

**Submission
No 146**

**INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

Name: Ms Sandra Langtree

Date received: 28/02/2014

27th February 2014

The Director
Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

socialhousing@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Director,

I am writing to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into social, public and affordable housing.

I am a public housing tenant and have held a tenancy since 1994. Sadly public housing has fallen into decline due to ongoing failure of government housing policy by both sides of government and the lack of political will to find a better way of managing and maintaining housing stocks.

Management Failure:

- Introduction of Reshaping Housing Policy in 2005 sent public housing spiralling into an unsustainable and unworkable service.
- State-wide sell-off of public housing properties. Funds from sell-offs not being generated back into new housing stock.
- Ineffective management of stock.
- Housing stocks allowed to fall into decline, due to lack of maintenance.
- Shortage of funds to adequately maintain properties Majority of maintenance jobs need to be approved through Assets Team, leaving major works held over for years.
- Funding waste -Interim band-aid fix it jobs carried out by unskilled contractors.
- Tenants inappropriately housed in dwellings that are not suitable to their circumstances.
- Lack of trained professional services to care for tenants who suffer with mental illness when they cease taking prescribed medication, causing social breakdown, unable to cope with taking responsibility for financial matters and day to day living. Reliance on police to intervene and in some instances arrest tenants.
- Anti-social behaviour is rampant due to lack of appropriate support services.
- Lack of social cohesion
- Majority of tenants sole income is derived from Centrelink services.
- Rent policy continually changing – ongoing rent increases, clawing money from tenants.
- Unfair water charges – two tiered water system. Tenants who don't have water meters are charged for water usage from household income.

- Political motive for mean spirited charging of rent on carbon tax rebate.
- Tenants receiving Centrelink payments are made to pay 30% of income in rent when gross household income reaches a threshold of \$1001 pw.
- Rent policy creates a disincentive to work – unfair and disadvantages young people when they reach tertiary education level.
- Lack of Commonwealth Funding

Impacts of management failure:

- Lack of adequate housing stock causing long waiting periods to be housed. This contributes to family breakdowns, financial difficulties, and homelessness and health issues, including mental illness. Children of homeless families often don't attend school due to their housing crisis.
- Sell-off of housing stock breaks up communities.
- Tenants who are housed suffer stress and anxiety from living close by to tenants who suffer mental illness, and drug addiction causing volatile behaviour and domestic violence.
- Housing staff encourages tenants to call police to report their neighbours for anti-social behaviour. It is up to tenants to solve the problem, causing feelings of hopelessness in preventing intrusive behaviour in the home environment.
- Frustration and feelings of powerless to get maintenance works carried out.
- Lack of maintenance exacerbates health issues.

Conclusion

The current housing situation is now critical. Housing is a basic human right, not a privilege. The two major party politicians have neglected the social and affordable housing crisis for too long. With worsening affordability, due to the housing market being driven by investment and overseas buyers driving up house prices, there is a rising demand for social housing and long term accommodation.

Social, public and affordable housing stocks need to increase to accommodate societies most disadvantaged and vulnerable people, low income families and service workers. It is with hope that this inquiry provides a holistic outcome and recommendations to the NSW government and power makers for massive improvements to housing policy and better outcomes.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Langtree