

**Submission  
No 128**

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

**Organisation:** Northern Rivers Housing Forum Steering Group  
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## **The Northern Rivers**

The Northern Rivers comprises the 7 local government areas of Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore Richmond Valley and Tweed on the border adjoining the Gold Coast. It covers approximately 21,000 square kilometres and is home to 290,000 people. It is a fast growing area with high housing costs, low housing supply, low levels of social housing and relatively low socio economic conditions. The Northern Rivers Housing Forum with a membership of over 300 individuals works to address homelessness and the critical affordable housing shortage in the Northern Rivers

High population growth in region is driven predominantly by in migration of retirees and is leading to a replacement population that is generally wealthier than the existing population but dependent on a strong local health & community service workforce. This local workforce is increasingly unable to afford to live near the region's key service centres.

With social housing making up only 3.5% of total housing stock, renters in all income brackets compete for housing in a very competitive private market. This market does not respond to demand for housing by low to medium income households and government measures – National Rental Affordability Scheme, Building Stronger Regions – have had little impact outside capital cities.

Inadequate access to affordable housing also impacts further on the region's high level of homelessness due to overcrowding, unsuitable dwellings and precarious tenancies.

'Housing' was the most frequently cited issue raised during community engagement activities (involving 1,200 people) in the development of the 2013 Northern Rivers Regional Social Plan. .

## **Supply of Social & Affordable Housing in the Northern Rivers**

- Social housing represents only 3.5% of total housing stock (NSW 5%)
- 10+ yrs waiting lists for 2 and 3 bedroom social housing in Ballina, Byron, Tweed; 2-10 years for balance of region
- 31% shortfall between housing production and housing demand - 2006-2011 (difference between Govt growth projections and housing production figures)
- Increasing number of 'unoccupied dwellings' to 2011 indicating growing use of stock for holiday or second dwellings.
- No 'affordable' private rental properties advertised for people on income support payments in Ballina, Byron, Tweed and Lismore (Anglicare Aust snapshot 2013)
- 74% of housing stock is detached houses – predominantly 3 bedroom; – 28% of population live in lone person households

- High incidence 'other' housing types (mobile homes, caravans, houseboats, tents) - 3.8% compared to .9% for NSW. This form of low cost accommodation is diminishing through site redevelopment and change of use.
- Projected 25,000 eligible for social housing in the region by 2021 compared to current social housing stock of 2,891

### **Demand for Social & Affordable Housing in the Northern Rivers**

- Median household incomes are 69% of the median household incomes for NSW; 53% of households earn less than \$1,000 per week (NSW 38%)
- 38% of low income renting households in housing stress (NSW 29%)
- Increasing proportion of renting households (28%)
- 29% forecasted population growth to 2036 (Sydney 31%) predominantly 1-2 person, older households
- Median rents for predominant housing type in coastal lgas - \$360 to \$480 p/w
- Access to affordable housing consistently cited as major challenge by homelessness service providers; rough sleepers in the region make up almost 20% of the State's rough sleeping homeless population.
- 36% of population reliant on government payments and pensions (NSW 27%)
- Predominance of part-time/casual employment in human services, retail and hospitality industries – 51% of workforce employed full-time
- Employment opportunities concentrated in region's major centres; very limited transport options
- Coastal economies impacted as employers lose local workers on low-moderate incomes unable to meet housing costs

### **Government Action:**

#### **Coordination & Integration**

The FACS Localisation agenda offers opportunity for improved coordination and integration between FACS divisions and NSW Health. This also provides opportunities for place based housing strategies which takes account of varying regional conditions and capitalises on local opportunities including collaboration with regional groups of local councils, ngos and existing cross sector entities.

A strengthening of the critical cross-portfolio link between Housing NSW and Department of Planning & Infrastructure and Treasury would support the government's role in the social housing system and the necessary transformation of the private rental sector to increase affordable housing supply

#### **Increasing housing supply:**

Management transfer to regional community housing providers can assist these organisations to build their capacity as social and affordable housing providers. These existing housing providers have strong and established partnerships within their communities to ensure the needed tenancy infrastructure and business connections for efficient property maintenance and management. This also significantly benefits local economies through employment creation and utility of local goods and services. Title transfer to business ready community housing providers would enable further capacity through leveraging new affordable housing development.

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) has supported the development of the community housing sector and delivered additional affordable housing. Locational targeting of incentives under this scheme would support greater investment in affordable

housing development in high growth regional locations and strengthen the impact of regional development strategies..

Regional development policy requires an explicit objective to increase affordable rental housing supply. This is an essential and central strategy to build and support the economy and wellbeing of regional communities experiencing housing market failure. This strategy would include critical regional housing supply and demand data collection.

The support and leadership of Government is required to target investment and create new funding and investment products. A number of alternative funding mechanisms have been put forward to increase housing supply. These include sourcing superannuation funds, housing supply bonds, social benefit bonds, conditional below market interest rates and philanthropic and corporate investment.

Government's promotion of alternative tenure models such as Community Land Trusts and land-leasing options would serve to raise confidence and further extend affordable housing development possibilities.

A related and critical role of Government relates to improved Consumer Protection through coordinated tenancy legislation including caravan and mobile home tenancies.

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