

Submission
No 58

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

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Our Reference: OUT 1860/09



23 March, 2009

Hon Ian West MLC
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Re: Inquiry into homelessness and low- cost rental accommodation

The Upper Hunter Shire Council would like to raise some issues and concerns that are affecting the Shire and the wider region. Upper Hunter Shire Council is a member of a Strategic Housing Working Group. This working group is bringing together important stakeholders across four local government areas in the Hunter Valley. The increasing demand for low – rent accommodation is an increasing concern for our Council.

Upper Hunter Shire Council LGA Snapshot, (2006 Census Data)

The total population of the Shire is 12,896; people, the average household income is \$882/per week, while the Australian average is \$1027/per week. The main source of employment in the Shire is from Agriculture with 20% of the population and only 7% of the population working in the mining industry.

There are around 5000 dwellings in the Shire in a land area of 8,100 sqm. This large distance with limited transport links leaves the small communities isolated, 91% of these dwellings are established separate homes. The rental market makes up 28% of these dwellings, with less than 4% being community housing. A two year waiting list exists for people living in Scone and Aberdeen needing to move into Community Housing. This shows the high demand for low cost rental accommodation; the median rent for the Shire is \$480 per month.

For Upper Hunter Shire Council the ageing population is of great concern with 21% of the population over the age 60 at the time of the 2006 Census. The Council will be looking at ways to cater for this ageing population increasing the demand for independent living units and aged care beds. Council currently manages 18 independent living units, one small cottage, two low income housing units and 16 low care beds in an Aged Care facility. All of these facilities have waiting lists.

With very few statistics available, it is known that homeless youth and adults exist in the Upper Hunter 'Couch Hopping' is very apparent amongst youth and adolescents. These youth have no fixed address and move between friends or acquaintances for weeks at a time. This shows the need for Crisis Accommodation for young people and adults. The Upper Hunter is over 100km from crisis accommodation that accepts young people and men.

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Response to Terms of Reference

- A) *Models of low cost rental housing outside mainstream public housing, including but not limited to co-operative housing and community housing:*
- Local Government would benefit by assessing all possible low – cost rental accommodation models that are currently working well in Australia and internationally.
 - Within the Upper Hunter Shire, Community Housing NSW has been selling property in the smaller towns that are isolated. An assessment of this is required to understand the reasoning of this model. The new model that may be developed from this inquiry needs to assess all areas, City and Regional, the needs are very different.
 - A National housing strategy would benefit all the stakeholders, ensuring everyone is working towards the same goal of providing low cost housing for those in need.
- B) *Methods of fast tracking the capacity of providers to deliver low- cost rental accommodation in a short time frame:*
- State & Federal Government needs to assist Local Government and not for profit organisations build and maintain housing aimed for the low cost rental sector. This may be through providing grants to efficient and effective providers.
- C) *Strategies to attract private sector investment in the provision of low cost rental accommodation.*
- Specialised loans that assist organisations, Local Government and the not for profit build low income housing with subsidised loans would assist with increasing the amount of housing available.
- D) *Current barriers to growth in low cost rental housing*
- Maintenance of old buildings/housing increasing, reducing the funds available to investment in new infrastructure, specific grants to improve old low income housing stocks may assist with the investment in new housing developments.
- E) *Strategies to avoid concentrations of disadvantaged and grow cohesive communities:*
- The assessment of development applications needs to consider the environment in which the low income housing is being constructed. Regulations need to be established to ensure concentrations of disadvantage do not occur.

Yours faithfully



Daryl Dutton
GENERAL MANAGER

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