

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

Organisation:

Name: Hon Clover Moore

Position: Member for Bligh

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Date Received: 22/04/2004

Theme:

Summary

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The Hon. Jan Burnswoods MLC
Chair, Social Issues Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

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Dear Jan

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN / WATERLOO SUBMISSION BY CLOVER MOORE INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR BLIGH

I write this submission as the Independent Member for Bligh, which has included the west Redfern, Darlington and Chippendale area since 1999. My submission therefore does not detail issues relating specifically to Waterloo, which is outside Bligh.

Redfern contains areas with concentrated social and economic disadvantage, large numbers of sole parents and unemployed people who live with substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness. There are a significant number of alienated young people, evidenced by high truancy rates, high child protection notifications and anti-social behaviour.

Redfern includes a significant urban-based Aboriginal community and is an important symbol to Indigenous people across Australia, attracting a steady flow of visiting Aboriginal people.

Despair, deprivation and drug-related crime and violence have long afflicted "the Block" and impacted on nearby precincts/ surrounding communities.

I am deeply concerned about the failure of Governments to seriously address the entrenched social and policing problems and urban decay. The violence following the recent tragic death indicates the volatility of the situation and the profound lack of trust and avenues to express community anger.

When this area came into Bligh, I urged the Premier to take action. The Government responded in 2002 by establishing the Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP), which is funded until June 2004 to coordinate responses and implement new strategies. It is vital that the Government ensure the RWPP continues for at least ten years so that real change can occur and hope given to the next generation.

Policing strategies and resources

The poor life chances of disadvantaged people living in Redfern greatly increases the likelihood of involvement in crime and contributes to the high levels of drug-related crime, violence and anti-social behaviour centred on the "Block" and its environs, and on the nearby large Department of Housing estates.

The mistrust and antagonism that have long characterised relations between the Aboriginal community and police continues. Some Aboriginal residents have told me that they and their young people feel victimised by police. Many of the people I spoke to following the recent violence feel that they are victims of racism. These concerns must be heard and investigated.

I believe that much of that sentiment could be historically based, rather than reflecting what is happening in Redfern Command today. Redfern Police, under Local Area Commander Dennis Smith, have been building better relationships with young people through street retreat camps away from the "Block", taking young people to Nippers surfing programs, and regular sport and recreation programs.

Redfern Command has allocated two staff as Police Youth Liaison Officers, who meet young people in the street, travel on the school bus with them, and act as mentors to keep them out of trouble.

I commend Redfern Police for this proactive work and urge Redfern Command to continue to build positive relationships with local leaders, youth, children and parents, and respond effectively and sensitively to policing concerns.

Restructuring the Redfern Police Local Area Command under Superintendent Dennis Smith has ensured that it:

- Is more strategic, responsive and proactive;
- Gives priority to crime "hot spots", drug dealing and robberies;
- Uses "intelligence" to direct police response; and
- Attracts new resources through joint operations with Transit Police and neighbouring Police Commands, and for major policing operations.

The Anti-Drug Strategy has reduced drug dealing and the incidence of drug users coming to the area to sell drugs; indeed crime is at the lowest level for five years. This emphasis must be maintained as illegal drug dealing results in major impact on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

I am very concerned that Redfern police need to have specialist staff and additional resources in order to effectively deal with the longstanding policing problems in the area. In August 2003, I requested the Minister for Police and Police Commissioner to upgrade the classification of inner city Commands to ensure that adequate resources to tackle the complex policing matters they face.

The poor state of Redfern Police Station has reduced the Command's capacity and weakened morale, and I raised this concern with the Government in January 2003. The current accommodation hinders modern policing practices. It is inappropriate for staff, cumbersome for dealing with people in custody, increases risk and reduces access for local residents who need police assistance. It exposes NSW Police and the NSW Government to risk of legal action from staff, prisoners and the public due to accident or injury.

I welcome the commitment to move Redfern Police Command to the former TNT tower next to Redfern Station. However, the Government must ensure adequate facilities and increased staffing for Redfern Police Command for the long term.

Other government programs

Education

I strongly opposed the Government's closure of Redfern Public School in 2002, as it was contrary to the community building goals of the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project.

Closing Redfern Primary marked a failure to acknowledge the importance of locally based schooling, and the vital role schools play within local communities. It did not address falling enrolments and high rates of non-attendance, and failed to anticipate the dramatically changing nature of inner Sydney as a result of the Government's urban consolidation policy.

I share the local communities strong belief that Government-owned facilities, such as **Redfern Public School** site and the former Rachel Foster Hospital site, should be made available for community services now the Government has closed them. Redfern residents have long required open space, recreational facilities and social support services. The NSW Government should ensure that public land and facilities remain available for known future needs, or the community will face huge social problems without them, or huge expense re-purchasing expensive properties.

Alexandria Park Community School has developed sports programs and employed outreach workers to encourage children to stay at school. The Government must recognise the community's concerns about one large campus catering for a much wider community, and ensure that Alexandria Park Community School provides special help for students who are struggling with the transition from home to school, or who face additional disadvantage.

