

**Submission
No 243**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Millers Point, Dawes Point & The Rocks Public Housing Tenants
Speak

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**Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Rocks
Public Housing Tenants Speak**

**Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into
Social, Public and Affordable Housing**

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

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Millers Point – home and community

Millers Point is our home. For some of us, it is the only home we have ever had. For many more of us, it is the only place we will ever call home, because we love living in the community here. That is why we want to stay in Millers Point: because it is our home and our community – not because its fashionable, or because of the views.

Some of us remember when there were no harbour views, when there were views of wharves and woolstores and bondstores instead. Back then work on the wharves made a lot of noise and dust, and when coal-burning ships came in they put soot and dirt everywhere. There was a stigma about Millers Point. But those of us who were here then, we didn't care; we lived here because we worked here, or our parents worked here. And we don't care that Millers Point may be fashionable now.

Millers Point wasn't always public housing. For many years it was like a company town, of people employed in the maritime industry. Some of us worked in that industry, and the expectation was that we would have secure housing here at the end of our working lives. We view public housing here in the same way that other people view their superannuation: as security in our lives after work. Those of us who came after the maritime industry should have that security too; it has been very important to the whole of our community.

We've also lost things at Millers Point over the years. We had the wharves, the fishing and the fishshop, and the King George V playground, which has been

corporatised. And many people have had to put up with properties not being properly repaired.

So we are not asking for special favours: we're staying at Millers Point because we love it, because it is our home and community.

The condition of properties

We are disappointed that many properties are in need of repair, and that numerous properties have been left vacant by Housing NSW. A lot of the time, the repair needed is very simple. Many problems with roofs could be prevented by simply cleaning out leaves and plants from the gutters. Also, the backyards that used to be regularly tarred could be simply covered, to prevent drainage problems. There are vacant properties that could be used if they were cleaned and painted.

Leaving properties vacant just makes problems of disrepair worse, because worsening problems are not noticed until they are very bad and affecting a neighbouring property, and the cost of repairs is much greater. Keeping properties vacant is also wasteful in terms of the rent that could be generated, and the housing that could be provided to people on the waiting list, or sleeping on the streets.

Heritage

Millers Point is a heritage area. The buildings are part of the heritage; their use as public housing, and the community that lives in them, are also parts of the heritage.

All of these aspects of Millers Point's heritage are recognised in Millers Point's listing on the State Heritage Register.

We've always campaigned for long-term residents to be able to stay here, such as when an elderly tenant passes away and a son or daughter has been living with them. But we are also very welcoming of new people. They can keep to themselves – that's fine – or they can become part of the community.

We are the living heritage of the place. We know the culture of the place. In summer, we sit out the front of our houses and the tourists walk up and ask what this place is about, and we tell them all the history.

Millers Point – the people

Below we present some brief details about a few of us, our lives in Millers Point, and what Millers Point means to us. Of course, everyone who lives in Millers Point has their own story. We encourage you to meet with us and hear from us directly about our lives and community in Millers Point.

Robert Flood High Street, Millers Point

My family has lived in Millers Point for more than 100 years. My grandfather lived on Kent Street; he was killed in France in the First World War. My father fought in the Second World War; he came back and worked on the wharves here, and lived with my mother and us kids in High Street.

I've always lived in Millers Point, in a few different places, but I'm in High Street now. I've got two nephews who live in Millers Point too. My grandkids don't live here, but they love it here when they visit. Actually, a person by my surname built the Garrison Church up near the Argyle Cut in 1840 – I don't know for certain we're related, so I don't know for certain how long we've been here.

I worked on the wharves like my old man. I first went to work in the woolstores when I was 15. Then I painted and repaired ships. We used to fish a lot too, from the harbour.

In 1990, I moved back into High Street after my father died, to care for my mother. I did that for years, before she died. I'll die here too. I'm not going anywhere else.

Jill*

I didn't grow up in Millers Point; I came later. But now it's so familiar to me. I've seen people born here and grow up here. I'm a pretty private person, but I know all the faces, and I know people to talk to. I'm out walking every morning and the way I go and the people I see are all very familiar to me.

