

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

Richmond – Tuesday 22 July 2025

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Tom McIntosh

Aiv Puglielli

Sonja Terpstra

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Thi Mai Tran (*via Vietnamese interpreter*), and

Thuy Thanh (*via Vietnamese interpreter*).

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the redevelopment of housing towers. We are going to go through and introduce the members of the committee. I am Joe McCracken. I am Chair of the inquiry.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. I am Anasina Gray-Barberio, Member for Northern Metro.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metropolitan.

Tom McINTOSH: Hi. Tom McIntosh, Eastern Victoria Region.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Hello. I am Ann-Marie Hermans, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Mr Berger is online as well.

John BERGER: And John Berger, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Very good. I will just read this out as well, and I will go slowly so they know their rights.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. The information that witnesses provide today is protected by law. They are protected against any action for what they say here, but if they go elsewhere and say the same thing, they may not be protected. Any false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded on audio, and you will be provided with a proof or draft version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcript will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, can I please get a name and any organisation, if any, that our witnesses are representing.

Thi Mai TRAN: My name is Thi Tran. I live at 139 Highett Street, Richmond.

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): 139 Highett Street, Richmond.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you very much. There is an opportunity to make a verbal submission as well, or we can just go straight to questions.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She wants to express her opinion about why she wants to stay in this accommodation.

The CHAIR: We can have 5 minutes to do that, and then we will ask questions.

Thi Mai TRAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: I will hand it over to you. You can speak and say what you would like to say.

Thi Mai TRAN: I understand. I have got a story. I will tell him – he can talk more quickly than me in English. I have got a long story about why I live here. I need him to talk about my feelings about the Richmond home and why I have to move out. That is why I need him to talk for me, please.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): Okay. She wants to express her feelings about why she would like to stay in her accommodation in this area.

The CHAIR: Please go ahead.

██████████ (interpreter): She wanted me to translate her script. Is that okay?

The CHAIR: Please.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): I was living here in this accommodation for 10 years with my mother. Before she passed away, she was very happy with the current public accommodation that was assigned to her. She was very happy about that, and me too. My mum had many friends and was very happy to live in this area. It is very convenient. She had a lot of friends, and she could access many health services around this area. The public transport is really good.

Sadly, when she passed away, I did apply for some jobs in this area. The first one was in a confectionary factory, but they rejected my application due to my high age. After that I got another job as a carer for two families – I care for their health. The job is hard, but I am very happy. I bring them to the hospital and doctor's appointments. I am very happy with the carer job even though it is hard.

On December 2024 I saw a group of people gather in the reception area asking me to sign a form. I was told that this building will be demolished and people will be relocated. It was very shocking to hear that. I am very concerned and cannot sleep, about that news that the building will be demolished and we have to relocate to the new accommodation. I was told you need to sign up, otherwise you might end up homeless, with no accommodation to live in. That is my expression.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): I have lived in here since 1984. It is 41 years now. I have lived in here, and it is very good accommodation. The public housing is very good. They do a lot of renovation and make some playgrounds for the kids. The accommodation is so good, why do we have to demolish and have to relocate us to another accommodation? And the public housing already spent a lot of money to do renovation for the current housing commission. It is a waste of money. And I express some sort of depression due to that news that I have to relocate. And it impacts my health. It is down. Can you explain why we need to relocate, as this accommodation is so good?

The CHAIR: Okay. Is there any more?

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): That is it.

The CHAIR: That is it. Okay. We will go through and ask questions. I will go first, and then we will go through to different members of the committee. I think it was Thi Mai that in her submission said that she believed the towers are structurally sound. What is the basis for that?

██████████ (interpreter): She said that is based on the fact that she has been living here for more than 10 years and nothing has happened. There has been no need to worry for foundation issues or something. It is perfect.

The CHAIR: Does Thi Mai think that the buildings have been maintained to a good standard?

██████████ (interpreter): She said that when she moved to this building the six stories below was renovated, and then it ran out of funding, so they stopped the renovation. Her accommodation was not renovated but still very sound. The structure is very sound – no issues with cracking or something.

The CHAIR: Okay. I was going to ask Thuy as well. My question is: in her submission she said she does not want to move into community housing because she will not be able to afford rent. Has the difference between public housing and community housing been made clear?

██████████ (interpreter): She said that she was told by Housing Victoria that the rent would increase from 25 per cent to 30 per cent for the community. So she was told that would increase.

The CHAIR: How was that communicated? Was it electronic or by paper or by letter? How was it communicated?

██████████ (interpreter): Reception. She was told in the reception. You know, the meeting in the reception?

The CHAIR: At a public meeting?

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): Yes, that is right.

The CHAIR: Okay. My time is up, so I will pass over to Ms Gray-Barberio.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you very much, Chair. Hello to you both. Thank you for being here. My first question, and either of you can answer this: who do you think will benefit if we keep the buildings and do not knock them down?

