

Submission
No 63

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Myra Demetriou and Mr John Dunn

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Partially Confidential

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
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Submission to the Legislative Council's Inquiry into elder abuse in New South Wales

Myra Demetriou is blind, physically frail, 88 years old and has lived in The Rocks / Millers Point area for almost sixty years. Myra cherishes and fights to maintain her independence, and she can speak for herself, but her blindness has made it too difficult to write a submission to this enquiry, so as a friend and neighbour, I (John Dunn) am writing it with her assistance and on her behalf.

Myra's submission is on behalf of all elder social housing tenants in The Rocks / Millers Point area who are currently suffering abuse following the decision in March 2014 to sell all public housing in The Rocks / Millers Point area, including the *Sirius* building in which Myra lives.

Myra's submission addresses Terms 1 and 2 of the Terms of Reference. These read:

1. The prevalence of abuse (including but not limited to financial abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) experienced by persons aged 50 years or older in New South Wales
2. The most common forms of abuse experienced by older persons and the most common relationships or settings in which abuse occurs

The World Health Organisation's definition of elder abuse at:http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/en/ and http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/toronto_declaration/en/ covers the psychological abuse being endured by older tenants of Millers Point.

Elder abuse is generally seen as occurring between two individuals of unequal power where there is an expectation of trust. However, we submit that the World Health Organisation's definition is too narrow. We believe that it is reasonable to extend this to between government and individual because elder abuse also may be a systemic problem, with a government through its policies, being the instigator of such elder abuse.

Myra asks for herself and her elderly social housing neighbours who live in Millers Point and The Rocks that she and her community be allowed to age in place, to maintain their community, which for many of them is now the only family they know, so that they may maintain their independence in the area they have lived in for decades, and in many cases, for generations.

The abuse of Myra and her elderly neighbours will stop only by allowing these people to age in place, in line with the government's policies, and Myra asks that this committee call on the government to save her and her community from Relocation.

Myra's immediate welfare is in the hands of an Asset Manager acting as a Relocation Officer who is part of a Relocation Team which in turn is headed by the Independent Facilitator for Millers Point. None of these officers is trained in looking after the social welfare of Myra and her neighbours, but nonetheless these officers are the only contact Myra and her neighbours have for negotiating their housing and community needs, and all the people with whom they interact are charged with moving out these people with the least fuss.

THE SIRIUS APARTMENTS

Sirius was planned as a mixed high and low-rise development providing aged and family accommodation. It was unusual for the Housing Commission to combine aged and family units in the one development, and the early 1970s was a time when many Housing Commission high-rise towers elsewhere were failing to provide safe and secure accommodation for residents. Why was this development different? Mixing old and young people was a success right from the start.

The aged units are located in the tower, where there are no steps at the entrance and units are accessible by lift. The entrance foyer is still adorned with the laminated timber animals designed by architect Penny Rosier as part of the original plans, loosely based on prehistoric cave paintings and looking entirely at home in the cave-like foyer, they are a mark of the way this development has been valued by residents because they remain unmarked after 35 years except for their deteriorating varnish.

Also in the foyer is the distress-call panel with lights for every aged unit which can be activated by residents from inside their unit. The distress-call panel is no longer maintained by Housing NSW, but it is an indication of the consideration towards residents' needs that went into the original designs. Also on the ground floor and opposite the entrance is the Phillip Room, the large community room in which the Friends of Millers Point presented the S.O.S. Save our Sirius exhibition for an afternoon advertised as Open Sirius to correspond with Open Sydney 2014. The unmaintained distress call panel and the exhibition title provided inspiration for crowning Sirius with a new name. The S.O.S. lights inside Myra's unit on the tenth floor flashed their message every night from November 2014 until June 2015.

MYRA AND TRINITY AVENUE

In 1970, before she moved into Sirius, Myra lived at 18 Trinity Avenue with her husband Nick and two children. She remembers what it was like moving to Trinity Avenue...

'Construction of the Western Distributor forced our family to move from above my husband's shoe shop in Erskine Street. The Maritime Services Board did not compensate us for the loss of the shop but had a small terrace in Trinity Avenue for us to live in. When we moved there in 1970 we were surrounded by wonderful neighbours.

