

24 February 2006

Matthew Morris MP  
Chairperson, Public Bodies Review Committee  
NSW Parliament  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Chairperson

### **Inquiry into the Allocation of Social Housing**

I write to provide comment to the Inquiry, from my experience representing the electorate of Bligh, which has large Department of Housing estates, very high and increasing housing costs, and is under increasing pressure as a result of the Government's urban consolidation policy.

Decreasing housing affordability and increasing housing stress has been well documented elsewhere and I will not elaborate on these concerns, however they provide the context for an inner city accommodation crisis that has not been solved, and appears set to expand.

I am concerned about people on low incomes being forced out of the inner city by redevelopment and inflated property prices. Government policy is to support "social mix" with low income people included in all precincts.

#### **Funding for New Housing**

The longstanding decline in funds for social housing has had a serious impact in the inner city, where older established Department of Housing estates have not been maintained and there is a serious backlog in repairs. Increased housing stress has also meant an increase in the number of homeless people who congregate in the inner city.

I have urged the NSW Government to advocate with the Commonwealth Government to increase the funds available for providing housing and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), which are essential to provide accommodation for people who cannot afford the private market.

***I recommend that the NSW Government actively engage with other States and Territories and the Commonwealth Government to negotiate a Housing Accord that addresses these longstanding concerns.***

The Government has increasingly been targeting social housing to only the most marginalised and people needing high levels of support, and changes made under the "Reshaping Public Housing" policy and the *Residential Tenancies Amendment (Social Housing) Act 2005* further entrench the provision of social housing as housing of last resort.

The result is an increasing gap between those who have accommodation in the private market and "ghettoes" of public housing estates where people with serious problems are concentrated, often with limited or no support services to enable them to maintain their tenancies to get back on their feet.

Consideration should be given to setting affordable housing targets and incentives which promote better integration of low income and affordable housing, and avoid the development of segregated communities with extremes of wealth and poverty traps.

Measures are necessary to ensure that blue collar and lower income workers remain accessible to the inner city, as Sydney faces the same affordability issues as other major world cities. Constituents in Bligh have expressed concern that they are being forced out of the inner city, and can no longer afford to live near their work, facing a long commute from more affordable suburbs. While the Government's key worker program offers some hope in this direction, it has been limited to one location and is a tiny program with negligible wider impact. The introduction of Very Fast Train services is one option but needs to be accompanied by a range of measures promoting housing affordability, and offering housing relief in the inner city.

In response to the Productivity Commission report recommendation that stamp duty be abolished, the NSW Government promised to examine tax relief for first home buyers. However, the Government could maintain revenue while improving equity and social justice, by providing relief targeted at affordable housing.

***I recommend that the NSW Government develop a new program of strategies to increase affordable housing, in order to reduce the demand for social housing.***

***I recommend that the Government return to the former policy of providing social housing to people who cannot afford the private market, and ensuring a social mix in public housing estates.***

Failed mental health and alcohol/drug service systems have meant that prison or the street are the most likely accommodation for people with health problems who cannot get the support they need.

The single hope for people with chronic mental illness or alcohol/drug problems is the Housing and Support Initiative (HASI) which provides accommodation with guaranteed support to enable people to live independently. I strongly support this program and have asked the Government to increase funding to enable its expansion.

***I urge the Inquiry to advocate for:***

- ***Expanded funds for public and other social housing;***
- ***Expanded funds for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to provide emergency accommodation;***
- ***Expanded Housing and Support Initiative funds;***
- ***A new proactive program to support boarding houses and other low cost shared accommodation;***
- ***Expanded mental health services, particularly supported accommodation and rehabilitation programs; and***
- ***Expanded alcohol/drug treatment and rehabilitation programs.***

## **Housing Allocation**

There are large Department of Housing estates in the Bligh electorate centred on Woolloomooloo, Surry Hills and Redfern, with large numbers of disadvantaged people concentrated in these locations the inner city. The Government's urban consolidation policy has resulted in an influx of new residents concentrated in these same areas, and where homeless people, chronic street drinkers, people with a mental illness and others live on the streets and in boarding houses.

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I am concerned about the pattern of allocation of tenants to these estates, where people with serious problems are concentrated, with few supports. I will illustrate this concern by referring to two examples.

In one large building was tenanted largely by older people, apartments were allocated to a significant number of new tenants who had serious alcohol/drug problems. Tenants contacted me in distress when they found that their home had become a focus for drug dealing, and the limited security that had provided for them was no longer able to keep unwanted people out of their building. Frail older people were intimidated, robbed and assaulted. It was only after my representations to the Department of Housing that a Local Allocation Strategy was agreed that would allow no additional tenants who had a history of drug use to be allocated to this building.

A similar situation is currently occurring in a building that houses isolated and vulnerable tenants. Tenants and neighbours contacted me when they found that new tenants were using the premises for drug dealing, prostitution and other criminal activity, and they had no control over who was entering their building. One tenant has very serious, complex health and social problems, and this person and their behaviour causes almost daily alarm to other residents.

Over more than 18 months, this has resulted in assaults, numerous police callouts, repeated emergency mental health treatment, the allocation of onsite carers, and approval for 24 hour onsite care in other premises. Unfortunately, a long term solution has still not been implemented, and more appropriate accommodation is still being sought. I am concerned that this tenant should not have been allocated to an apartment in this building where other tenants were exposed to the threat of harm, and have to live every day with intimidation and harassment.

The Department of Housing has now agreed to a Local Allocation Strategy that will provide some protection by ensuring that frail and vulnerable tenants are not housed unprotected in the same building as others who have serious problems. I am concerned that this situation should not have arisen in the first place.

***I recommend that the Department of Housing develop and implement a stronger Local Allocation Strategy in order to provide increased safety and amenity for its tenants.***

I look forward to the outcome of the Committee's consideration of these matters.

Yours sincerely

Clover Moore  
Member for Bligh