

**1. QUESTION:-**

**The Hon. Robert Brown:**

Given that the departmental policy is to assist public housing tenants transition into home ownership by encouraging the sale of existing housing to public housing tenants, can the Minister tell the Committee how many public housing tenants outside the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong areas have applied to purchase such homes and how many of these applications have been approved?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

I will have to take that question on notice

***RESPONSE:***

Since 2002/03, 241 properties have been sold to Housing NSW tenants in the Northern NSW Division and the Southern and Western NSW Division (excluding the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Wyong, Gosford, Wollongong and Shell Harbour areas).

## **2. QUESTION:-**

**The Hon. Robert Brown:**

I refer to the relativities between metropolitan NSW and rural NSW. What is the average rental received for a three-bedroom public housing property in Sydney and for a similar property in rural NSW? What is the average time that people remain on the housing register in metropolitan Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong compared to the average time on the register in rural NSW?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

It depends on where we are talking about in rural NSW. Of course some rents are cheaper in some rural areas than in metropolitan areas. Every year we ascertain the market rent of all our properties. We then look at what our tenants can afford to pay to live in those properties by looking at their income and working out the percentage that they can afford to pay in rent. At the end of the day, the difference in rent does not matter; the department focus is the ability to pay. The other questions are specific and I will endeavour to get the correct answer.

## **RESPONSE:**

Public Housing/Aboriginal Housing Office tenants as at 30 September 2007 in 3-bedroom cottage

	<b>Average weekly rent paid*</b>
Sydney	\$ 127
Rest of NSW	\$ 112

\* Approximately 90% of Housing NSW and 80% of Aboriginal Housing Office tenants pay subsidised weekly rental.

The number of people on the housing register varies and changes constantly. The number of people listed on the state-wide housing register in June 2007 was approximately 44,864.

### **3. QUESTION:-**

**Chair:** Will the introduction of metering be part of this process?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

Yes, we are introducing metering. For some properties it would be very difficult to meter so we allocate those charges on a pro-rata of the home units in a particular block. We also have a Community Greening Program. We allocated \$780,000 towards that, so it is not small fry; it is not an offhand amount. We want to expand our garden projects, with a focus on our housing estates, particularly in rural areas. So whether it is in the city or the country, we have these projects popping up everywhere – Claymore, Macquarie Fields, Mount Druitt, Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay, Tumby Umbi, Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo – and they are working really well.

We are retrofitting a lot of light globes in our houses and seeing solar hot water heaters and electricity systems fitted to a number of houses. I am very committed to this aspect of the challenge that the Premier has given me. I have a lot more to give to you but I do not want to bore the Committee now. Perhaps I could forward that information to the Committee if you have an interest in that.

**Chair:**

We will take the remainder of that on notice. I appreciate that.

### **RESPONSE:**

#### **Designing Out Maintenance:**

Housing NSW occupies a unique position in the residential property industry with over \$27 billion worth of assets which require approximately \$300 million worth of maintenance annually to keep homes habitable, safe, and functioning.

Housing NSW has consulted widely with the property industry and other stakeholders to determine how it can reduce its maintenance liability and increase environmental sustainability through more intelligent building design.

As a result of the consultations, the *Designing out maintenance* approach was launched and incorporates new design requirements that seek more robust, environmentally sustainable and comfortable buildings which provide reduced on-going running costs for both the Department and tenants.

These requirements are currently being piloted in four redevelopment projects in Parramatta, Kingsgrove, Armidale and Queanbeyan, with a further two at Lidcombe and Chester Hill which are currently in the master planning stages.

The design requirements are also being reviewed by an independent building research group. The review of individual projects will help measure the success of the design features and provide guidance for wider implementation in future projects.

Some of the measures include using more robust building materials, such as full masonry walls, coloured metal roofs, rainwater tanks, high-grade water pipes and solar hot-water systems.

## **Community Greening:**

In September this year, a further \$780,000 investment into a NSW Government Community Greening program was announced.

The community greening project will expand to include 80 new garden projects with a focus on social housing estates and rural areas. This includes Claymore, Macquarie Fields, Mount Druitt, Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay, Tumby Umbi, Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo. The funding will also continue to support the employment of two senior horticultural experts who will provide expert advice to gardens like Bidwill.

The Community Greening program was established in 2000 and gives new life to social housing by providing open space for people to come together and participate in a range of activities, including gardening.

Over 50 acres of land on public housing estates has already been devoted to community greening projects creating a more enjoyable and greener environment for Housing NSW's tenants. Around 3,000 residents currently participate in training and environmental activities on the 130 projects across NSW.

Gardening not only improves health and wellbeing, it encourages community participation, beautifies urban environments, promotes recycling and sustainability, and increases community ownership of public spaces.

The Bidwill community garden is a great example of a fully sustainable garden which incorporates environmental features such as compost bins and water tanks, and provides fresh produce to the local community.

This partnership goes beyond the garden walls to serve the broader community through innovative environmental education programs, including gardening projects in local schools.

