



LOCAL GOVERNMENT and SHIRES ASSOCIATIONS of NSW

GPO Box 7003 SYDNEY NSW 2001 • 215 Clarence St SYDNEY NSW AUSTRALIA
Phone (02) 9242 4000 • Fax (02) 9242 4111 • E-mail lgsa@lgsa.org.au

Our ref: R96/0115.ss
Further contact: Stephanie Smith
18 December 1996

Mr Peter Hamilton
PAN Community Council
PO Box 102
Nimbin 2480

Dear Mr Hamilton

Thank you for participating in the Ministerial Taskforce on Housing's workshop addressing housing issues on the Far North Coast on 11 September 1996 at Lismore.

As Chairperson of the Non Metropolitan Housing Issues Working Group I found the meeting very informative. The issues raised at our meeting have been passed onto the Taskforce.

Please find attached the combined minutes of the three meetings we held. I hope you find them a true reflection of the concerns raised on the day. These issues will help inform the priorities for the Taskforce in 1997.

I will also send a copy of these minutes to the new Executive Officer of the Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Stephanie Smith, Housing Policy Officer, on phone (02) 9242 4000.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Murray Kidnie'.

Murray Kidnie
Secretary

Sent to Col 5.

MINISTERIAL TASKFORCE ON HOUSING

NON METROPOLITAN WORKING GROUP

visit to the Far North Coast, 11 September 1996

Present representatives from Local Government: Casino, Tweed, Lismore, Grafton, Kyogle, Byron, Ballina and Richmond River, the North Coast Community Housing Company, the Premiers Department, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, Department of Housing, Southern Cross University and Pan Community Council.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA

- High proportion of people on low incomes.
- Large ageing population, many retirees migrating into the region.
- Large youth population, unsure as to how many are permanent residents and how many are transient, eg Byron.
- High unemployment rate, eg Byron approx 30%. Many people move to the area without employment and looking for a cheaper lifestyle.
- Families are beginning to move back, eg Ballina.
- Growth rates vary considerably in region.
- Population densities are lower and the population is more dispersed than in metropolitan areas.

GENERAL ISSUES

- There are significant environmental constraints on housing development.
- Under the proposed housing reforms, an increase in rental assistance will necessarily address housing needs. It was suggested that landlords may increase rents.
- There is a shortage of rental housing, particularly for older people. Many older people are underoccupying housing.
- Demand for housing from students coming into the area.
- Department of Housing has a high demand for single/one bedroom accommodation.

- There is discrimination in the private rental market against certain groups (such as people with a mental illness, Aboriginal people).
- There was discussion about the high level of people living in caravan parks and the adequacy of this type of accommodation. Often caravan parks are the last option for accommodation. It was noted, many retirees to the North Coast purchase homes in manufactured home parks, that do meet their needs as they grow older. However, there are problems associated with the depreciating value of these homes and with some parks not providing necessary services.
- The existing housing stock does not meet local community needs in many areas, particularly where the population is ageing, eg Grafton.
- Low income earners can't afford to live on the coastal strip anymore; cost of land on coastal strip is high.
- Often salaried people moving to the area have difficulty in finding rental accommodation.
- Job insecurity is a significant issue
- Housing is a significant structural cause of poverty.
- Youth housing needs not being met, eg Byron.
- Older people when moving from their homes into smaller accommodation often have difficulty in selling their properties, eg Casino.
- Seasonal influx of tourists have a significant influence on the availability of private rental housing, leases are short as many landlords aim to rent properties out at high rentals in peak seasons.
- There is a short supply of community support services, funded under the Home and Community Care program.
- There is a shortage of supported aged accommodation.
- There was concern that the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning North Coast Strategy Plan did not incorporate economic development issues.

Local Government

- Councils have limited resources to research housing issues and explore possible projects.
- Rate pegging has inhibited councils trying to meet the needs of a fast growing community. This has resulted in an inability to meet the basic infrastructure needs. Many councils are looking toward full cost recovery.

