

## **INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS**

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



## Submission

# Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Disturbances at Macquarie Fields

# CAMPBELLTOWN CITY COUNCIL

## PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

### INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

#### INTRODUCTION

Campbelltown City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a formal submission to the Legislative Council inquiry conducted by the Social Issues Committee into the public disturbance that occurred in Macquarie Fields in late February 2005.

The disturbances, which are subject of this inquiry, occurred within the Macquarie Fields Public Housing Estate which is one of five large and homogenous public housing estates located in the Campbelltown Local Government Area. These estates occupy 500 hectares and comprise over 7,000 dwellings accounting for 14% of housing stock in the Local Government Area and almost 16% of the City's total population. These estates contain areas of high unemployment, low incomes, high single parent families and difficulty with access to services and transport.

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE

***Policing Strategies and resources in the Macquarie Fields area, particularly in the immediate period leading up to and following the motor vehicle accident involving two fatalities on 25 February 2005***

The public disturbances of February represent infrequent and unacceptable behaviour that required a direct and firm response. Campbelltown City Council is satisfied that the action taken by police was appropriate to the issues presented.

From Council's perspective the Macquarie Fields Local Area Command takes a proactive and co-operative approach in their role in the community. This is evident by their partnership with Council in a number of initiatives:

- Police Accountability Community Teams (PACT) is a forum for the community to express its views about police visibility, police deployment and crime generally. It also enables local communities to hold local Police Commanders accountable for crime reduction. Council has been an active participant in the Macquarie Fields PACT meetings since its implementation in February 2002.
- Active membership of the Campbelltown Community Safety Committee auspiced by Council and provision of expertise in the development of Council's Crime Prevention Plan
- Joint operational projects with Council's Compliance staff and Rangers. eg; trail bike enforcement program and assistance in undertaking safety audits in public housing estates

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The Macquarie Fields Local Area Command has been actively addressing issues pertaining to young people through the Crime Management Unit. The Unit includes a dedicated Youth Liaison Officer, two Domestic Violence Officers, an Ethnic Community Liaison Officer and a Crime Prevention Officer.

### ***Government programs and service provision in the Macquarie Fields area, including local, state and federal programs.***

There is a diverse range of government services in Macquarie Fields. Council is a provider of human services and infrastructure in this area. Services include library services, recreation services comprising of a swimming centre and indoor sports centre and child care services. Council also provides physical infrastructure including a youth centre, senior citizens centre and neighbourhood centre which are operated by community organisations. The many passive recreation areas and active playing fields in Macquarie Fields are owned and maintained by Council.

Council works closely with residents, community organisations and government departments in organising and running community development projects. An example of this is working with the AFL to introduce a program for young men in Macquarie Fields. This is being adapted from a successful program in Western Australia and will address the issues of school drop-out, low self esteem, alienation and anger.

The greatest need is for better coordination between government agencies at all levels and the delivery of services. In particular this applies to the planning, funding and delivery of human services.

Better coordination between the three levels of government will enable complementary programs and provide more comprehensive information to service providers and the recipients of the services. Improved coordination would give the general community greater confidence in the level of service being provided by government agencies.

The need to improve collaborative and integrated planning and service delivery was a common thread throughout the consultations Council undertook in preparation of its Social Plan in 2004. A number of opportunities were identified, including: better processes for sharing information and knowledge; developing joint solutions to address community needs; seeking joint funding; avoiding duplication of services; investigating options for consolidating administrative functions to increase efficiency; and career progression opportunities for workers.

A strong message from the community has been for government at all levels to continue programs that are working well and to avoid short term funding that raises expectations before resulting in frustration when funding ceases and programs disappear from the estate.

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Short-term non-recurrent funding is ineffective in providing solutions to long-term issues such as those faced by the residents in the Macquarie Fields public housing estate.

Campbelltown City Council chairs the Campbelltown Coordination Group comprising the State and Federal Government human service agencies operating in the Campbelltown Local Government Area. This objective of this group is to improve coordination and collaboration between government agencies particularly in the provision of services in the public housing estates

The ongoing commitment by all parties to this process will be an important part of improving service delivery across the whole Local Government Area

### ***Non-government services and service provision in the Macquarie Fields area***

Through consultations with both government and non-government organisations during the preparation of Council's 2004 Social Plan, there is a strong emphasis on the need and opportunities to strengthen the capacity of the community sector in the Macquarie Fields area. This particularly focuses on how organisations can increase their ability to meet community needs through better ways of working together and maximising resources.

