

**Submission
No 37**

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

Name: Mrs Marie Sillars

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The Director

Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing

NSW Parliament House

Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

SUBMISSION

By Marie Catherine Sillars,

By way of introduction, my name is Marie Catherine Sillars and I am 60 years old. I have lived in Social Housing most of my life in England and here in Australia. My earliest childhood memories are of an English Housing Estate where everyone looked after each other, street parties and outings.

In 1979 my husband was diagnosed with a serious illness and we knew that getting a mortgage would be impossible and so we went on to the Housing list and we waited. I had two young children and wanted to get settled. In 1986 we were offered a three bedroom house in West Ryde, NSW and were very happy to have moved into a good house in a very nice area. In those years we always found that mostly, the Staff of Housing NSW cared about their Tenants and any disputes were settled fairly. We would never have been able to own our own home due to the serious nature of my husband's illness so we took great care with our home as if it were our own property. The part of West Ryde that we resided in was a 'mixed' area of privately owned and Housing NSW homes and I cannot recall in those years any major social problems or stigma attached to the Housing NSW Tenants in the area. My Husband and daughter and her three sons still reside in that property and all was peaceful until approximately 4 years ago when a Community Housing project was built in the street. Since then there is regular police visits up and down the street and there seems to be a serious problem with mentally ill and people with drug & alcohol problems. My grandsons (aged 10 & 12) regularly walk the long way around the block to avoid walking past those buildings.

In 2003 my marriage ended and I moved to private rental in St. Marys, followed by a move to Woy Woy on the Central Coast. I was already back on the Housing list and knew that I had to wait again. In 2010 I still had not been told how long I would have to wait and my health was becoming a serious concern to my Doctor and family. I had a suicide attempt and a nervous breakdown and was very ill physically. I wrote to the then Minister of Housing (I apologise that I cannot remember the name) and I was visited by a Lady from the Minister's Office and she felt that it was urgent to get me nearer to my family and find me a place where I could feel safe and concentrate on getting well again. Within weeks I had a call from the Ryde Office of Housing and came to view this place on the Ivanhoe Estate. I moved in 4 years ago now and for the first time in many years I felt that I had found a real home.

The staff at Ryde Office (our CSO Kathryn Moxon) encouraged me to become involved in the local community and I quickly realised that there was a lot of potential to have a Tenant Group and get a lot of people involved and having a close, happy Community. I am one of the Founder Members of the Ivanhoe Estate Tenant Group Inc. and together with an amazing group of people we went to work to create a Community Centre where many activities were to take place. Housing NSW helped us with Grants as did Ryde Council and we have had much help in getting this Centre up and running with computers, craft sessions, library, BBQs and Tenant Group General Meetings. Working alongside Housing NSW Staff worked very well and sometimes we bridge the gap between Tenants and Housing Staff and I am extremely proud of the way this has come together and I am very proud of the amount of work that the Tenants here do and in doing so, enjoy each other's company and look after the vulnerable and frail Tenants around the Estate.

On a Sunday night March 18, 2012 I was watching the news (as were many others) and witnessed something that still leaves me in shock. Minister Greg Pearce and our local MP Victor Dominello were announcing to viewers that our home (the Ivanhoe Estate) had gone passed its "used by date" and that there would be a decision made in the coming months. Within minutes people were out on the Streets and were very upset by this. I went down on to the Street and told these Tenants that the Tenant Group (known as IETG) would look into this and call a public Meeting. The next morning I rang the Channel nine news desk and was told that the story had been "leaked" to them by Mr Dominello (obviously some political play without thinking about the impact this would have on the Tenants here). It would take 50 pages for me to explain to you all how many Meetings we have had with Politicians (Mr Pearce had told us in an interview that he released that information as he had a duty to the people of NSW and I asked him "well are the Tenants on Ivanhoe Estate people of NSW?") I honestly thought then as I do now, the Tenants should have been informed BEFORE the release to the media. We now have Community Reference Group Meetings every month, we have had Meetings with the Urban Planning people, we have attended Council Meetings and we have had Meetings with so many Bureaucrats that we hardly can keep up with all of this. We have been passed to this one and that one and spoken down to, laughed at and at times being made to feel like uneducated fools. The Ivanhoe Estate is now a place that is in absolute despair and people are frightened. It is a long time to wait whilst you know that these people are intent on taking your home and really have no care. I do not blame Housing NSW for this situation but I do blame Finance & Services and Land & Housing all mixed up into something called "Family & Community Services" which sounds like a very caring group of people and in my opinion could not be further from the truth. In essence, the Tenants on this Estate are being damaged and harmed by the determination to keep them "in the dark" for as long as possible in this situation. Many of the older Tenants here are convinced that when the decision comes that they will be placed into nursing homes, I would ask you all on this Panel "Would you want your

Mother or Grandmother to feel this way?" I have always said that to live in Public Housing is a PRIVILEGE not a RIGHT and feel that a mutual respect with each other brings about happy Tenants and happy Landlords but right now WE on the Ivanhoe Estate are fulfilling our duties to our Landlords but the Landlords are NOT fulfilling their duties by allowing maintenance issues to get to serious stage and generally not looking after the welfare of the Tenants. I realise that they too do not know the answers to our future either but there is a certainly a lack of the personal touch that we used to have with our local Housing Office and the Tenants here just are sitting waiting for the axe to fall on this place and I can assure you this will have some very serious effects upon the people who reside here with me in the tidy, happy little Village in Macquarie Park.



