

**Submission
No 44**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Clarence Valley Council

Date received: 25/02/2014



25 February 2014

Reference: DWS1236548
Contact: Des Schroder

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission Clarence Valley Council

A lack of affordable housing has been identified as a priority issue for the Northern Rivers area since 1999. It has been documented as a key issue for the Clarence Valley since the Clarence Valley Social Plan 2005. The Clarence Valley Housing Interagency identified a doubling of demand for housing in the years 2002-2004 and that some people were forced to live in cars or on the street due to the shortage of affordable rental properties. Clarence Valley is currently considerably undersupplied with social housing 2.9% compared with NSW 4.9%.

In terms of projected demand, the Department of Planning predicts an additional 7,000 dwellings will be required in Clarence Valley by 2031. This is a 38% increase on the current level of occupied private dwellings. Approximately 16% (or an additional 1,100 dwellings) will need to be affordable rental accommodation for low-income households by 2031. Of these 370 would need to be social housing to meet the current NSW level of supply of social housing and 730 would need to be affordable housing. Excluding social housing, which may be provided by Government or community housing providers, 1 in every 10 new houses created would need to be affordable private rental. This is conservative, as it does not address existing shortfalls in private rental.

The annual Rental Affordability Snapshot undertaken by Anglicare showed that on 13 April 2013, of the rental properties available there is a mismatch between our demographic and socio-economic profile and the rental properties available. Clarence Valley is undersupplied with smaller more manageable dwellings, having only about one third the NSW rate of provision of this housing type. Our high median population age and proportion of 'lone person' and 'couple with no children' households indicates a current need for such dwellings which will increase significantly with an aging population.

Council responded to this need by initiating the Clarence Valley Affordable Housing Project in 2005 as a three-year jointly funded project under the then Area Assistance Scheme and CVC. A full time Community Development Officer - Affordable Housing was employed to develop and deliver the Clarence Valley Affordable Housing Strategy (CVAHS) which was overseen by an Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. That Strategy has been instrumental in:

- Quantifying the need for affordable housing based on waiting list evidence;
- Identifying suitable Council properties to contribute to affordable housing;
- Underpinning partnerships which have resulted in new affordable rental properties;
- Building the capacity of the local sector to work collaboratively on new initiatives; and
- Raising awareness of local housing issues.

The Strategy had clearly articulated a range of roles for Council in addressing this growing local issue. After much consideration Council determined that with the current resources available, it could reasonably: 'advocate' for increased provision; 'promote' provision; 'provide pathways' for the private sector to provide; 'contribute' some unused suitable land; and 'partner' with providers to demonstrate its commitment, leadership and what could be achieved at a local level.

This committed approach and actions enabled Council to take advantage of Federal Government funding to further its achievement of the CVAHS goals. Its successful application to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) for the Housing Affordability Fund (HAF) Round 1 for the Clarence Valley Affordable Housing Reform & Infrastructure Package (CVAHRIP) was the result.

The CVAHRIP was an innovative project that builds the capacity to continue developing sustainable housing growth for the area into the future. It involved:

1. Planning Reforms;
2. Infrastructure development and sale of Council land - 32 blocks of land at reduced prices;
3. Development of 16 affordable rental dwellings with a community housing provider CHL and NSW Housing;
4. Evaluation and development of a Best Practice Model.

While the evaluation was largely focused on the CVAHRIP, it also includes learnings from the broader CVAHS as these actions are also reflected in the CVAHRIP and are critical for others embarking on a similar journey to understand. The evaluation also considers overall project design, risk management and project management for the same reasons. Simply, they all form part of our Best Practice Model. This document along with the Affordable Housing Strategy, the Affordable Housing Policy (1 in 10 units built by private developers to be "affordable"), the Clarence Valley Housing Needs Analysis Report and the Adaptable Housing Guidelines are all on Council's website at

http://www.clarence.nsw.gov.au/cp_themes/metro/page.asp?p=DOC-CTE-60-53-25

One last comment, while Council achieved quite a lot from 2006 to 2013 it was made possible by the dedication of an externally funded project officer. Dedicated project officers can make a huge difference as facilitators of the process and in forming partnerships so crucial to success in this sector. Most Councils cannot afford permanent officers dedicated to this role and there is much debate whether this is a core function of Councils anyway, especially given the perilous financial position of many rural Councils in particular.

Yours faithfully

Des Schroder
Director - Environment, Planning and Community