

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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WITNESS

Kai Ng (*via Mandarin interpreter*).

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the redevelopment of public housing towers.

I am Joe McCracken. I am Chair, and we are going to go through and introduce the rest of the members of the committee.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Good afternoon. My name is Anasina Gray-Barberio, Northern Metro.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. I am Aiv Puglielli. I am a member for North-Eastern Metropolitan.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metro.

The CHAIR: We might also have another one come online too, but it will depend. They have got a few other things going on. I will just read this out so Kai knows his rights.

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All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof or a draft version of the transcript following the hearing. Once that has all been sorted out the transcript will be made public, and it will be put on the committee's website.

Just for the recording, can we please get Kai to state his name into the microphone.

Kai NG: My name is Kai Ng.

The CHAIR: Kai, thank you very much. Now is the opportunity for you to give an opening statement, 4 or 5 minutes, something like that, and then after that we will have the opportunity to go around and ask questions.

Kai NG (via interpreter): So what do I say? About myself, my age or something like that?

The CHAIR: He can give an introduction about who he is, what his concerns are, how long he might have lived in the area, anything that he wants to say that he thinks we should know.

Kai NG (via interpreter): Okay. My age – I am 78 years old.

The CHAIR: You look very good for 78.

Kai NG: I have been living in the high-rise housing more than 25 years, and everything so far is quite good.

The CHAIR: You are happy with it?

Kai NG: I am happy with it. But I already moved, because I respect the government's decision. But they told me after two years time, when they rebuild the place, people can move back. That is what they say, but I am not sure, because there is no guarantee. So I was just wondering: is it true or not?

The CHAIR: We cannot answer that question directly because this is an inquiry. We are coming to you to give evidence to us about your experiences and the things that you have gone through so we can provide a recommendation or a series of recommendations to the government. Could we perhaps explore the experiences through questions? Would that be better?

Kai NG: Yes, you can ask me.

The CHAIR: That is cool. Okay. I will go first, and then we will go through the rest of the members of the committee. You have lived in the estate for 25 or 35 years, was it?

Kai NG: Twenty-five.

The CHAIR: Twenty-five years. And you are happy with the condition of the building?

Kai NG: Very, yes.

The CHAIR: What would you say, if any, would there be improvements to make?

Kai NG: They will be much better.

The CHAIR: So, for example, we have had people say that there is mould. Is there mould in the building that you think we could have cleaned?

Kai NG: Management.

The CHAIR: The building is not managed well. I am paraphrasing. Is the building maintained properly?

Kai NG (via interpreter): A lot of areas need improvement.

The CHAIR: A lot of areas need improvement.

Kai NG: Such as security – a lot of strangers mucking around in the night-time.

The CHAIR: Sorry?

Kai NG (via interpreter): A lot of strangers are wandering around.

The CHAIR: Oh, yes. Okay.

Kai NG: During the night-time.

The CHAIR: At night-time, okay. Are there things –

Kai NG: Sometimes even some of the people – they sleep there.

The CHAIR: People that do not live there sleep there?

Kai NG: Yes. The laundry room gets breakdowns. Laundry machines break down.

The CHAIR: So the laundry room is in bad condition?

Kai NG: Damage to everything.

The CHAIR: So the laundry room is damaged?

Kai NG (via interpreter): Yes, the laundry.

The CHAIR: Yes, okay. What about in the –

Kai NG: Even now it is still –

The CHAIR: At this point in time it is damaged?

Kai NG: Yes, even now.

The CHAIR: What about in your apartment? Are there things like carpet damage, or are walls not in good condition? Does the bathroom have problems? Is it leaking or – you know, those sorts of things.

Kai NG: Everything. Water leaking in the bathroom, carpet damage, the holes on the bottom – so many things need repair.

The CHAIR: So the question I am going to is: in your view, should the building be demolished and started again, or are the things that you are talking about repairable?

Kai NG: I think repairable is better.

The CHAIR: Repairable is better.

Kai NG: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Kai NG: Because the building is not too old, only 60 years.

The CHAIR: That is not old at all, is it. Okay, I appreciate that. Thank you for your time. My time is expired, and I am going to hand over to Ms Gray-Barberio now. Thank you.

Kai NG: It does not need to be pulled down. If we manage it, it is okay – the building.

The CHAIR: If the amenities are okay?

Kai NG: It should be okay. That is what I think, personally.

The CHAIR: Yes. We are after your view.

Kai NG: It is my personal opinion.

The CHAIR: Yes. That is all that matters. We care about your view; that is why you are here. Thank you. I am going to hand over to Ms Gray-Barberio now.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Hi, Mr Kai. Thank you very much for your time. In your submission you spoke about relocation, and you were not offered any interpreters. Were you ever offered any interpreters at any time to help you understand the relocation process?

