


21 March 2011

Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
By email: [pwc@aph.gov.au](mailto:pwc@aph.gov.au)

**Submission No. 02**

 (Muirhead)  
Date: 21/03/2011

Dear Committee Secretary,

**Inquiry into Proposed Development and Construction of Housing for the Department of Defence at Muirhead, Darwin, NT**

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) thanks the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Development and Construction of Housing for the Department of Defence at Muirhead, Darwin, NT. Members of ERA endorse all, or in part, of this submission.

**Introduction**

ERA (formerly known as WomenSpeak) is Australia's largest organisational network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. ERA is one of six National with funding from the Australian Government Office for Women. We bring together 54 non-government organisations and social enterprises with an interest in advancing women's equality. The lead agency and contract holder for ERA is YWCA Australia, who provides programs and services, including housing, to over 250,000 people in Australia.

In 2010 ERA identified women's housing security as a priority issue, in particular the need to build a gender analysis of women and housing, and advance proposals to improve and expand women's access to affordable rental housing. In February 2011 ERA brought together a high-level roundtable of women's advocates, academics, housing providers from across Australia, investors, developers including Defence Housing Australia and state, territory and federal government housing departments to discuss investment in affordable rental housing.

Economic Security4Women, also one of the National Women's Alliances, supports and endorses this submission.

**ERA supports the proposal put forward by Defence Housing Australia in its submission to the Committee.**

ERA has an interest in the expansion of affordable rental housing for the benefit of households of low to moderate income – a group which is incredibly diverse but features a prominence of young

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single women; female headed families with children; workers in highly feminised work sectors including but not limited to community services provided by ERA member organisations, carers and nurses, retail and hospitality; apprentices, and mature single women who are approaching retirement without adequate savings and who are renters.

The ERA February 2011 roundtable highlighted that current Government initiatives are moving to partially address a crisis in the shortfall of affordable rental housing properties available to low and middle income individuals and families. However greater institutional investment and long term, sustained government strategies on affordable housing rental housing are needed. There is also a need to nurture innovation and collaboration between different sectors in the housing market, from housing providers to investors, from developers to community services. Finally, there is strong evidence that for a range of reasons, including lower average income, greater life longevity than men, caring responsibilities, and vulnerability to lack of income security post-relationship breakdown, women fare worse than men in accessing appropriate, affordable rental housing.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident to ERA that the Commonwealth's National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is an extremely important vehicle, and we welcome the recent announcement by the Prime Minister that confirmed ongoing funding for NRAS and extension until 2015 for the scheme's full implementation. We have made, and will continue to make further representations to Federal Ministers about a renewed national housing affordability strategy.

As a part of the ERA affordable housing project we have taken careful note of the history and development of the Defence Housing Australia (DHA) as a major land and property developer and manager, and its remarkable success in stimulating private retail investment in the provision of housing for Defence Force members and their families.

In discussion with DHA it is clear that there is potential for mutually beneficial cooperation between DHA and the affordable housing sector. We believe there is much to learn from the DHA experience, which has applicability to a national affordable housing strategy for the generality of Australians. It is therefore pleasing that this matter has progressed to the point that a DHA proposal for cooperation is before the Senate Public Works committee.

It is also evident that opportunity for innovative approaches to the provision of affordable housing is in its infancy. The ERA roundtable canvassed such a project in the ACT, which includes the involvement of the YWCA of Canberra and represents collaboration between a community organisation, ACT affordable housing provider, ACT and federal government (notably through NRAS).

<sup>1</sup> Professor Judith Yates, University of Sydney, 'Rental supply and housing affordability: Gender implications', presentation to ERA roundtable, Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011

Sharam A., 'A Predictable Crisis, Older Women as the New Face of Homelessness', Swinburne Institute of Technology 2010

The lead agency and contract holder for ERA, YWCA Australia, is a federation of Local Associations active in providing affordable long-term housing in a number of settings, and with innovative approaches. The YWCA of Darwin in particular has detailed understanding of the shortage of affordable housing in the Top End, and we recommend the Committee seeks the input and insight of the YWCA of Darwin as to the particular housing needs faced by residents in that local area.

It is also evident that while the NRAS is a valuable (albeit improvable) strategy, the availability of land for construction of affordable housing, especially in major cities, is an impediment to expansion of affordable housing. DHA has demonstrated its capacity to acquire and develop large tracts of land, and quite properly wishes to come to arrangements with other housing providers to assist the development of diverse and varied communities.

We commend the proposal for 15% of total dwellings constructed by DHA at Muirhead to be offered to the NT Government for affordable housing and Community Housing purposes. In the spirit of welcoming the DHA proposal **ERA recommends that:**

- prior to inviting tenders for the design and construction of properties, DHA consults with local NT and Darwin Community Housing providers and providers of affordable housing properties, and incorporates their input to the tender application and requirements;
- properties eventually available for affordable rental housing purposes be targeted to respond to the specific needs of Darwin residents in need of affordable rental properties;
- In light of the evidence that women face higher housing stress than men, DHA and the NT Government seek a gender needs analysis prior to inviting tenders for the design and construction. The purpose of this would be to ensure housing design and construction meets the circumstances of women in need of affordable rental housing in Darwin.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully,



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