- Level of Section 94 and Section 64 contributions are used to influence the level of development in the area.
- High planning standards tend to inhibit private sector from getting involved in affordable housing.

Squatter settlement planning

Dual occupancy has been generally accepted well in the area, while multiple occupancy has been controversial, although it has been able to meet some housing needs of people on low incomes.

- There are a range of issues resulting from rural residential developments. These include the high cost of public infrastructure, residents often feel isolated, there is a loss of prime rural land, re-subdivision of rural residential can be difficult once town grows out.

Housing Market

- Housing market varies considerably throughout the Region:
Land prices vary: for example, rough cost of a block of land \$30-40,000 Casino, \$60,000+ Byron, \$35-45,000 Grafton, \$60,000 Tweed, \$20-30,000 Kyogle, \$45-50,000 Lismore, \$55-\$70,000 Ballina.

stated but policy

It was suggested that market price was not related to infrastructure.

Many small investors have moved out of property investment as the return is small (approx 5%).

- The housing market in some areas, such as Grafton, is controlled by a small number of conservative investors.

- There is less resistance to public housing than previously.

✓

Medium density housing is not necessarily a cheaper form of housing in the region.

STRATEGIES

→
→

Several councils have policies that seek environmentally sustainable outcomes, eg Lismore, Byron, Tweed.

There is a need to encourage appropriate/quality housing outcomes, meeting the diversity of local community needs. Interested in exploring small cluster housing that caters for three generations.

Col.

Innovative housing options that reflect the social and environmental aspects of the local area should be explored. One option discussed was the concept of model villages. One example given was that in Crookwell, whereby the village creates its own power, produces food, recycles waste. The concept of the model village also needs to be explored from an affordability aspect.

yes, emphasis
comment. →

There is a need to get the housing industry involved and influence the conservative market forces. All levels of government need to be involved.

Local government was identified as playing a range of roles influencing housing outcomes, eg through land release, subdivisions, building codes.

- There was discussion about the potential role Local Government can play in housing in contrast to the view that residential development and housing are primarily influenced by market forces.

It was suggested that it would be useful to develop links with the research undertaken by Universities (examples given ANU, Macquarie University).

There is a need for a greater supply of public and community housing.

- Stronger links need to be developed between the private housing sector and community housing providers.
- North Coast Community Housing Company is a growth housing association under the NSW Community Housing Strategy, and is keen to become entrepreneurial in this approach. There is a need for a cheap source of finance.

Level of involvement of Local Government in housing varies across the region. Lismore identified itself as taking a role in identifying housing needs and perhaps, if appropriate, undertaking some joint venture partnerships. Byron Council identified its role as having a social planning one, eg looking at employment issues, rather having a particular role in housing issues.

- It was pointed out that Councils accept their role in residential planning, but this does not necessarily mean they support broader objectives for housing.

There is a need for detailed documentation of housing needs and issues of the North Coast.

- Housing research needs to be coordinated with economic development targets and the planning and coordination of support services.

Housing issues need to be addressed by cooperative and coordinated action within Council, including community services, planning and elected representatives.

Lismore has tried to reduce lot sizes to encourage smaller developments, however, this has not been popular.

- The group would be interested meeting again with the Taskforce once it has developed a range of options, to examine their feasibility within the North Coast region.

NSW, Cal.

✓ —

?

PH
& cost effectiveness →

Squatter settlements

Non-Metropolitan Housing Work Group of the Ministerial Task Force on Housing.

Meeting held at Lismore Council 11-11-96. A 2 hour session.

Attendees

Present. Chair. Murray Kidnie - Sec Local Govt
Shires Ass.

Officer from the "National Housing Forum"

Senior Policy Officer of the "Office on Housing Policy" DVAP

+ 10 council planners or community service staff representing 8 councils. 1 Rep from the North Coast Coop Housing Co + myself for Par Com (described as a peak organisation representing low-cost, self-help, housing home builders on shared land in the North Coast).

