

TO: Legal and Social Issues Committee
FROM: Philip Gluyas, Private Citizen, Ballarat, Victoria
RE: Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

To the Committee,

I apologise for being a business day late with this submission as I only got an email today advertising the Committee's first public hearing, and I was not aware that this inquiry was being held until now. I note that submissions did close on Friday, but given that I never got an email noting the existence of this inquiry despite being on the Parliamentary mailing list I would hope that you would make an exception for this submission.

My Interest - I have been on the Public Housing waiting list since 2002 and remain in private rental today. I can not give details in public due to online stalkers, but at present there is nothing available that suits the criteria that we are listed under in the areas listed. I do know we are near the top of the list on priority housing. I am therefore very keen to see stock numbers in public housing be increased as this will increase our chances of finally being placed in public housing. Given that we have been waiting 15 years I am sure the Committee can understand the urgency of this matter.

I'll address the terms of reference individually and this is a rush job I admit.

1. The adequacy of a proposed 10 per cent increase in public housing (or 1,100 public units) on the sites given the size of the waiting list for public housing;

It is my view that this increase is not adequate – nowhere near it. If there are just 11,000 units at present the waiting list of 35,000 (not including Community housing waiting lists) just can not be covered, and increasing it to 12,100 will just not cut it. During the 2014 election campaign I tried to put it out there that \$4 billion needed to go into public housing over four years. At an average of \$250,000 per dwelling/unit that would be 16,000 units – more than doubling the current stock. And even that would only cut the waiting list in half. This is in theory of course.

2. The ability to cater for all demographics including families, couples and singles with the proposed housing mix;

In this I draw the Committee's attention to Chapter 5.6 of the Family and Community Development Committee's Inquiry into Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I fall into this category and my submission to this inquiry was in fact quoted in part where my housing issue was brought up. The government is yet to respond to the report, in particular Recommendations 5.11 and 5.12. Requirements for Autistics are at present not well catered for and this is why my wait has been so long.

3. The effects on current public housing tenants

I'll leave this one alone as I am not a current tenant, except to say that increases of any sort should not have any effect on current tenants.

4. The allocation of parts of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units;

This appears to indicate a leaning towards communities in groups, which is fine in one sense but in another sense – as has been seen in the old Housing Commission estates in inner Melbourne – it can

create a local culture of mental health issues for all residents of varying degrees and so forth. This should be something that should be avoided. I believe this is also happening in inner city private apartment blocks, where of course the sorts of issues would be different but the core cause would be the same – putting too many people in too small a space.

5. The lack of public condition assessments of the estates or alternative options such as refurbishment of all or part of the existing housing units;

I am amazed that this sort of neglect has been going on, judging by this note and obviously that needs to change – given that this appears to place a question mark over the safety of existing stock. It should be mentioned that the potential of a similar disaster to that of what happened in England earlier this year raises its ugly head – and not just because of the cause of that disaster either (whatever it was – I can't remember it as I type this submission).

6. The proposed significant increase in density and heights and any local environmental impacts, such as the loss of open space and mature vegetation;

This goes to what I said in response to point 4 of the Terms of Reference, plus the fact that high density logically does negatively impact on open space and existing vegetation.

7. The removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implications surrounding communities including existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services;

I'm not a fan of removing planning controls completely but there does need to be some pressure placed on local councils to allow for public housing requirements. Having said that though, as this term suggests – local variations have to be taken into account. When it comes to services, public transport is essential as most public housing tenants (both current and prospective such as myself) do not drive or have their own motor vehicle. Those that do probably do so despite not being able to afford it and so on. Provision of adequate public transport is therefore essential in this area.

8. The proposed loss of third party appeal rights;

This rather depends on the factors this may refer to. The provisions of the Vexatious Proceedings Act may cover for a lot of these appeals so for that reason alone just taking these rights away could be seen as overkill. Having said that though, there is also the factor of neighbourhood character per point 7 above. This would become maybe something of a culture issue – a perceived culture by private residents in the vicinity thinking that public housing means troublemakers in not just the criminal sense but in the social sense as well. Enforcing diversity in a neighbourhood would be a two edged sword, but it could also be beneficial for all parties if it is handled correctly. This isn't an easy issue to resolve and it requires a lot of discussion both within the committee and through public hearings and consultations. I would encourage to Committee to therefore look at all angles as if this is done, it needs to be done right.

9. The transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community regarding the short, medium and long term implications of the PHRP model as currently proposed;

This goes to what I just said to point 8 of the Terms of Reference.

10. Public housing estates where similar models are envisaged or underway

I can't comment on Ashburton, Hampton or Preston so this one I would have to leave alone.

11. Previous Victorian public housing renewal projects, including but not limited to the Kensington, Carlton and Prahran public housing estates;

As I am not familiar with these renewal projects again I can't comment.

12. Best practice models for the provision of public housing from within Australia and overseas;

As indicated at several points above, I am not a fan of the estate principle – certainly in practice. I can understand the theory, particularly in the sense of providing savings for Treasury. But it creates issues that in the 21st century are best avoided. We need to take mental health into account and public housing renewal just can't be limited to estates. It has to go to all forms of housing consistent with point 2 of the Terms of Reference.

The Terms also make note of any other matters the Committee considers relevant.

I get the impression that this inquiry may be limiting its scope to Melbourne. If this is the case I would recommend that this be expanded forthwith. Regional Victoria needs help as well, and there is a solution which can assist both in regional areas and to a degree Melbourne as well taking into account what I said about public transport.

In 2006 the Bracks government introduced the Regional Rail Link project. This brought regional locations within the interurban network closer to Melbourne – in particular Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and the Latrobe Valley. Improvements have continued since that time and more are on the way as well. This means that public housing increases in these locations is more viable not just for those areas but also as alternatives to Melbourne. For instance, there is no public housing stock at all within a two kilometre radius of the Ballarat central business district. It is apparently concentrated in Wendouree with various other locations outside the radius. This would be the opportunity to change that. Another example, I am reliably informed, is the lack of one bedroom stock in Bendigo.

But the real opportunity for increases in stock come in the locations between these cities (and Seymour) and the metropolitan edge. Not just larger towns like Castlemaine, Bacchus Marsh, Kyneton, Drouin and Warragul, but also the smaller localities – such as Little River, Malmsbury, Tallarook and Tynong as examples. This would admittedly fit in with a key criteria of my own needs on the waiting list – solitude. But I am sure I'm not the only one who would benefit from that, and not just within the Autistic community either. The most important factor out of all this is that all of these places are easily accessed from Melbourne by public transport, and with enough frequency to be reasonable options for those on Melbourne based waiting lists. And I say that without wanting to suggest you ignore cities outside of this area – such as Mildura, Warrnambool, Shepparton and so on.

I hope this rush job is acceptable and I hope you consider my submission favourably.

PHILIP GLUYAS