OBSERVATIONS BY A TENANT OF HOUSING NSW

Public Housing CAN & DOES work. It is necessary to house people from ALL walks of life. If they

remove this Public Housing Estate from Macquarie Park and allow privately owned high rise buildings to be put up here HOW are they going to rehouse to 600+ Tenants from here? How are they going to rehouse the people with families who cannot reside in high rise? Does this mean that people who for one reason or the other cannot own their homes cannot live near the Sydney City and have to be expelled out into the Western Suburbs? Is this not a form of elitism?

Elitism*** 1.** The belief that certain persons or members of certain classes or groups deserve favoured treatment by virtue of their perceived superiority, as in intellect, social status, or financial resources
The sense of entitlement enjoyed by such a group or class, control, rule, or domination by such a group or class.*****

Surely, the cost of moving Housing Tenants from one place to another is in a financial sense an incredible amount of money. In my view, the cost alone to the Government for the Staff of Land & Housing must be very expensive as they seem to spend a large amount of their time wandering around on this Estate joining in various activities even on weekends (overtime etc. Paid by the Taxpayers of NSW I would imagine)

The rents are constantly being raised and when I receive a raise in my Pension Housing NSW steps in and claims it and even though I realise that costs have to go up, it does not balance out as less maintenance is being done. Some people here pay full rent (\$500 plus) so where does all of the revenue go?

When things are in balance and obligations on both sides are being met, Public Housing works very well. This Estate was once referred to by a Housing Staff Member as the “Jewell in the Crown” of Public Housing. If this is so why is it necessary to demolish it to make way for high rise apartments mostly for the benefit of Asian Students attending Macquarie University (these units will mostly be bought by overseas Investors) as most Australian people cannot afford to buy houses in this area so I am asking ARE THE NEEDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC BEING IGNORED IN FAVOUR OF OVERSEAS INVESTORS? I fear that this is the case. I have been told by some Politicians and Bureaucrats alike that I am being simplistic and it is rather a selfish attitude to feel that as a Housing Tenant I have a RIGHT to live in such a wonderful place near transport and the University. The UAP people have described this “Utopia” like place that they envisage for this area with buildings, water features, transport hub and bike tracks...all designed for these wealthy, young trendy folk targeted to move in here certainly NOT Housing

Tenants.

Some may argue that there have been Housing Estates that have been demolished because of the serious Social problems and issues of neglect and places being demolished. Anyone who knows the Ivanhoe Estate would see that there are very little social problems and it is a very peaceful quiet place. The only time that things go wrong and where peace and quiet is disrupted is when the Contactors who are working on the buildings all around us are parking and using our Estate as a parking lot for their vehicles and as a dump for their beer bottles and lunch debris which the Tenant Committee here clear up every day so that our homes look neat and tidy.

In this instance all that I see is a grab for cash without any care for the people who will be negatively affected by the actions of the Politicians & Bureaucrats who hold our future in their hands.

I ask you to think carefully before allowing these people with dollar signs in their eyes to destroy the very fabric of the Public Housing system in this State. How many people will end up on the streets if this breaking down of the Public Housing systems is allowed to continue? This insistence that elderly people need to live in high rise buildings with lifts is a fallacy. "Vertical Villages" did not work in the UK and will not work here either. Tenants will become isolated and scared.

I apologise in advance for the 'long winded' Submission but in my 60 years on this earth (most in Social Housing of one form or another) and especially working with my colleagues on the Ivanhoe Estate Tenant Group, I have never been more afraid of the mistakes and disasters about to be brought down on the less fortunate people in NSW, and especially some of my neighbours and friends who have fled their own war torn Countries to come to this peaceful land called Australia, only to find themselves being moved on yet again by the State Government in NSW. I can guarantee that there are hundreds of Communities out there similar to ours so I hope that this Inquiry can discover and explain why these Communities are in danger of being torn apart to make way for impersonal, brass and glass hellholes.

I thank you all for being given the chance to Submit this document and wish you all luck with this Inquiry and I would ask that you all remember that we are people NOT numbers and statistics. We raise our families, we work, we pay taxes, we get old and we get scared.

Thank You

Marie Catherine Sillars

22nd February, 2014

PICTURES OF IVANHOE



In 2013 Ivanhoe Estate had a visit from Mr Robert Hawke – Our Community Centre



Late 2013 – Our Community planted vegetable gardens in the over 55's Section of the Estate



Inside our Community Centre where Tenants can use the Internet, Computer lessons to start

soon. We have knitting sewing and beading classes.



Late 2013 – A group of young workers from Macquarie Park, the Salvos and IETG Members Peter Evans and Irene turn up to clean up the area around the over 55's area.