Introduction: A 3 minute overview of the "Task Force" and this "Work Group".

Question: "What are the housing issues of concern for your Council area?"

For background to this question (ie the setting) see DVAP "Office on Housing Policy", "Housing Assistance Reform" paper (P3).

much of the 2 hours was taken up with expressions that the proposed rental subsidy scheme would not in fact attract the housing market to provide low cost rental housing!

Murray sought the average cost of a typical block of land in each of the Council areas. This revealed considerable diversity - even within each Council! Surprise!

Question 2 "How big an issue is the provision of housing for your council?"

Responses ranged from "Council has no concern about housing - this is left to market forces", "Council's concern is simply to respond to the demand for DAs for subdivision and BA's for building".

to -

"Council is not involved in housing - ie it has no housing strategic plan or goal BUT recognises that its zoning does determine where subdivision will occur and may thereby set minimum lot sizes and to this extent does affect the market price of land!

Nick J. (LCC) cited that LCC had offered a 10% discount on DA fees for smaller lot sizes but there had been only 3 DAs taking advantage of this in the past several years!

North Coast Coop Housing Co nep. said that provision of rental housing in the Lismore area was not primarily determined by the ability to pay the rent but who you were! eg if you were a disabled person, a single parent or a single person you were discriminated against!

Question 3 "How does the council cost of providing infrastructure pursuant to a subdivision DA relate, to funds received from s.94 contributions and council fees?"

Feedback given by each council. This ranged from 100% in the case of dismire to a lot less in other councils.

In the latter case the difference has to be made up by rates etc.

Nick J strongly expressed that in his view the proposed rental scheme would at the best assist middle income earners. If implemented the result was likely to create "squatter" settlements and planning strategies should be preparing for this now!

I put the case that housing should be "socially appropriate" not just "affordable". (See p6-7 for their definitions of these terms.) They do give some credence to the need for "social housing"!

Question 4 "Does anyone have a solution to providing cheaper housing and if so what?"

I responded at length :-

- by lowering building material costs eg on site and recycle materials etc
- self help building
- early occupation of dwelling eg moving in while continuing to build. That the building process may go on for years or the rest of ones life!
- cost sharing of the land
- taking care of building maintenance as an ongoing process. This advocates the need for periodic "replacement" of the building as is encountered in Housing Commission homes!

I also spoke on a house not being just a roof over ones head but a place one could relate to as "home" and able to still identify with as "home", even if travelling overseas!

- that it had the potential to cater for 3 generations in residence at one time
- that communities of 9-12 households had been found to be an optimum size
- that those who were into the property being an "intentional community" could relate to each other as "extended family".

- that the above may be summed up as encapsulated by the term "quality of life" and that the nature of the "quality of life" should be seen as the desired outcome of any housing strategy.

"Bucks and motor are not an end in themselves. The end product is to create the highest possible "quality of life"!"

My contribution was accepted but marginalised by saying that this would only address the needs of a small percentage - "What about the rest of the population seeking housing?"

The Byron planner raised the issue of the Council's adoption of a policy of "ecological sustainable development" (ESD) and that this policy implied a recognition that land for residential development was a finite resource!

Closure.

Dot point "issues" were recorded by a secretary I asked that this be written up and circulated as they had not planned to do this!

There is no commitment to have a follow-up meeting!

6.

I recommended that the Task Force document the diverse issues and circumstance that had been expressed in the meeting by carrying out a holistic survey on the North Coast.

This was noted but no commitment given.

Conclusion

This was a piss weak meeting!

If this is indicative of where the top bureaucrats are at in establishing and implementing community housing it is no wonder it has been so hopeless!

Of the several people I spoke with after the meeting the common theme was that they got nothing out of it!

(NB. Many had travelled long distances and at short notice!)

#

Peter Hamilton

11-11-96