The community here is so important, especially if you're older and especially if you're on your own. The community is what you've got. The thought of having to move from here... it's terrifying. It really is. Starting over, when you're older... I really am frightened.

name changed at tenant's request.

Allana Walton Trinity Avenue, Millers Point

I have always lived in the city. I grew up in Darlinghurst and attended Fort St. Girls High. So, when I moved to Millers Point 17 years ago, with my 7yr old son, it felt like coming home. And we did make Millers Point our home. My son went to [redacted], attended all the youth community activities and has forged life-long friendships in the neighbourhood.

Millers Point is unique in so many aspects, but it is the sense of identity and community that the residents feel, which makes it a great place to live. It is an egalitarian community, in keeping with its working class history. This is a community that cares about and supports each other. We look after our vulnerable and elderly neighbours; many of whom are petrified by the proposed sale of housing in Millers Point. At least half of the people living in Millers Point are over the age of 60, many have lived here all their lives. The dislocation, the loss of friendships and social networks, not having a sense of belonging – will have a disastrous effect on their health. The whole community is living in fear and uncertainty.

We don't want to move. Millers Point is our home. This is our community. The proposed sale of our homes is re-writing the history of Australia's first settlement and its maritime history. Millers Point has a proud working class history; this should not be sacrificed to the highest bidder.

One of the catchcries for tourism in this area is "Come and Meet the Locals". It is the people who live in Millers Point that are central to the character of Millers Point. To sell our homes would be an act of piracy.

Glenda Cox

Dalgety Terrace, Millers Point

I was born in Harrington Street, The Rocks, 63 years ago. When my youngest brother was born (nearly 61 years ago) my family moved to Dalgety Terrace, Millers Point. I still reside in that same family home today, where I was raised by my parents with my five brothers and later I raised my daughter here.

I attended Lance Kindergarten and Fort Street Primary School as did my father and his family and my brothers before me and my daughter after me. We also played and learnt various sports, games and crafts etc. at the King George V Recreation Centre and represented the centre in basketball and netball.

My family has been traced back to the 1860s, having lived and worked in Millers Point and The Rocks area. I can still hear my mother saying to me be careful what you say to people around here because you may be related to them.

I cannot imagine living anywhere else as this community has always been like an extended family. We were taught respect and to look out for and help each other, whether it be doing messages or any odd jobs for the sick and elderly or if anyone was in need.

When I was at High School, I found it upsetting, and still do, that the parents of the

girls I made friends with would ask 'what suburb do you come from?' & when I replied 'Millers Point' they would tell their children not to have anything to do with me as I came from a 'bad area'. Now today, as the area is being gentrified we are told we are not good enough to live here as we are 'Public Housing' tenants. According to the Police, Millers Point has the lowest crime rate in Sydney.

My father worked on the waterfront and used to walk the 'Hungry Mile' looking for work in the early days, when times were tough. The Walsh Bay and Darling Harbour wharves used to be our playground as kids, we would go fishing and swimming, and now the Walsh Bay wharves are luxury apartments and offices, while Darling Harbour is now being called 'Barangaroo' and is being reconstructed. How sad to see this once working and busy waterfront gone and probably soon forgotten.

As I said previously I cannot see myself living anywhere else as this has been and I hope will continue to be my home and playground. So I ask the NSW Government to give great consideration for the continued tenancy of Public Housing in Millers Point, Dawes Point and The Rocks.

Wendy Ford

Dalgety Terrace,

I moved from the north side of the harbour to Millers Point in 1979 and being a working single parent with a six year old child my needs were, affordable housing and a secure well run school close to my work environment in case of emergencies. Millers Point supplied all these needs, and what I discovered was a unique close knit community whose families went back generations in the area, many of the neighbours having been born in the houses they lived in. In thirty five years as a

resident I have witnessed many changes in the area, but the one thing that has stayed solid is the closeness, support and friendliness of this unique community. My submission is to argue for the maintaining of this community and one common landlord i.e. Department of Housing New South Wales.

Historic and Cultural Significance of Millers Point

Millers Point Village constitutes a rare and historic part of Sydney, retaining the majority of its early buildings, which display the traditional character of an earlier century workers village. It has been shown and discussed many times in the various media outlets as being of State significance because of its historic buildings and longevity of some of its residents whose families trace back five and six generations. It was for these reasons the houses were Heritage listed and to this day some of these families continue to live in their family homes, some being born in the same house they live in.