██████████ (interpreter): Her opinion is the cost will be \$22 million just to relocate – just to demolish this building and relocate it. So instead both will benefit, for the tenant and the government. Because the government have to spend a lot of money – \$22 million, the figure she said – about the project. So it will cost a lot of money, instead of using that money to build more accommodation for public housing. That would be better, in her view.

Thi Mai TRAN: Excuse me, I am sorry. Can I change the people? Because the lady in my group can understand that we are talking more than he talks. Because he not feeling about what I am feeling, you know. That is why – can I change the interpreter now? Sorry.

The CHAIR: We are just changing the interpreter.

Thi Mai TRAN: I am sorry – because he is not feeling what I am talking strong. He is talking very soft. We have been very upset, you know.

The CHAIR: You want to say it stronger?

Thi Mai TRAN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Whichever witness can choose whichever interpreter to talk for them, okay. Sorry, do you want to ask your question again, to make it clear.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Sure. I will re-ask the question: who do you think will benefit if we keep the buildings and do not knock them down?

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): Number one, it would benefit the residents, because they will not be stressed – the residents of the public housing buildings. The children who study, who live in the buildings and who are students at the schools around here – it will not negatively impact their education. It also will not affect our employment, because we live here and work here. All the support services that we have here through the community – if we get relocated, those support services will not exist. There will be support services, but it is different to what the community can provide for community.

We really believe in and support public housing. We believe in the security that public housing affords us. The idea of community housing really scares us. The idea of having contracts that you may need to sign, like a three-year contract, if I am moved into community housing, when the time comes that that contract runs out – I am getting old, and I am worried about whether or not I will understand what is in the contract.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Just speaking about contracts; have Homes Victoria or the relocation staff been very clear with yourself – both of you and people that you know, other public housing residents – about the actual process and what they are signing?

Thuy THANH: No.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Sorry – and has an interpreter been provided in this process?

██████████ (interpreter): For her opinion, the public housing did not provide enough information for her to understand this project.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): I have not had contact with Homes Victoria and I have not heard. Things are not clear to me.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will pass on to Mr McIntosh.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, great. Thank you all for being here and for joining us today. Just so I understand, do both of you support the redevelopment in some shape, or no works at all?

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She thinks that, keep it that way, keep the current accommodation. That is better than to just demolish and move to another accommodation. You believe that?

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): And Thi Mai said, no, she does not agree with that, with redevelopment, because the house is still really strong and there is nothing wrong with it.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes, okay.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): And she is getting older and moving is a big challenge for her. She has lived here 40 years, so she gets used to the environment here. So moving is –

Tom McINTOSH: Nearly as long as I have been alive.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): Yes. She is living alone, by herself, so getting used to a new environment is hard.

Tom McINTOSH: Yes. I suppose the thing is, some of these buildings require work – serious, significant work. I am just interested in your reflections – so everybody can have good water, good sewerage, good electricity; that is why people want to do work to the buildings. So I will leave it at that. I just wanted to put that and hear any feedback, because there was a question about why.

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): I will just interpret for Mai. So Thi Mai is saying that is the reason why there should be, like, renovation work, whatever the required works are. Mai is saying that if they had fixed it over the years as there was damage – if you had just fixed them over the years rather than leaving them in a state of decline, then we would not be where we are or with the issues that you are seeing.

Tom McINTOSH: If, let us say next year, significant work needs to happen, would you want the work to happen on the building, if it is, as I said, the sewerage, the water, the electrical?

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): As in, will they keep the building and repair the things?

Tom McINTOSH: Even here I think there is some confusion. If there is work that requires tenants to move out of the building while there is work – I suppose what I am trying to understand is: are they against any works being done?

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She agrees, because the works are already done. All the sewage and electrics have been renovated.

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): Ten to 15 years ago they renovated the 6th floor, and she had to move a few floors up. She went up to level 7 and then they did the works, and then she came back down.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): I am not worried about relocating for there to be repairs or having to move out if necessary, if works need to take place. My concern is being moved out of public housing and into community housing.

Tom McINTOSH: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I will hand over to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I would just like to get a really clear position from what has already been spoken about. Just to be clear, what we are hearing today is that we do not want the towers to be demolished and if necessary they can be renovated and upgraded instead. Is that right?

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): Yes, that is correct.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. For the residents with us today: are either of you aware of anyone telling you that they felt pressured or misled by Homes Victoria or relocation officers during a relocation process? Are there any examples that can be shared with us today about this?

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She said that she got no information about that from Homes Victoria, so she is in the dark.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is okay. I mean, from other residents, potentially, who have gone through the process – are you hearing things from the residents? Do they feel that they have been pressured or misled in that process?

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): A lot of people have been pressured. Homes Victoria staff are at the bottom in the reception daily putting pressure on people to sign the relocation forms if they have not signed yet. People feel incredibly pressured by that and are just signing because they are worried that if they do not sign the relocation forms they will not have a home to live in.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I am sorry to hear that. Do you feel that there are consequences for relocation officers telling residents the wrong thing?