Kai NG: The interpreters are better, because my English is not that good.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: You were never offered interpreters?

Kai NG: No.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Okay. You also said in your submission that you felt pressured to sign relocation documents without fully understanding them. Can you please explain to the committee today why you felt pressured? What were they doing that was making you feel pressured to sign the documents?

Kai NG: I signed the documents because I respect the government. I respect the government decision. And I think sooner or later I have got to move, because they said, 'Everybody move out – compulsory.' That is why I had no choice. So I did not have to think, just sign.

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify?

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Yes.

The CHAIR: You are saying you felt like you had no choice – it was compulsory?

Kai NG: Yes. They told me, 'Building – compulsory pull down.' So everybody had to move. That is why I signed.

The CHAIR: Okay. Sorry.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you, Mr Kai, I appreciate that. Did the relocation staff tell you that you have to move out by February?

Kai NG: Next year.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Next year. What did they say to you would happen if you chose not to move out by February of next year?

Kai NG: They did not say anything.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I understand you are a very respectful man to the government, but do you think the government is doing the right thing?

Kai NG: I have no idea.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: What impact is this having on you?

Kai NG: I think, if they are doing this, they must have their own reason, but I do not know what reason, so that is why I do not object.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Are you scared, Mr Kai, of what is going to happen to your future?

Kai NG: I am not scared of anything. I am an old man.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: I guess I am trying to ask: so many of the public housing residents that we have been very fortunate to hear from speak so proudly of the community of the public housing residents, the community that they have built in supporting each other. Are you going to miss that community, Mr Kai?

Kai NG: Yes, the support of the community.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us today that you are comfortable with?

Kai NG: So far, that is all for the moment.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Thank you for your bravery in being here today.

Kai NG: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am going to pass over to Mr Berger, who is on the screen. John, over to you.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair, and hello to Mr Kai and to the interpreter as well. I have just got one question, Mr Kai, if I could. It is still your preference to have a new home?

Kai NG (via interpreter): Yes, it is okay to move to a new home.

John BERGER: I read in the introduction that I have for Mr Kai that his preference is for a new home. I am just wondering, if he had been given an opportunity to have things explained properly, would he have been more comfortable with it?

Kai NG (via interpreter): No. He has not had the opportunity.

John BERGER: Thank you. That is all I have. Thank you, Chair.

Kai NG: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Berger. Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon. Just looking through your submission, I understand you used to work at Dragon Boat Restaurant in Chinatown. Is that right?

Kai NG: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Were you cooking there?

Kai NG: I was the dining room manager – in charge.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, great. I would just like to ask about the home that you have lived in for 25 years. Can you tell us about your home? What were the things that you were most proud of about the place where you were living?

Kai NG: I lived in this place for 25 years. I have very good relationships with the neighbours. These people are my family. So it left me with the feeling that if I move out, the feeling will not be that good, because it is so friendly.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. What sorts of things would you want to see in your home? How many bedrooms? What sort of size of kitchen or bathroom? Do you have any particular things that you would want to see in the home that you live in?

Kai NG: For facilities everything is okay. The kitchen – everything is okay for a family. That is good enough.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: We are talking about a plan where many people are being moved into different homes. Some of the feedback we have received is around the number of bedrooms and the suitability for families, for example, of what is being offered. Do you have any concerns about the types of homes or the designs of the homes that are being offered to people who are moving from public housing?

Kai NG: My place is no problem. I have got enough space myself. I am one person. I do not have any family members, so the space should be sufficient for me – no problem at all.

The CHAIR: No girlfriend?

Kai NG: Not yet, unless you are going to introduce me.

The CHAIR: It is never too late. Sorry, Aiv.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: No, that is okay. I understand that in the submission that you have provided you spoke about the potential costs of moving, and that can be seen in many different ways – for example, if you have to replace furniture or there are any changes to utility bills and things like that. Can you speak about those concerns that you have? Because these are probably concerns that will be raised by other public housing residents.

Kai NG: I can handle it by myself very carefully – not overspend. I cannot afford to pay for too many items.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: We have heard from some public housing residents who have moved into community housing that they are experiencing shock because they have to suddenly pay for utility bills that previously they had not been paying for when they were living in a public home. Are you aware of these concerns? What do you think about them?

Kai NG: In my place I do not have much worry because I can afford it, but some of the people might not.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: They might not be able to.

Kai NG: It all depends on how they manage.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Do you think we should be doing everything that we can to keep the costs minimal or ensure there are none, effectively, for people who are living currently in public housing?

