

**Submission
No 9**

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF NSW PUBLIC HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

Name: Name Suppressed
Date Received: 5/02/2016

Partially Confidential

Tenant Submission

‘Inquiry into the Management of NSW Public Housing Maintenance Contracts’

Terms of Reference & Response:

That the Committee inquires into and reports on the management of public housing maintenance contracts in NSW, with particular reference to:

- a) The current repair status and physical condition of the public housing stock managed by Housing NSW;

a): I am a tenant of social housing in an inner city estate and live in one of three historical houses. I have had numerous and serious issues both outside the building. Falling and rotting fencing and a rotting gable and decorative eave – the downward point of which has fallen, and internally there is an ongoing leak in the bedroom which has not been addressed though it has been reported many times. I have not had any substantial maintenance for the 18 years I have been in my home. Many of the small repairs – like a leaking toilet are repeated yearly because they are not repaired properly. It appears that Housing NSW does not care about its beautiful historical stock.



Our homes are featured online as examples of Victorian architecture

pictured here when they were in more acceptable, albeit superficially better, condition - though even at this stage it was our own repairs that retained a semblance of maintenance.

Unfortunately, the homes have been left to rot through consecutive changes in government, despite numerous requests for maintenance:



Fence detached from rotten frame



Fencing rotted, fallen and rotten decorative eaves



rotten wood, fallen eaves and crumbling masonry



Interior Knob and on the exterior - just a glob of glue.

The glued doorknob, while creative, is basically unacceptable workmanship.

- b) The costs of maintenance of the current public housing stock, variations in expenditure trends over the previous five years and projected expenditure for the next five years;

b): Through observation I have observed a decline in maintenance that coincides with the end of NSW housing in-house maintenance dept. Contractors are simply not delivering long lasting and quality work. I am unaware of the previous five year expenditure trends or projected five year costs but having experienced the very low quality and standard of work used to replace previous materials and craftsmanship – some of which had lasted over a hundred years, it seems obvious that quality is the better choice to reduce overall maintenance costs in the long term. Calculating expenditure over five year terms must take into account the failings and wastage that occurs across the board. If I calculate how much rent I've paid in 17 years, I deduce that it would easily cover the cost of decent long lasting maintenance. It would be wiser to invest in quality work rather than cheap short-term repairs. If government continues to approach maintenance with short term and lowest cost estimates, it will eventually cost more and contribute to the suspicion that there is deliberate neglect - facilitating the privatisation of its stock, rather than the preservation of strong existing communities and historical homes.

- c) The nature and administration of maintenance contracts, including private sector arrangements;

c): I'm not sure how the administration of maintenance contracts work but I assume it is based on the cheapest quote gets the contract. This is not sound practice and will encourage competitive profiteering before the delivery of decent quality work. Private sector arrangements need to be supervised and quality needs to be stipulated within the contract.

- d) Methodologies and processes for ensuring consistent public housing maintenance standards across NSW, including quality assurance, effectiveness, efficiency and contract supervision;

d) : Arrangements with the private sector need to be supervised and followed up on site to ensure the work is done properly with quality

materials and high standard workmanship. Creating a paid position for a maintenance supervisor, for a local resident/s in each estate, (job could be shared via a casual contract) preference to active qualified community members – (such a member of the NAB) would help cut costs in the long term and ensure work is done on time and to standard.

- e) Statutory obligations on tenants to take care of properties and report maintenance needs in a timely fashion;

e): Many tenants do look after their properties but cannot manage the more serious issues that arise – especially with structural degradation, leaks and mold. Tenants that damage their properties should not be tolerated and eviction warnings should be issued to tenants who destroy their homes - but it is important to monitor the condition of the property at the beginning of the tenancy especially concerning the quality of the work. Low quality work quickly reveals itself in a short period, as it does not stand up to wear and tear.

- f) Measures to meet the special maintenance requirements of aged and disabled tenants;

f) Assisted housing models should be considered when building new housing stock or renovating existing stock reserved for aged pensioners. Assisted housing would be especially helpful in supervising tenants with severe social and mental dysfunction.

Aged and disabled tenants should be housed in either secure low-rise single story housing or buildings with well-maintained elevators with wheel chair capacity and access.

- g) Any other related matters.

g) : Maintenance of street and common areas is well below standard. Jobs begin unreasonably early and stay unattended for months encouraging rubbish build up, pet droppings, vermin and untoward anti-social behaviors.

Trees, wildlife and greenery are proven to be of benefit psychologically and socially.

Therefore it is of the highest priority that the natural surrounds of inner city estates in particular be preserved and any wildlife documented. A tragic incident involving the Powerful Owl in Woolloomooloo has alerted me to the fact that the importance of wildlife and in particular an endangered species, which is losing its habitat, has been largely ignored.

The following pictures track the recent destruction of Stephen Street in Woolloomooloo, which was quite a magical walkway until recent years and in the last few months has been subjected to complete destruction and questionable contracted maintenance - as yet uncompleted. The work was begun in November 2015. The pavers and top soil were removed exposing the roots of the tree pictured. The contractors then vanished. After months of rain since late 2015 couple with inadequate and imbalanced pruning, the tree came down.

The pre-Christmas and New Year timing of beginning work on this site has caused considerable trauma to local residents that care about their community and has become a great inconvenience as it is part of a walk through from Kings Cross to the Domain and the main walkway for the invalid pensioners that live in Stephen Street. Many trees have been removed over the last few years with the last one falling in a recent storm.

Stephen Street is now a sandy heat bank. We had to fight to save a tree that was planted last year for \$1500 and approved by housing – now scheduled for removal for no good reason at all - but as a compromise to keep the raised garden bed it occupies! The tree is so far, organized by residents and approved by Housing, is the only replacement for the removal of four old growth trees – once part of a grove that attracted the roosting of the Powerful Owl pictured. The Owl has not returned because the trees are gone.



The last old tree in November 2015 Cnr Forbes and Stephen St.



Powerful Owl in Stephen Street 2014



Stephen St with pavers removed and tree removal Nov 2015



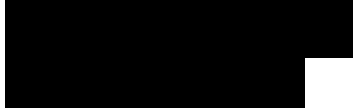
Tree falls due to heavy rain over months, missing topsoil and pavers and branches heavily pruned on one side only.



Cnr of Forbes and Stephen Streets Woolloomooloo, is beginning to look like a slum, after loss of its trees and is a worksite left unattended since November 2015 adding to the negative psychological impact of shoddy maintenance on local community.

Work on this site needs to be resumed with care and commitment to repair the destruction of an established natural habitat and once delightful walkway. The private contractors responsible for this ongoing disaster should be sacked immediately and replaced with professional and reliable tradesmen.

Stephen Street is a prime example of the unprofessional, careless and destructive contracted work currently being funded by Housing NSW.



Woolloomooloo 2011