

Legislative Council
Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues
Submission To
Inquiry into the Retirement Housing Sector
From
Hon Rod Mackenzie OAM

Views on Retirement Villages:

My wife and I have been living in a [REDACTED] retirement village for the past 10 years. When our large house on a double block became superfluous we decided to downsize. Looking firstly at town houses in suburbia. However friends who had already made the move had bad experiences with neighbours so we turned our attention to retirement villages where we also had friends. We have not regretted that decision to enter the [REDACTED]

Quietness, security, neighbours of similar age group, communal activities and a social life without travel. Holidays away without concerns for a vacant unit, an excellent library, community centre, Bowling Green, workshop and the ability to have a companion animal is an added plus.

Village life is to our generation what life was like in suburbia many years ago when your street was your community everyone knew each other, helped each other when needed and the street was the children's playground.

Owner/Management issues

When we first entered the village it was owned by a Ballarat developer who owned two or three other villages. The village was managed by two live-in managers a husband and wife who resided in a manager's residence in the village. The wife being the bookkeeper and front office manager the husband responsible for maintenance, unit sales and refurbishment, bus driving and employing trades people and gardeners.

Both were there full time and provided a sense of security especially if emergencies occurred late at night. Maintenance fees were never raised above the CPI. Communication with the owner was on a face to face basis.

After some five years or so the owner sold the village to Australian Unity who owns some 30 or so villages in Victoria and New South Wales.

On taking over the village we were assured by Australian Unity that there would be no changes either to our contacts or to the management structure. Within a few months it became apparent that Australian Unity did not want live-in managers making life so hard for the managers that they retired Australian Unity replacing them with a Melbourne based manager and assistant on a 9 am to 5 pm basis this caused the annual maintenance budget to increase by \$30,000 and Australian Unity endeavoring to increase the residents fee \$54.00 above CPI. With the loss of the live-in managers was the loss of our sense of security and now our management controlled not by one owner but the huge bureaucracy of Australian Unity.

Dignity and Respect

One of the issues affecting residents is the lack of respect by some upper level officers of Australian Unity and probably at other villages residents are spoken down to like children the “we know what’s best for you” attitude is insulting. Retirement villages are full of highly qualified retired professionals from many fields and with a lifetime of experience, as an example our village community centre had a major renovation. Residents were originally asked to contribute ideas towards the refurbishment only to find these suggestions ignored and the resulting centre unsuitable to the resident wishes.

Consultation with residents is important and their views should be respected

Retirement homes ombudsman

I would certainly support the appointment of a retirement homes ombudsman. We have been involved with a few differences with management relying on advice from the local office of Consumer Affairs in regards to our rights.

Local Government Rates

This is an issue that a number of villages have taken up some have been able to gain a reduction from some Councils. Personally I do not think is a great issue certainly we do pay for our street lighting and internal roads but we still use all the other council services such as garbage collection, libraries, art gallery, roads, parks community health so any reduction to our rated would be very minimal.

Contracts with Owners

Contracts with owners vary greatly and even in our village there are about 7 different contracts. There would be a big advantage if it were at all possible to have a State wide standard. All villages are different some like ours have the residents paying a very large refurbishing fee when they leave the village. Some village residents pay an exit fee on arrival which I believe to be the best option. Maintenance fees vary from village to village depending on the facilities and serviced provided perhaps there should be some set formula for setting them. The provision in the Act for the annual maintenance fee to be kept to the CPI and only above with the resident’s approval is a very important safeguard especially as many residents are pensioners.

Hon Rod Mackenzie OAM