Darlington Public School, which provides award-winning programs for local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, must keep its current staffing and needs additional resources to tackle the specific concerns its students face.

Government policies have encouraged "educational choice", but closing all local schools and leaving only one large campus at Alexandria Park reduces the choice for public school students and their families.

I strongly support retaining a choice of local public schools.

Substance Abuse

Alcohol and drug programs are sorely needed for those who are addicted, and the recently established Alcohol and Drug Task Force must call on new resources to expand services and ensure they are appropriate for the needs of the diverse community in Redfern and Waterloo.

At the New South Wales summit on Alcohol Abuse in August 2003, I raised concerns about chronic street drinking and overloaded alcohol detoxification, treatment and rehabilitation services. The Government must act in response to the concerns raised at the Summit, and improve the drug and alcohol service system.

My proposal to establish a specialist service for people with both a mental illness and alcohol dependence was accepted, and is being considered by the Government. The Government will also consider my proposal for "Wet Centres" as a creative response to the conflict caused when chronic drinkers congregate in streets and parks, providing a safe alternative and access to services.

The Government must ensure that tenants with alcohol and drug problems in Redfern and Waterloo Department of Housing estates receive the support they need, and provide specialist drug workers for Aboriginal people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Mental Health

Hospital, prison and acute psychiatric facilities cover for the lack of accommodation and community support for mentally ill people, who are discharged into crisis refuges, boarding houses, caravan parks or motels and risk becoming stuck in a vicious cycle of life on the margins.

The Government must respond urgently to recommendations of the Legislative Council Inquiry into Mental Health Services in NSW. Supported accommodation places must be greatly expanded, with extra staffing in mental health crisis teams. I have raised this matter in Parliament since then, and while the Government has announced administrative changes, the badly needed expansion of supported accommodation and Mental Health Teams remains to be carried out.

The Government must ensure that tenants with mental illness in the Redfern and Waterloo Department of Housing estates receive the support they need, and provide specialist mental health workers for Aboriginal people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Transport

Redfern Railway Station is not physically accessible, is run-down and incapable of handling the 19,000 passengers who use the station each day. It cannot handle future growth in passengers.

I have urged the Government to bring forward upgrading of Redfern Station to address these concerns. The Government must fast-track redevelopment of Redfern Railway Station.

The Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project's RED Strategy is supposed to ensure future transport needs are met; however there are no clear plans to establish an integrated system of public transport that links local transport with the rail system.

Non-government services

The RWPP has contracted consultants to carry out a Review of Human Services in the area. This review will include all Non Government Organisation (NGOs) services and some "non-core" Government services.

Community members have pointed out that the Government still cannot identify what services it funds in this area, and there appears to be no consolidated database of organisations and the services they provide. This is a failing of Government, rather than of community based organisations.

Some community members are concerned that the Review of Human Services will reduce funding to social services, rather than the Government seriously tackling the problems. The response of some NGOs to the Review of Human Services demonstrates that this Review is also seen as a threat to service providers, rather than an opportunity to improve services and provide additional help to those in the community.

These concerns may mean that the Review has limited chances of making a real difference, and will simply repeat past failed experiences. The Government must ensure that resources for disadvantaged people in Redfern/Waterloo are maintained and expanded, and this ***Review should not be used to reduce services or support.***

I am concerned that Government provided "core" services such as public schools, public housing, alcohol/drug, mental health, employment, and other services should be assessed in addition to those services provided through NGOs. Many of these services are far more important in the lives of disadvantaged residents, and should be examined.

The Review of Human Services is examining co-location of complementary services, creation of a "back office" to provide administrative support for NGO services, and a "one-stop-shop" for Aboriginal clients. I am concerned that similar strategies have been repeatedly discussed within the community welfare sector, but have not been implemented.

The Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project must ensure that any strategies agreed with the community are implemented, so that service provision is expanded and improved.

Community organisations have previously suggested a range of administrative reforms to help NGOs provide more services, and I have raised many of these concerns with the Government, including:

- Supporting a range of organisations by funding diverse organisations;
- Streamlining accountability for multiple funding sources to reduce paperwork;
- Providing funds over longer periods than one year to allow long term planning;
- Recognising the value of community building programs and strategies as well as direct service provision;
- Providing funds to cover the increasing costs of service provision, including award wages, public liability insurance, WorkCover premiums, and rental costs;
- Feedback to funded organisations and the community from funding bodies; and
- Funding based on community need rather than program frameworks.

The Government should ensure that its funding processes help rather than hinder the provision of much needed services.

Redfern/Waterloo Project meeting community needs

The Government's Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project has been funded for two and a half years to develop strategic action for the area's entrenched social problems and urban decay. The longstanding problems of this area require ***a long-term commitment.***

I have urged the NSW Government to ensure that the RWPP is continued for at least 10 years, so that real change can occur and hope given to the next generation.

