There is clear evidence that caravan parks are under increasing pressure and that the number of people who are going to be evicted will grow, and the problems that these people face are increasing, and, if anything, their options are decreasing.

There will be a shortage of housing as people are not building enough homes to fill the demand. The Homeswest waiting list is not shrinking. If someone is evicted from one of these caravan parks, there are fewer and fewer spots for them to go—unless we do something. I reiterate to the member for Mandurah that we have to act quickly to acquire land and provide a housing style to address the real demand.

Many of these people, as the member for Mandurah said, are the type of electors that we need to look after. They do not have too many options, whether it is because of their age or their asset base. Many of them perhaps were not fully informed when they went in there, but they tried to make the best of things and make a life for themselves and to support themselves. That is something that we as the government and as elected members should help. I urge the government to accept this critique, and to act.