There are many non-government services operating in Macquarie Fields. A number of these are based in Macquarie Fields while others operate on an outreach basis. The services cover many areas of need but are by no means comprehensive. Many services face rising operational and administrative costs that far exceed any increase in funding resulting in some non-government organisations having to reduce their hours of service. Council is concerned with this ever increasing problem of funding being insufficient for the delivery of effective services.

All levels of government need to strengthen the capacity of the community services sector to meet the needs of the local community. Particular issues include the need for:

- Resources and funding to match population growth and demographic change
- Better collaborative planning between:
  - Non-government organisations
  - Government and non-government organisations
  - Different sectors, i.e. community services sector and business
- Regional approaches and planning, as many organisations provide services across the Macarthur region
- Cyclic communication with the community
- A process for ongoing community involvement in all aspects of planning

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- Flexibility and adaptability of services and facilities to meet a range of diverse needs

A key strategy suggested to address some of these needs is to develop a process for greater collaboration between and integration of services. The Macarthur Community Forum and the Campbelltown Coordination Group were identified in Council's Social Plan as having key roles in bringing this about. Particular aspects to this are:

- Sharing information and knowledge
- Developing joint solutions to address community needs
- Seeking joint funding and avoiding fragmentation of funding
- Avoiding duplication of services
- Investigating ways to consolidate administrative functions to share and reduce costs

In addition the community has clearly expressed a need for greater involvement in the planning and decision-making processes of all levels of government. With an emphasis on having a forum to communicate needs and opinions and to engage in meaningful discussion with Council, State and Federal Government.

### ***The underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to individual and collective acts of violence and social disorder***

The Macquarie Fields estate has a high welfare dependency and a level of intergenerational unemployment. Overall the estates are becoming areas of social disadvantage and are physically and socially isolated from the rest of Campbelltown.

Research has shown that unemployment leads to a general lack of structure in daily life, a higher likelihood of poor diet, lack of physical activity, drug and alcohol problems and chronic high stress. In an area of high unemployment these conditions are common enough to have an impact on social norms and expectations

In metropolitan Sydney in 2001, 44.4% of people aged over 15 had completed Year 12 or equivalent. In the Macquarie Fields public housing estate the figure is only 17%. In 2001, 44.9% of people living in the Macquarie Fields estate were aged under 20 compared to 26.6% for the Sydney metropolitan area (ABS).

Considered together, the conditions above describe a situation where achievement is difficult and the possibility of social unrest is increased. Council's Social Plan has also identified that crime, disorder and fear of crime are major concerns for parts of the Campbelltown community.

No single organisation can focus upon all the factors which influence and contribute to the events that occurred at Macquarie Fields. Well targeted measures must focus on the range

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and circumstances which influence these incidents. Because of this, a range of stakeholders need to act cooperatively, together with the local community, to implement these measures.

The development of local crime prevention partnerships involving organisations such as police, local councils, government departments (Department of Community Services, Department of Housing, Area Health Services, Department of School Education), local business and community representatives are seen as a positive way of addressing these issues.

### **CONCLUSION**

It was evident through consultations for the 2004 Social Plan that the community of Campbelltown has concerns about the amount, density, availability, quality and maintenance of public housing in the area.

Council supports a greater mix of public and private housing than currently exists in many suburbs in Campbelltown, such as Macquarie Fields, and is a partner in the Minto Redevelopment Program. This is a prime example of a strategy to increase the mix of public and private housing (to 30% public and 70% private) that combines renewal of the urban/physical environment with supporting and building the community through improved social capital and services.

In addition to continuously improving the coordination between local services in addressing needs in the Macquarie Fields public housing estate, Council considers a program of urban and community renewal such as the Minto Redevelopment Program to be a positive way of improving the local amenity, community capacity and access to opportunities for residents in this area.

Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour requires communities and all levels of government to work together in implementing strategies that aim to make such behaviour more difficult, risky and less rewarding to commit.

Council is committed to working in partnership with all levels of government and the police to create neighbourhoods which have strong social bonds, where people take pride in their street and "own" their public places, where the needs of all groups in the community are met and where people regard the area as an attractive and safe place to live and work.

Campbelltown City Council trusts that this submission has provided the Inquiry with an insight into the issues facing the Macquarie Fields community and the wider community as well.