



Submission No. 5
ao (Muirhead)
Date: 31/03/2011

APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL TERRITORIANS

02711
31st March 2011

The Secretary
Parliamentary Committee on Public Works

Dear Sir or Madam

NT Shelter offers the following paper as our submission to the Inquiry on the Proposed Development and Construction of Housing for the Department of Defence at Muirhead, Darwin, NT.

NT Shelter is the peak non-government advocacy and policy body for housing and homelessness in the NT.

Our comments in relation to this inquiry relate to both the need for additional housing in Darwin as well as issues we believe are vital for consideration in developing a new suburb where defence families and personnel as well as other Darwin residents will want to live.

For any further information you may require regarding the NT Shelter submission, please contact me [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

TONI VINE BROMLEY
Executive Officer

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT & CONSTRUCTION OF HOUSING FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE AT MUIRHEAD, DARWIN, NT

The Northern Territory Shelter Submission



NT Shelter Inc.
PO Box 1577
NIGHTCLIFF NT 0814

31 March 2011

ABN 12 591 531 723

For any information on this submission please contact
Ms Toni Vine Bromley
Executive Officer
Phone 08 89815003
Email eo@ntshelter.org.au



Introduction

The Northern Territory attracts major investment and national interest and Darwin is the center for most business and government as well as services, education, employment, entertainment recreation and opportunity in the Territory.

Darwin alone comprises around 50% of the total Northern Territory population and in the 2006 census, 9.7% of Darwin's population was Aboriginal.

Darwin's population also comprises people from many ethnic backgrounds, has a youthful population with an average age of 32 years (compared to the national average of around 35 years) and this profile is assisted to a large extent by the military presence.

The NT also has;

- The lowest level of home ownership in Australia at 44.1% compared to the Australian rate of 71%¹
- The largest number of public housing dwellings in the country at 6.8% (in urban centres)
- The highest rate of homelessness at 248 persons per 10,000² compared to the national average of 53 persons per 10,000
- Significant land supply constraints sometimes due to Native Title claims
- Well documented levels of disadvantage, particularly within the Indigenous population,
- Wide geographic spread, small populations and limited infrastructure and service delivery capacity
- A steadily increasing and relatively youthful population- particularly in Indigenous populations
- The fastest rate of ageing in the country- by 2050 we expect to triple our numbers of over 65s compared to a doubling for the nation in the same period and
- A relatively prosperous economy but an enormously unequal distribution of wealth.

Our submission is therefore presented for consideration in the proposed development and construction of new housing at Muirhead in Darwin.

¹ Australian Housing- A Fair Share, National Shelter Policy Platform 2007

² Counting the Homeless 2006, Australian Census Analytic Program, C.Chamberlain & D.MacKenzie, Swinburne University and RMIT University 2008



What is NT Shelter

NT Shelter is an independent community based incorporated body that works towards a just and fairer housing system.

As the peak NT housing and homelessness non-government organisation, NT Shelter advocates for appropriate and affordable housing for all members of the community particularly disadvantaged groups and those on low incomes.

NT Shelter is funded by the NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, and NT Department of Children and Families to carry out our peak housing and homelessness body roles.

NT Shelter believes that any sustainable and economically viable society requires a diverse social mix of people, interests and skills and that appropriate and affordable housing is available to support and encourage development and growth.

In the words of Julian Disney, Chair, National Affordable Housing Summit Group, 'the lack of affordable housing strikes at the heart of our lives, our communities, and Australia's future prosperity. It impoverishes people, erodes families, destroys jobs, weakens the economy, and damages the environment'³.

³ Affordable Rental Housing, Election 2007 Australian Review of Public Affairs. J.Disney. University of NSW
<http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2007/election/disney.html>



Comment to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

Darwin has unique features including its lifestyle, natural attributes and open space, Indigenous heritage, cultural diversity, and we have always embraced the military presence in Darwin.

The presence of the military has contributed to Darwin's range of benefits, infrastructure and services not available in cities/towns of comparable size.

Darwin is also a part of the country which generates;

- considerable investment,
- relatively high levels of employment,
- significant economic activity, and,
- various social, cultural and other economic interest relative to our size.

NT Shelter strongly believes that a range of different types of housing for our diverse population is vital to sustain the NT's population, workforce and ongoing viability.

In a relatively recent address⁴ '*Growing the Territory – Managing the Growth of Darwin and Palmerston over the Next 20 Years*', the Chief Minister, The Hon Paul Henderson MLA identified data showing strong population growth- particularly in the Darwin and Palmerston region- leading to a requirement for at least 1700 additional dwellings per year to meet immediate future needs to 2021.