Uniqueness of the Location

The area of Millers Point is recognised as a truly unique community not just within New South Wales but Australia. This was acknowledged in 1987 when the Department of Housing commissioned a heritage survey. In the same year, a conservation study declared the whole of Millers Point should be retained as a cohesive example of 19th and early 20th century townscape. In a fast changing world more than ever people are attempting to make connections with their histories and cultures. Millers Point is an area where part of early white settlement in Australia

has some of its roots, and its Community in the heart of Sydney CBD offers domestic and international tourists ready access to explore this cultural heritage that has so far been preserved.

Responsibility for Millers Point Houses and their Residents

The majority of the houses in Millers Point and Dawes Point have always been maintained by Government Departments. In 1936 the Maritime Services Board took over the running of the houses from The Sydney Harbour Trust. Then in 1986 The Department of Housing took over the running of the houses from the Maritime Services Board.

Sydney City Council draft Local Environment plan for the City states the majority of the area should be a conservation zone, with the study establishing what is at stake for Millers Point is its totality as a precinct and its coherence due to the fact that ownership of the large majority of residences are in the hands of the state and therefore one Landlord and has therefore helped to maintain its originality and coherence.

In 2005 the Department of Housing New South Wales obviously recognised the uniqueness of Millers Point Community by commissioning an Oral History Project to “add to the understanding of the history of Millers Point and its Community to assist in the formulation of management and interpretation strategies for the area by the various stakeholders”.

The Project Brief stated “that the long term residents of Millers Point provide a rich resource of oral information contributing to an understanding of the history of the area and the community”. It recognised the importance for Department of Housing New South Wales to understand “residents’ needs, expectations and the community’s attachment to the place and thus in the formulation of strategies, such as social housing, local area plan, community options and others”. The Oral History Consultants were expected to find what made this part of the city a community and how they saw themselves as part of Sydney and their aspirations for the future of their unique Community.

The Present-Day Situation of Millers Point Housing

The Auditor General’s Report of 2013 – “Making the Best Use of Public Housing” states there are three ways Social Housing in New South Wales is provided – Public Housing (79%), Community Housing and Aboriginal Housing (21%).

The current state of Public Housing in New South Wales appears to be in total disarray if the Community of Millers Point is any indication of how the rest of the state is faring.

As of June 2012 in Central Sydney there were 12,838 applicants on the waiting list and yet currently in Millers Point there are seventy empty houses and continuing to climb as this submission is being written, with the Minister for Housing continually telling the media she has no properties to house people on the waiting list.

Let's look at Millers Point as it stands today -

The Government commissioned a Social Housing Survey of Millers Point tenants, it has never been released and one can only surmise that it must have found in favour of the tenants, otherwise one would assume it would have been released some time ago to show the houses should be sold!

Over the last five years as houses in the area have become vacant for various reasons e.g. re-location, death, purchase of a property outside the area, not one of these houses has been re-tenanted and have been let run down to the point of needing major repairs, some having floor boards ripped up and not replaced by Department of Housing tradesmen, others with windows boarded up.

This brings up two queries why is the government losing out on all that rent? Why are they letting the empty houses become in such a state of disrepair that some are almost derelict? I have lost count of the number of people/tourists walking around the area who ask for directions then ask about the state of repair of the houses and why are so many of them empty?

With the transformation of what is now known as Barangaroo, there is fear among residents that the empty houses are being let run down to such bad states of disrepair in order for total redevelopment of just not Barangaroo but all of Millers Point. This would mean one of the most historic parts of White Australian history would be lost to present and future generations of Australians. No more school tours of our historical precincts of Millers Point!

Recently, after an outcry by residents, there have been some major repairs done where tenants' safety was at risk, but there is still a massive amount of work to be done. In the majority of the empty houses there are fairly simple repairs needed in order to make them habitable for people to move into, and thus help reduce the minister's waiting list and bring in some much needed revenue that we are told is lacking at the present time.