'Next door in number 16 lived . was divorced and made a living running residential in Kent Street. joined us for dinner most Friday nights for chicken and chips and we became firm friends. My husband Nick was committed to working and would rarely take a holiday, so it was with I travelled overseas to Germany, to France where my sister lived, and later to countries throughout Asia.

'Past I in number 14 were the . was a lovely lady who had a job at Grace Brothers, and her husband was a wharf labourer. was Aboriginal, and he always had presents for all the kids at Christmas. Their son worked at the CBC Bank and now works for ATSIC.

'Next door on the other side in number 20 were the family, the mother Scottish, the father Maltese, and together they had three children. their eldest son married , who has written, "I lost my husband and son in a car accident in 1979. The community was absolutely wonderful, the support never stopped. They rallied around, people brought food, cared for the kids. That's what they do in this area, when anything like that happens. We are there for each other." continues to live in Kent Street and is an active member of St Brigid's congregation.

' was the other son. He suffered severely from scoliosis. After my husband passed away in 1991 I cared for and would have been eligible for the Carer Allowance, but by that time my sight had deteriorated to such an extent that I was classified as legally blind, and I was judged by Social Services as incapable of looking after . So I cared for for many years and managed without the allowance.

'In number 22 was , her husband and three boys. Even though they built an extra room out the back, it was a very tight fit for their family. The extra room was built of brick but it was a tiny room. For the son who lived in it, his books were spread across his bed, which he used as a desk while he studied, and everything had to be packed away when he slept. The small space they used as a dining room had a drop-side table so it took up less room when not in use. I don't know how they managed in so small a space as the boys grew, but eventually a larger house became available in Lower Fort Street and the family moved.

'It was a busy but happy time when our family moved to Trinity Avenue. I was still working for J Walter Thompson, before I became secretary to the bishop in 1972. My two children attended Fort Street School, where I formed many friendships, including one with . In my spare time I ran the Historical and Military Museum at the Holy Trinity Church across the road which housed many important artefacts and records from the early years of the Colony.

'I continued to live in Trinity Avenue and look after until 2008 when a friend visiting from New Zealand told me that the narrow and steep stairs in my house were too dangerous and she would never visit me again if I did not move. I knew several people in Sirius and when an apartment became available I agreed to move there.'

Most of these Trinity Avenue neighbours are still in the area, and there are still strong bonds between Myra and these people of her community. Dispersing this community by force should be considered an act of abuse.

The large Georgian house at 8-12 Trinity Avenue was in a poor state of repair, but the City of Sydney and the local community raised funds to refurbish and extend it, and for more than twenty years it has been known as Darling House and operated as an aged care facility until it was closed by the government earlier this year. It will be sold early in 2016 as part of the government's asset sale program, another part of the Millers Point and The Rocks community being destroyed by the NSW Government.

THE EARLY 20TH-CENTURY WORKERS FLATS OF MILLERS POINT

Beside Darling House are the model Workers Flats, designed by Government Architect Vernon and built early in the 20th century as part of the government rebuilding of the wharves of Walsh Bay and Cockle Bay, and erecting great bond and wool stores to service the wharves, and flats and houses to accommodate maritime workers. This massive reshaping of Millers Point and The Rocks transformed the area more than 100 years ago, and now it is undergoing change of a similar magnitude as its long-term residents are stripped from the area.

There are more of these workers' flats in Millers Point, Dawes Point and the Rocks that were part of the reconstruction of the area at the beginning of the 20th century. All are owned by Housing NSW. They are on one hand modest properties mostly without water views that should continue to be used as social and public housing. On the other hand, they are an integral part of the early 20th-century redevelopment of the waterfront in this area, that is still largely intact, and they continue to house people who have direct links to the maritime history of the area. Such an integrated development of workers' housing, wharves and stores from the early 20th century appears to survive only here and nowhere else in the world, and when combined with the surviving houses of the 19th century that were built by and for the maritime community in the early years of the Colony, it is no wonder the area has been considered for World Heritage listing.

We ask that the final report of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. include a recommendation that the NSW Government allow the remaining older residents of Millers Point and The Rocks to age in place in their current housing.

Please don't hesitate to contact Myra or me should you wish to discuss this submission. Our details are as follows:

Myra Demetriou

John Dunn

Yours faithfully

Myra Demetriou and John Dunn