[REDACTED] (interpreter): That is confirmed. But she wants to add that the information about the move to community housing is that they have to be moved to community housing, otherwise they will be homeless; they have got no place to live. So that is very scary and very stressful. She believes the community housing is not secure like the public housing, and they might evict the tenants in the future. That is very concerning.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: How widespread do we think this concern is, the fear of homelessness if people do not accept the offers being made to them?

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): It is widespread among the public housing at the moment. They believe that, so they are a little bit concerned.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is my time.

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): According to the opinion of the people who are moving, they are not happy at all.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): If you make decisions late, she believes you move farther than if you accept the accommodation when they offer it to her, so that is what she believes.

Thuy THANH (via interpreter): According to the people who are moving, they said that the new community housing is not good in design for old people. They cannot reach the cabinet. The cabinet is a very bad design. They cannot use that cabinet.

The CHAIR: I am going to have Mrs Hermans ask some questions.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Hello. Thank you for coming in. Firstly, I just want to help you understand something: we are all members of Parliament, but we are not all members of the government and we are not all from the same party. So please be very free to answer the questions – and we thank you that you are – so that you can help all of us understand what has been happening here. That is what we are here for. Somebody mentioned that there have been things that have been left, putting these buildings in a state of decline over many years. What are some of the things that have not been looked after in this building over the many recent years – maybe the last 10 years. What has been left and not been looked after properly that could have been done better and that would have made this more livable and an easier place to live in?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, she believes before she was very happy with the service provided. If she had a maintenance issue, they fixed it straight away, but not recently after the decision was made with the demolition. It is very bad. Sometimes you have to wait for a few days. She had problems with the water service and she had to wait a long time, and she is not happy.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So it has only been in the last two years that it has been bad, or has it been longer?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, just recently. And the job may be done in a few minutes, but the waiting time is so long. She is not happy with the response time.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Yes. So is it that it is becoming more and more difficult for residents to stay here because the government is wanting people to move on? Do they feel that that is what is happening?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, she agrees with that. Before it was always good – just recently only.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So recently it is taking longer to have things fixed; you are feeling like you are pressured. You have mentioned that many people are feeling forced to move into community housing and not have the safety of public housing after being part of public housing, and obviously there have been people that you know that have moved into community housing where they cannot reach cupboards – it is not good for elderly. Is that because you are talking to the people in your own community that have already moved out and already signed these agreements, or is that just because you are hearing that through your community?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, she did come to the community to inspect, and she confirmed that happened. She cannot reach the high –

Ann-Marie HERMANS: And so she has not wanted to move?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes.

The CHAIR: So seen it and touched it?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, she has seen it with her eyes. Compared with the current accommodation, it is bad.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: She wants to stay. Okay, thank you very much.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): I just want to reiterate that people are accepting community housing homes because they are worried that they will have nowhere else to go. I am a carer, and I have been in the new community housing build that they built across the road. I went in there with the person that I care for, who is in a wheelchair, and there is not enough space in the bathroom for me to bathe this person. It is not built according to what the needs are.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am going to hand over to Mr Berger, who is online.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, interpreters and witnesses. My question is for Thi Mai. I just have a question in relation to the reception area where you are getting your information. Do you think that that information is reliable?

██████████ (interpreter): Yes, it is Homes Victoria, so it is a reliable source. After that they sent some delegates to the community, so it is a reliable source.

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): Sorry, I think there has been a misunderstanding of the question. Mr Berger, were you saying do they believe that the information received in reception is reliable?

John BERGER: Yes, it is in relation – and my next part of our question was about the petition and who constructed the petition and what it was about.

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): So I will just clarify. It was Homes Victoria in the reception area, so we believed what they said. Then your next question was –

John BERGER: It was about the petition.

R-Coo TRAN (interpreter): the petition, yes. It was Homes Victoria. I think there is an interpretation issue. It is not necessarily a petition, it is like a form that you sign. So because people were not signing the relocation forms, they were getting community members to stand in the reception area to encourage people to sign the relocation forms, not a petition.

John BERGER: Is there a better way that that Homes Victoria can communicate with residents?

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She believes that it is not very good communication, because they do not know the tenants' wants and the needs of tenants, so no.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): Homes Victoria do not understand our situation. It does not seem like they care if we want this or not. They are just telling us what to do, and it seems like we have to do it.

John BERGER: All right, thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks. We have finished questions now, but I just want to give witnesses one last chance: if there is a final message they would want to send to us they have an opportunity to do so now.

Thi Mai TRAN (via interpreter): What we are requesting is that if renovation works are required to just continue what they started years ago when they renovated up to the sixth floor. Just continue the renovation works, and that will cost the government less, and it will cost us less as well, because we are being relocated within the same building. And the most important thing is that I want it to be public housing, please.

[REDACTED] (interpreter): She wants to stay wherever she is as well.

The CHAIR: Okay. That concludes today's hearings. Thank you very much, both of you, for appearing and for your evidence. You will get a copy of the transcript in case there need to be any minor changes or whatever, but that concludes today's hearing. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.