If on the other hand the houses are to be sold individually as we are told, then the majority will have to be sold at a reduced rate because of the state of disrepair of so many of them, thus again minimising the governments' effort to raise more capital to build more houses.

I hope this committee is able to continue to recognise the uniqueness of the Millers Point area and its community and preserve our heritage and right to continue being able to live under on landlord in an area which we all love so much and some tenants family history is so intricately linked.

C.R. Hinkley Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point

Firstly I would like to raise a number of general points ;-

1. The issue of two government agencies that manage social-housing properties. It is my understanding that in simple terms Housing NSW manage the leasing of the properties and that the Land and Housing Corporation manage the buying and selling of the properties. These agencies share different charters

and at times are in conflict. There needs to be a consensus of purpose between these two agencies.

2. That Housing NSW has given the vulnerable and disadvantaged priority for housing. This, the majority of us would agree, would be fulfilling the department's role. However, when one realises that this translates into housing the mentally ill, the drug dependent and the ant-social, without the back-up services they desperately need, it seems a recipe for a dis-functioning community. This is especially so when many such needy people are housed together in a small area.

I would recommend to the committee that there should be a ratio of tenants with these problems to tenants without, of say 2 to 8.

The department is not equipped to house and look after the mentally ill, the drug dependent and the ant-social. This should be the responsibility of a mental health agency, which can follow up with the services that these people require.

3. I would ask the Select Committee to examine at the *Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1948 (NSW)* (the LTA Act 1948) regarding the section on 'protected tenants' with a view as to questioning why government agencies are exempt from this act?

4. I ask that the Select committee to consider government re-funding of the Older Persons Tenants Service, which the NSW Government ceased all funding to the service on 30 November 2013. The committee may wish to consult the Older Persons Tenants' Service Evaluation Report (March 2013). An external evaluation of the Older Persons Tenants' Service was conducted by Judith Stubbs and Associates.

www.cpsa.org.au/files/OPTS/OPTS_Evaluation_Final_130320.pdf

5. Regarding maintenance. The Select Committee should examine how this is co-ordinated; whether the use of contractors is a viable and economic means of fixing repairs. It is my experience that Housing NSW rarely inspects the repairs to be completed before or after the work has been done. Therefore being at the mercy of the contractor, who can basically charge what they like.
6. When we speak of Social Housing it is easy to forget that we are speaking of **people's homes and communities**. The majority we are speaking of are hard-working or retired folk, who have lived in their social housing homes for many years, some all their lives. Who have built communities, bonds and networks of neighbours and friends. Who depend on those infrastructures and local services, such as their local general practitioner, around them.

Secondly I would like to submit a few points about my particular area : -

1. The Millers Point, Dawes Point and Rocks area is unique, not only in Sydney, not only in NSW, not only in Australia, but possibly the world! You have a continuous community going back over a hundred years with some families going back generations! The majority of the houses built here were for the workers on the waterfront. It has a wonderful tradition of hard-working people. The area was **not social housing**, being administered by the Maritime Services Board for many years. There were many families living here, where children grew up, married and they too lived in the area. It was very much a **village** where so and so was related to so and so. I remember a man, much to his chagrin, from outside the area who married into one of the families and was always known as so and so's husband. When the area was taken over by Housing NSW the majority of people in the area worked for a living. I still believe now that the majority of people either work for a living or have retired. However, we are still a vibrant, living, breathing, close-knit community.
2. There are several properties in the area where Housing NSW has spent a lot of money converting them from terrace houses into one bedroom units. The majority of these are now vacant (e.g. four units at Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point), which are in good condition and should be used to house people. Housing NSW is constantly complaining of a lack of funds, yet they are losing hundreds of thousands of dollars per annum by leaving properties vacant that are available to let.

3. I myself moved into the area in 1972 and was taken under the wing by three locals. It has been/is a privilege to live in this community where I have met many acquaintances and made dear life-long friendships. Where I have watched children grow up, where, until it closed, I was being served by the third generation at the corner shop.

4. We ARE A COMMUNITY! Since 1974 I have lived with my wife who moved here in 1958. She and I intend to stay in our home of 56 years! It is VERY IMPORTANT to keep this community intact. To keep this village with all it's informal and formal infrastructures, it's network of families and friends.

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