

Submission  
No 61

## INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

**Organisation:** Lake Macquarie Park Residents Association  
**Name:** Ms Pam Meatheringham  
**Position:** Secretary  
**Date received:** 18/05/2009

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## **LIVING AT THE SANCTUARY RESIDENTIAL PARK**

**Pam Meatheringham. Single Pensioner Homeowner**

**Pam is also Secretary Lake Macquarie PRA**

**Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

### **Nine Mile Beach Caravan Park. (1<sup>st</sup> name)**

**The Building of this park commenced approximately 22 years ago by a well known character named Joe Sacarsan. Well known in the Caravan and Camping world and highly respected by those residents who chose to make this their desired way of living.**

**During the first couple of years the park consisted of mainly caravans with annexes but as more and more roads were laid Manufactured Homes were brought into the Park and a community of Residents consisting mainly of retirees was built.**

**Joe who was part owner and on site manager, so I am told, was most helpful To all residents and is remembered by these folks in a most dedicated way. Rental at the time was approximately \$47 per week. Pensions then were \$112.15 (single) and \$187.00 married couple rate.**

**Rent increases were usually in the region of \$1 – 2 per week sometimes slightly higher. It was quite common for Park owners at this stage and Joe in particular to give an Increase of say \$1 to \$2 for the following 3 years. In this way Residents were happy knowing what additional cost they would be paying for say the next 3 years.**

### **The Park Caravan Park (2<sup>nd</sup> name)**

**I personally came to live on this Park in January 2000. Although never having considered this type of living previously I could see it as a safer place for my husband to wander around after having his 3<sup>rd</sup> stroke and being rather careless of wandering onto the main road where we lived.**

**We had a nice house which was converted into two self contained units of 3 and 2 bedrooms. The smaller one was rented out for \$100.00 per week and this covered much of our utilities expenses.**

**At the time of selling our home we received \$167,000. and spent \$90,000 to \$95,000 for the purchase of our manufactured home We had taken the**

**precaution prior to moving into a park of obtaining all information about living in a manufactured home from our accountant and he advised us financially we would be better off as we would be making the big step of entering into an affordable housing lifestyle.**

**The rent we were to pay upon entering the park was \$79.30**

**I personally arrived at this Park in January 2000 with a fixed rent of \$79.30 for 3 years.**

**The on site managers present at this particular time were exceptionally helpful and kind to residents living at the Park. They organized many functions and it was good to know that such capable people were around. Because of the activities and help by owners and managers who cared about those living in this unique lifestyle and the companionship of happy residents living around we found it an enjoyable way of living. So much entertainment took place on the park we did not spend very much money outside on entertainment etc.**

**In early 2005 the Park was sold and a new owner, together with new Managers arrived. Lots of changes then took place in everyone's life. Gone were the days of friendship and caring by those running the park and a gradual downhill schedule took place.**

**In the meantime we are given rent increases that are gradually going up and up and currently where I live my current rent is \$120 per week. Or \$6,240 per annum and what do I get for my \$6,240 per year, (1) my council rates are Paid (2) garbage pick up twice a week... If I were still living in my own home outside of the park I would be paying approx \$750 per year as a pensioner for rates (50% of rate charge) which would include my garbage charge PLUS THE TWICE YEARLY PICK UP OF LARGER ITEMS WHICH RESIDENTS OUTSIDE OF PARKS GET BUT OUR PARK OWNER WILL NO LONGER PICK UP FOR US.**

**THIS IS A SERVICE WE HAVE TO PAY PRIVATE CONTRACTORS FOR - some Residents have paid \$60 to have a washing machine removed.**

**To some the \$120 per week rent sounds quite cheap when comparing to House Rentals but you must remember that WE OWN OUR OWN HOMES we are only renting a very small piece of land for the house to sit on.**

**We are responsible for Full house coverage for house and contents insurance. We pay our own water costs, Electricity, Gas, Repairs and maintenance to our homes, maintenance to gardens, etc.**

**We are treated as second rate citizens by Park Owners and their employees Who are not friendly and seem to delight in making the statement IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH WHAT YOU GET THEN YOU CAN ALWAYS LEAVES. Many elderly are frightened to make contact with office Staff.**

**Some elderly tell me that because of their personal situations they have to depend on family to assist them to pay their bills and d are most concerned as more and more people lose their jobs as this could affect them too.**

**Those of us who have held onto a little of our savings and even if we could get what our homes are worth would still not have sufficient capital to purchase outside the Parks. Single Pensioners find this so called affordable living as very unaffordable and many tell me of their hardships in daily living by receiving single pensions and paying such things as high medical attention and pills.**

**High rents can be dealt with at Tribunal Hearings however very rarely we receive results in our favor as most times the Park Owners will win.**

**Our situation, to us, seems to be one of despair and we feel deserves an enquiry as to why we who worked so hard all our lives now find ourselves In the too hard basket.**

**Rents started to increase quite dramatically and single pensioners were the ones to suffer most of all.**

**Residents who normally had paid their rent into the office were no longer allowed to do this and had to arrange direct debit payments. The elderly who usually met on Thursdays to pay their rent and have a chat and a cup of tea**

Were no longer encouraged to come near the office which put those who rarely left their homes, in a more isolated position. It was around this time That a lady died in her home and because she had no family to visit she was not found for 10 weeks after death. The garbage removal assistants finally reported to the office their suspicions.

This owner only lasted 10 months and then the Park was sold once again to a Park Owner by the name of Paul Craig , a park owner from the central coast whose current task is to clear one of his parks of manufactured homes in order to build High Rise units – he has succeeded. News filtered to us from these Parks of this mans reputation and we were more or less pleased to hear that the land our park is situated on is classed as waste land – flood prone – and nestled in along Jewels Swamp. It is not suitable for high rise.

Unfortunately our homes cannot be guaranteed as completely safe from future alterations to the Park (Land) as with a D.A. being passed by council We could all be given notice to leave in order that the Park Owner may want to use this land for a different type of housing., thus resulting that future sales to new Residents would be impossible and having no-where to move to we would be forced to accept smaller amounts of money than homes are worth by selling to the Park Owner and apply for public housing.

There are 180 sites at The Sanctuary and of these 169 are Pensioners.

Working Couples	=	5	2.7%
Working Singles.	=	6	2.3%
Pensioner Couples.	=	48	26.5%
Male single pensioners.	=	32	18%
Female single pensioners.		89	49%

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There are 11 different rents at the Sanctuary ranging from \$109 to \$124 per week with a current rent increase of \$8 per week currently being taken to tribunal as an excessive rent increase.

**The disparity in rent increases continues the exploitive, unfair and discriminatory practice of the Park Owner which creates disharmony and discord to the detriment of park residents and the parks lifestyle as a whole.**

**Our Park owner is a greedy businessman who has taken away most of our services (including on site managers, security, certain garbage removal) and yet takes approx. \$1.5 million dollars a year in site fees with running costs of Less than \$303,000 dollars per year. His net profit being a startling 72%.**

**The value of this Land as per the Lands department is \$2 million dollars. Our homes would be worth \$27 million dollars. Where is the fairness in this type of living?**