## **Water:**

Under the Reshaping Public Housing reforms, the Government asked public housing tenants to make a contribution towards the cost of their water usage, which until recently was paid in full by Housing NSW. The Government committed to continue to fully pay for connections and maintenance.

Previously, public housing tenants used an average of 50 kilolitres per household more water a year than those who rent in private housing.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal estimated that three thousand million litres could be saved if public housing tenants used the same quantity of water as other households.

Under Stage 1 of water usage charging, introduced on 5 December 2005, each Housing NSW tenant paid a water usage contribution of 4.1% of the tenant's net rent. This amount was capped at \$7 per week.

Since 5 March 2007, as public housing tenants used less water, the percentage water charge reduced from 4.1% of net rent to 3.3% of net rent. The maximum charge of \$7.00 per week was reduced to \$5.00 per week and for a single pensioner, the maximum charge is approximately \$2.10 per week.

Compared to four years ago, this group of residents are now saving the equivalent of 4,600 Olympic size swimming pools in water annually.

Under Stage 2 of the program, tenants living in properties that have a separate water meter are being charged for the water they actually use.

Other tenants will continue to pay a water usage contribution based on a percentage of their net rent.

Sydney Water data shows that water usage by Housing NSW tenants in separately metered homes has reduced by 29%.

The Government has committed that any money saved by charging for water will be re-invested into the public housing system, helping the Government to build, acquire or substantially upgrade 30,000 homes over the next 10 years.

In addition to these measures, the NSW Government is undertaking a \$9 million dollar water conservation retrofit program. The WaterFix Program involves the installation of water saving devices to public housing properties. Approximately 70,000 dwellings have been retrofitted to date in the Sydney metropolitan area.

This program is being expanded to other areas of the state and when complete will involve approximately 128,000 properties which is expected to save NSW the equivalent of 2,700 swimming pools annually.

### **Blacktown Solar City:**

Housing NSW is proud to be part of the Solar City project in Blacktown which will see 100 solar hot water heaters and 140 solar electricity systems fitted to Housing NSW homes and unit blocks to reduce residents' energy bills and generate clean electricity.

These measures are expected to save each household approximately \$250 a year in energy bills, which is a significant saving.

Sixteen houses in Amy Close have been the first to have their solar appliances installed, with the remaining installations to continue over the next two years.

This will also include solar electricity systems being fitted to 40 unit blocks to supply energy to power common area lighting.

Housing NSW's 11,000 households in the Blacktown City Local Government Area can take up offers of community advice, home energy audits, discounted energy appliance and free energy efficient light bulbs. This could contribute to the fight against global warming by reducing up to 13,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases over the life of the pilot.

Low income households are at greater risk from climate change impacts, with energy and water costs taking up a larger proportion of essential income. Social housing residents in the Blacktown Solar City area can also take up offers such as community energy advice, home energy audits, discounted energy appliances and free energy efficient light bulbs.

Funding for the Housing NSW component of the project includes \$1.3 million from the Australian Government and \$714,000 from Housing NSW.

The Blacktown Solar City project is a \$37 million project that will utilise \$15 million of funding from the Australian Government and \$22 million of in-kind cash contributions from consortium members including BP Solar, Blacktown City Council, Integral Energy, Landcom, Big Switch Projects and ANZ.

#### **4. QUESTION:-**

**Chair:**

How much did the Department of Housing spend in government advertising in 2006-07 and what did it spend in the previous two years?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

I will have to take that on notice. We do not have a large amount of money for advertising.

#### **RESPONSE:**

In 2006/07, Housing NSW incurred \$575,917 advertising expense which includes recruitment advertising and other advertising costs, such as EOI for property redevelopment and public tending.

In 2005/06, Housing NSW spent \$349,223 on advertising expense which includes recruitment advertising and other advertising costs, such as EOI for property redevelopment and public tending.

In 2004/05, Housing NSW spent \$605,142 on advertising expense which includes recruitment advertising and other advertising costs, such as EOI for property redevelopment and public tending.

**5. QUESTION:-**

**Chair:**

Are you aware of any workers employed by the Department of Housing or employed by companies undertaking contract work with your department on 457 visas?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

I am not aware, but I will take that on notice. The director general says that he is not aware of any.

**Chair:**

Do you have specific procedures that the Department of Housing would undertake to check whether workers are on 457 visas?

**Mr Matt Brown:**

It is an operational matter so I will ask the director general to answer.

**Mr Allen:**

I think that information would be drawn out as part of pre-employment checking but certainly the department does not take any active steps to engage people from overseas for our operational staff. I am not aware of anyone on a 457, but we will certainly take the question on notice and check.

**RESPONSE:**

Housing NSW does not employ staff on 457 visas. Pre-employment checks include ascertaining individuals' citizenship and residency status.

Companies undertaking contract work for Housing NSW are required to observe both Commonwealth and State statute laws in regards to the employment of 457 visa holders.