

Australian Greens Additional Comments

Energy efficiency and environmental building standards

The Community Affairs Committee heard evidence from representatives of the housing sector that stressed the need for public housing to be affordable in the long term. The Greens believe that all new buildings funded through the package, including homes and school buildings, should showcase best practice for energy and water efficiency, location and access to public transport and services.

For example, new houses should achieve a 7 star rating under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme. The current requirement, administered by State Governments, is just 5 stars. This standard lags well behind building standards in comparable nations such as the United States.

It is not acceptable for the Government to fall back on the industry's assertions that there are 'diminishing marginal returns' for developers when going from a five star accreditation to six, because people on low incomes will be left with higher energy and water bills in perpetuity.

In setting a business as usual five star standard, the Commonwealth has missed an important opportunity to drive a large-scale improvement in the quality of public housing. Raising the standard would also improve the skills-base and expertise of the Australian building industry and improve its environmental performance relative to other nations.

The HIA represents developers who have a clear incentive to build homes for the cheapest possible up-front cost. The incentive and responsibility for the government is different. It is in the government's long term interest to build energy efficient homes which cost less for tenants in the longer term and won't require immediate retrofitting following the introduction of scientifically defensible greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Charitable tax status

The Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA) gave evidence that the two year window protecting the charitable tax status of community housing organisations was insufficient to provide the confidence that the sector needs, and that a long-term solution is required. This issue generated great uncertainty at the time of the passage of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), which was only temporarily abated. The Australian Greens urge the Government to extend the protection of charitable organisations providing affordable housing permanently, so that these organisations can get on with the job.

Reporting and governance

In paragraph 1.41 the committee notes that 'the plan does contain significant monitoring and compliance mechanisms'. The Australian Greens contend that the plan would benefit from a substantial strengthening of these mechanisms, which are vague and poorly defined. When questioned on the reporting requirements and benchmarks for access of the new housing to public transport, employment and services, Departmental officials were unsure on what basis the applications from States and Territories would be reported, how they would be benchmarked, or whether the information would be made public.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Siewert', written in a cursive style.

Senator Rachel Siewert

Senator Scott Ludlam