Kai NG: You try to reduce the expenses. Yes, you can do it.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I just clarify one more thing?

The CHAIR: Yes, of course, please.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Are you still living in public housing now?

Kai NG: Yes, I am still in public housing.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: But you have engaged with Homes Victoria. I do not want to paraphrase, but you felt pressured to sign papers, and you have not already signed – or you have signed?

Kai NG: I have already signed.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: You have already signed, but you have not moved out yet. They are still finding a home; is that right?

Kai NG: I already moved, yes.

The CHAIR: You have already moved.

Kai NG: Already moved.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: You have already moved. How long ago was it that you moved?

Kai NG: Three months.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Three months ago. Are you still in the local area? Are you nearby?

Kai NG: Local area, just a different building.

The CHAIR: That is probably time. I have got one more question and then I will go. Last question: I want to ask you about how you knew that you had to move. Did you get a letter or was it email or was it something under the front door? How did you find out that you had to move?

Kai NG: They gave me a form.

The CHAIR: They gave you a form? Before the form did you get a letter or did you get a piece of paper that said you had to move?

Kai NG: No, I did not.

The CHAIR: Nothing?

Kai NG: No. They just came up to the house – to the flat.

The CHAIR: And they said you had to move?

Kai NG: No, they give you a form.

The CHAIR: You fill out the form?

Kai NG: And then they introduce what they are doing. And then if you accept it, you can sign, or you can take it into consideration.

The CHAIR: Just so I am clear –

Kai NG: They give you time to consider.

The CHAIR: You got the form, and that was at the same time you found out that they were telling you you had to move; is that correct?

Kai NG: No, they give you a form and then they give you time to consider before you sign.

The CHAIR: What I am getting at is you that got the form when you were told that you had to move, though. You did not have to sign it then, but you got the form then.

Kai NG: I got the form.

The CHAIR: Okay. That makes sense. What do you think could have made communication easier and better for you from government? Could they have done things which would have made it easy for you to navigate the process?

Kai NG: They are doing okay at the moment.

The CHAIR: Sorry; I missed that.

Kai NG: I said the government is doing okay at the moment.

The CHAIR: It is okay?

Kai NG: Yes. So far it is okay.

The CHAIR: You have not found difficulty in understanding what was in front of you?

Kai NG: No.

The CHAIR: It is all clear. Okay. That is the end of my questions. Do any of you guys have a last follow-up, or are you all good?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I am just looking at the end of your submission. You said:

What do I hope for?

All I want is to stay.

To keep my home, my community, my way of life.

That's all I hope for.

Can you speak a bit more about why you wrote this?

Chengde LIU (interpreter): What is the actual submission, sorry?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is at the end of Kai's submission. It is:

What do I hope for?

All I want is to stay.

To keep my home, my community, my way of life.

That's all I hope for.

How did it feel writing that?

Kai NG (via interpreter): I am not quite sure.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: That is okay. Thank you. It is a really excellent submission, though.

Kai NG (via interpreter): Whatever I thought of, I just put in.

The CHAIR: From here to there, yes. We might close this session –

John BERGER: Joe.

The CHAIR: Sorry, John; I did not even see you.

John BERGER: That is okay, mate. I just want to clarify one thing if I could, please, and that is if Kai was given a form, told what was happening and, in his words – I think I picked it up – had time to consider it. And then he was moved to a similar place in the same suburb. Is that what I heard?

Kai NG: You can move to any suburb. They give you a choice – not 'It must be Richmond.' You can move to maybe some other area. Not Box Hill or somewhere – they give you a choice.

The CHAIR: Did you get that, John?

John BERGER: Yes. Sorry for labouring the point, but I just want to see if it was in the same suburb and the communication that he got was clear and he understood it.

The CHAIR: Forgive me, John, if I am not saying it correctly, but the question is: the communication you got, did you understand it and was it clear? Is that it, essentially, John?

Kai NG: Yes.

John BERGER: Yes, and that it gave him a choice.

Kai NG: Yes, they give you a choice.

John BERGER: Okay. Thank you. That is clear now. Thank you, Kai. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: One final question.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Was there an interpreter during that session? When you signed the documents, was there an interpreter?

Kai NG: No interpreter, no.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: No interpreter.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Kai NG: That is what I told you. My English is no good.

The CHAIR: I can understand you. We will now bring the session to a close. Thank you so much for your time today. We have appreciated it very much.

Kai NG: Most welcome.

The CHAIR: You do not look 78; you look very good. Thanks for your time. We really appreciate it. This brings the session to a close.

Committee adjourned.