I support this Project because it involves all New South Wales Government agencies and the City of Sydney. I understand that the Commonwealth Government has agreed to participate in some aspects of this work; however the cooperation of all levels of Government is required to adequately address these concerns. The Government should ensure that Commonwealth agencies are active participants in the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project.

The original aim of the project was to improve both the social and the physical environment and the Project has funded:

- Extra short-term youth and family support programs;
- An intensive family support service run by Barnados;
- An Aboriginal in-home support service run by Mudgin-Gal;
- A family support program for non-English speaking background and migrant families run by Centacare;
- A street team to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour;
- A sports development coordinator at Alexandria Park School; and
- An employment and enterprise taskforce.

It is vital that these programs are continued, monitored and modified to ensure they are effective and responsive to changing circumstances.

For low income and disadvantaged communities in Redfern, the Government must fund adequate support programs to respond to crisis, as well as long-term programs that provide hope and opportunity through education, training and employment.

There is a high level of frustration in the community that it has taken so long for these social programs to be implemented and that they have not been integrated into the existing network of services. I am concerned that the long term employment and alcohol/drug plans have not yet begun, and that the plans for the RED Strategy have been delayed.

Community members have also raised concerns that the ***RWPP has failed to genuinely engage and consult the community, which may limit its potential to achieve holistic, lasting solutions to social problems.*** I have previously raised this matter with the RWPP, and requested improved communication and dialogue with the community.

I am concerned that the plans for "social mix" changes in some proposals for Redfern/Waterloo will simply shift problems by removing disadvantaged groups from this community. The Government must ensure that affordable housing is maintained in the inner city, including Redfern/Waterloo, and that social problems are addressed, rather than "moving the deck chairs around".

Developmental projects such as the UNSW Waterloo Community Development Project and the Waterloo Community Garden should be actively supported, and I call upon the RWPP to provide resources to ensure that these activities continue and are expanded to cover Redfern.

Breaking the cycle of intolerance and mistrust is our ongoing responsibility, and I urge the Government to initiate **community building programs** to bridge the gaps between the Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal residents, service providers and Government agencies.

The **Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project's RED Strategy**, which has been initiated to redevelop the physical infrastructure for Redfern, Eveleigh and Darlington, options for Redfern Railway Station, open space, a shopping precinct and housing will be released in April. The draft RED proposals identified that the population of Redfern/Waterloo is likely to double as a result of redevelopment.

Residents are concerned that the plans will result in overdevelopment and the sale of public assets, rather than improve the urban environment. I share residents' concerns that the current problems in Redfern and Waterloo may not be addressed if the Government's focus is on private development and the sale of Government property rather than providing needed infrastructure and services.

The plans must focus on safer streets, better public transport, and reduced traffic impacts, increased open space, and better community facilities. **The upgrade of Redfern Railway Station** must be brought forward. The Eveleigh railway yards redevelopment should protect industrial heritage, with a focus on jobs for local people.

These infrastructure projects should provide **vitaly important training and employment programs**, to ensure a future for the local community. Employment and training will provide real hope for disadvantaged groups and low income earners.

Proposals for the future of "The Block"

The recent violence in Redfern highlights the urgent need to address the progressive ruination of housing on the "the Block". Various redevelopment schemes have been developed, and some long time residents will wonder if the Aboriginal Housing Company's current **"Pemulwuy Redevelopment Project"** will also fail to materialise; however, this is a critical opportunity to get action and reverse the resulting degradation.

Given that this is private property and not a Government project, I support the provision of **in-kind Government and private sector help** to ensure that the Aboriginal Housing Company can carry out this major redevelopment project, and to ensure that the resulting development is **appropriate for Aboriginal residents, well managed and financially viable**. The redevelopment needs to be designed to ensure that drug dealing and crime are prevented rather than helped by the physical design.

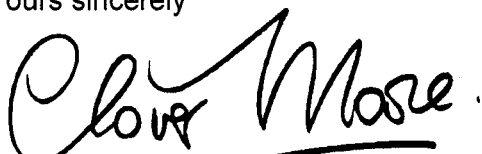
Real change is likely only if the local community — Aboriginal and non-Indigenous — are part of the process. This project will be seen as a measure of the success of the Government's response to the serious concerns about this area, and the Government must provide practical help to ensure that redevelopment solves the long-identified problems.

Redevelopment must also ensure that the symbolic importance of this precinct to Indigenous people across Australia is recognised and included. It is likely that this precinct will continue to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Sydney and it needs to have adequate facilities to provide for visitors and the cultural practices which have groups of people who congregate and socialise outdoors.

Summary

The longstanding concerns that have affected Redfern and nearby precincts require long-term, proactive and holistic strategies, and the Government must commit to a 10 year program to tackle these complex issues and to provide resources adequate to this task. The Government must also ensure that community services, infrastructure and facilities are adequate for current and future needs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clover Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Clover Moore
Member for Bligh