NT Shelter primarily advocates for those on low to moderate incomes and who are disadvantaged in the market based housing system. Many such people are those on Centrelink Benefits or others who work in low paid but key areas of the workforce where they often support the functioning and viability of the city and its services such as in retail, hospitality and tourism, and those working as apprentices or in lower level administrative positions.

Most of these workers are on low and fixed incomes and require affordable and appropriate housing well linked to transport and other key infrastructure. Some of these people may also be seniors who no longer work but have significant links within the community and whose circumstances are changing.

⁴ Growing the Territory – Managing the Growth of Darwin and Palmerston over the Next 20 Years', the Chief Minister, The Hon Paul Henderson MLA, 4 February 2010. Darwin Convention Centre



In the recent Defence/private development at Lyons, adjacent to the proposed Muirhead development, we have seen a development catering for a particular middle-class family oriented culture which does not reflect Darwin's values and diversity.

In Muirhead NT Shelter believes that the Commonwealth should consider a development which encompasses a range of other issues including density, diversity and environmental sustainability.

NT Shelter is strongly of the view that Governments, the private sector, not-for-profit sector and local government should work in partnership to achieve the housing outcomes in which we all have an interest ie;

- a healthy, diverse and functioning community and economy
- adequately housing the workforce in appropriate and affordable accommodation close to transport, infrastructure and services
- housing which reflects the Darwin lifestyle and incorporates effective airflow and outdoor living, reducing reliance on expensive and unsustainable energy consumption
- urban design which minimises the cost of policing and the opportunity for anti-social behaviour, and
- optimizing individual participation by all groups as well as engendering community cohesion and tolerance.

Density:

Australia is experiencing a housing affordability crisis with inadequate housing supply and increasing rents and house prices. It is estimated this crisis is impacting severely on approximately 15% of those in the current private rental market, causing severe housing stress, household tensions, some deprivation and forcing some into homelessness.

With Darwin's significant shortfall in housing supply, housing costs are extremely high and there is little choice in the market for household compositions other than families seeking houses on separate lots.

We strongly recommend consideration for some level of density within the Muirhead development for well designed housing forms such as town houses or medium density apartments which would suit single people, older people, couples and small family units.



Diversity:

NT Shelter strongly supports the NT Government's efforts in allocating 15-20% of new developments as affordable housing.

This provides the opportunity to promote a social mix in neighbourhoods, along with a mix of dwelling and tenure types and at the same time creating environmental sustainability, energy-saving housing and the delivery of affordable rental housing in areas where there are well located services including transport.

With new attention on affordable housing initiatives at the Australian Government level, we envisage that the Department of Defence, in wishing to place its personnel within a thriving community, should be emulating the establishment of neighbourhoods which have a social mix as well as a range of dwelling and tenure forms which include affordable rental and affordable home ownership opportunities.

We therefore recommend negotiation with the newly formed NT Affordable Housing Rental Company in Darwin which may offer a mechanism/ partnership approach to the development and management of rental housing within Muirhead and assist in the creation of the diversity all communities should incorporate.

With ongoing investment in high end apartments, especially in Darwin city, and the immanent investment coming to the Territory with the Inpex Gas Plant, NT Shelter fears that more and more low cost accommodation units will be lost for 'key workers' and others on low and fixed incomes.

NT Shelter believes that all communities benefit from social, economic and cultural diversity however our city areas are being gentrified at an alarming rate and no new low cost housing is planned anywhere to replace lost guest houses or public housing and appropriately re-house low income tenants within proximity of their social networks and context.

The Darwin housing market is relatively small, we have no community housing sector to speak of, and land and house prices are soaring, all of which mitigate against the provision of affordable rental properties but there are a range of options which bear investigation.



Conclusion

Governments play an important role in the housing system in Australia and the Australian Government's focus and leadership on affordable housing initiatives has been welcomed.

NT Shelter believes this commitment needs to be assigned across all government portfolios and particularly when looking to house Defence personnel in the community.

It is essential that Darwin has a diverse supply of housing types for different groups now and into the future. Investment in housing as infrastructure provides jobs and economic growth as well as long term housing as an outcome.

We believe planning and future developments need to encompass thinking around land, locations and the amenity required for various demographic groups including first home buyers, young families, large households, single person households, seniors and workers from all socio-economic groups.

We also need affordable rental accommodation and shared equity housing arrangements particularly for young people, singles, apprentices and others on low and fixed incomes.

Prepared on behalf of NT Shelter Inc

By

Toni Vine Bromley

Executive Officer

March 2011