

**Submission  
No 7**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE  
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

**Organisation:** Gwydir Shire Council

**Date Received:** 22 July 2021

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021

The Secretary  
Committee on Community Services

**Submission to the Committee on Community Services and the inquiry looking at options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage**

According to Martin, Beer, Morris, Paris and Budge (Australasian Journal of Regional Studies, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2021):

*Gwydir Shire Council is in north central New South Wales. In 2017/18, the shire had a population of 5,104, which has declined slightly over the last decade. The median house price (three bedrooms) is \$168,000, and the median weekly rent is \$120. The annual average wage and salary income is \$38,267, marginally higher than the minimum wage of \$37,398. While housing prices are relatively affordable when compared with metropolitan and regional cities, the average income is low. The Gwydir Shire agricultural economy is based on beef, sheep, and dryland farming. Local housing issues include the quality of housing stock, availability for farmers retiring off their farms, fit for purpose housing, including aged care housing. The relative isolation of the two main towns has seen the council support local housing over time in several ways.*

*These include supporting long standing local community groups providing aged care housing, a non-government aged care facility, owning local caravan parks (which provide long term accommodation), acting as mortgage guarantor with the local Regional Australia Bank, and working in partnership with the State Government to manage and maintain local public housing stock. (29 properties that it manages: 18 aged care units, six commercial premises, three low-income houses and two residences that are used by medical professionals). Council also supports a community group (Radiance Club of Bingara) to deliver seven residences for people in need, with a focus on sole supporting mothers and widows. Councils own aged Care facility is a 36-bed residential facility. It includes a 10-bed dementia secure area. The Naroo Advisory Committee developed during the building stage of the facility and continues to go from strength to strength. The Advisory Committee not only undertakes fundraising for items for Naroo residents, but it is also a consultative body ensuring community input is included in any strategic planning initiatives undertaken. All these activities are facilitated by the Gwydir Shire Council.*

Following severe drought and threats from bushfire it is expected that the next census will show a decline in population and increase in average age across the Gwydir Shire. In response to this the Council has been running a Tree Change campaign to attract new residents. In just a few months, three families have committed to moving to the Shire with a significant number of other families in serious consideration of the move. Of the three families moving to the Shire, two have filled long standing employment vacancies and a third will establish their own business providing locally grown vegetable produce (currently unavailable) at a commercial level. All three families have been unable to secure affordable, fit for purpose accommodation.

From a longer-term perspective Gwydir Shire has responded to this demand by bringing forward a residential subdivision which will be available to the market in the coming months. The Council has had dialogue with local builders about the potential to build speculative

affordable accommodation on the subdivision, but to date has been unable to find a provider with capacity to deliver such a project.

There are currently early explorations of creative “meanwhile” use of Council’s conference and training facility ‘The Living Classroom’ in Bingara as well as reviewing cabin accommodation options as temporary dwellings for relocating families in the short term. However, a long-term solution to ensuring access to fit for purpose affordable accommodation is still required. For instance, of the 29 properties managed by Council, only 3 are available for low-income families, this not to say the other 26 are not in valid use – indeed they are, however it does highlight the need for additional stock.

In short Martin et al identify Gwydir Shire as a highly capable and highly active stake holder in the provision of social and affordable housing. However, there is far more that could be done, should the resources to do so become available. As noted in the Australian Journal of Regional Studies, Vol. 26 No. 4 2021 Gwydir Shire is one of the most active local government authorities in Australia when it comes to securing fit for purpose housing for its residents. Unlike larger centres with large sustainable not for profit organisations filling the role of “Community Housing Provider” there is no such organisation to take this burden in Gwydir Shire.

In small regional and rural communities such as Gwydir Shire, this burden falls to local government. Whilst recent trends have moved away from seeing local government as a service provider, this is not necessarily feasible in regional and rural NSW - where it may be more prudent to look to local government to fill the role that Community Housing Providers (CHP’s) fill in larger communities and for local government to take the lead on social housing and affordable housing provision growth.

Gwydir Shire is investigating the creation of additional short term accommodation options for residents who are required to either vacate their properties temporarily or longer if substantial damage occur to their dwelling following a disaster situation such as bush fire or flooding. The options are being designed to have a dual purpose when not required for emergency accommodation such as short term rental cabins or a respite centre for people with a disability.

### **Opportunities in Gwydir Shire that could be realised in partnership with the State Government:**

“Meanwhile use” development of existing buildings and land

Provision of affordable housing and or prefabricated temporary accommodation on Council land and residential subdivision to provide temporary accommodation to new families in the Shire. These new families include:

- Tree changers
- COVID-19 career changers (for instance people from overseas travel businesses; small gym’s etc. that have closed on the coast and in the cities)
- Young trades and professionals wanting to start their own business
- Emergency services personnel such as paramedics etc. who need a steppingstone between moving to the country for an affordable housing purchase and a demonstrated capacity to service a loan (employment history in the area)
- Women over 50 years of age with limited superannuation and capital

Support to expand Council’s Community Housing Portfolio

- Purchase of existing fit for purpose or close to fit for purpose stock
- Purchase and renovation of non-fit for purpose or near fit for purpose stock

- New builds

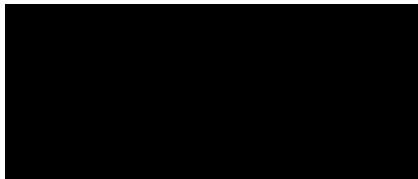
**Barriers:**

Insufficient trades and service people to meet demand of local repairs and maintenance, let alone speculative building.

Excess of non-fit for purpose housing stock

Insufficient fit for purpose housing stock

Insufficient temporary and or short to medium term accommodation



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