

# TRANSCRIPT

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

### Subcommittee

#### Inquiry into the retirement housing sector

Melbourne — 29 November 2011

#### Members

Mr Edward O'Donohue — Chair

Ms Nina Springle — Deputy Chair

Ms Margaret Fitzherbert

Mr Daniel Mulino

Ms Fiona Patten

Mrs Inga Peulich

Mr Adem Somyurek

Ms Jaclyn Symes

#### Participating Members

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

#### Staff

Acting secretary: Mr Patrick O'Brien

#### Witness

Ms Daisy Ellery.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Ms Ellery. Before I invite you to make your statement, I will just caution that all evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. If you could make your 2-minute statement?

**Ms ELLERY** — I just have to say that I am Daisy Ellery, chairperson, Housing for the Aged Action Group. There definitely needs to be some sort of arbitrator or ombudsman across the retirement village sector, because you go from having retirement villages that you pay \$2 million or \$3 million to go into, then down to your residential caravan parks, where most people — low-income people, people on a pension — do not have a lot of money to pay ingoing. They go into these villages and are promised the lifestyle that they can afford because they are nil-income people.

I do think there needs to be protection across the whole sector but particularly in caravan residential parks. I think that is a real concern, and I think it needs an independent arbitrator. Dispute resolutions do not work in most of those places. People are very fearful as they get older. They might go in when they are 65 or 70, but by the time they are in their late 70s or early 80s and they are not well or do not keep good health and managers then just override everything and they feel that they have no say. I think, as I said, dispute resolutions do not work because you go to the manager or the owner of the village, and that is where it stops. There is nowhere else for anybody on a low income to go to — to go to VCAT or Consumer Affairs — sometimes when they are older. So what most people do in those sorts of villages and under those circumstances is lock themselves in their unit. Most people become really ill and suffer from terrible ill health, locked in their own four walls because they are too frightened to speak to anyone about it. Sometimes they are marginalised within the village that they live in. So that is what happens.

Housing for the Aged Action Group sees on a daily basis many of those people coming to our organisation. We are seeing more and more people in these situations that are living under these terrible — it is like a regime, Hitler sort of, where they are too frightened. So they come to us for help. We have seen people who have come to us who had decided that their life was not worth living, until they came to HAAG. Our staff help them through that and work through all those issues with them, until they find them — often — affordable, low-income housing and put them into it. We see people that are really ill that, after being helped by HAAG over a number of months and being represented by them and supported by HAAG, then actually become really well and become very active and good community workers in our organisation and for other organisations. But I do think there is definitely a need for an ombudsman or an arbitrator.

You must remember that as you get older, if you are not well and you do not have a family support — and as you know, in this day and age a lot of older people do not have family support because their children live their lives and they leave their elder family members to live their own. And quite often people do not want to go and worry their children about what is going on, because they do not want their children to know what is going on. But on the other hand, the positive side about living in some of the villages is that when you go to buy into a village you are not buying a home — and I think that is where a lot of people are confused — you are buying a lifestyle. The lifestyle is what you are buying. Where I live and in a lot of the villages it is a wonderful way of living as you get older. You have companionship from people of your own age, you can talk about all your illnesses. Everybody has had something else going on, so you compare different knee replacements with whatever. It is a really good lifestyle, and it is companionship. I have seen people who have been so ill when they have actually come into the village, and have gone from being ill to being really well again because of the support that they get. So there are very positive things about living in a village.

In the caravan residential areas there are positive things about that too. But as Max was saying before, there are a lot of things — the building standards and the way they build the villages and the dispute resolutions — that need to be looked as well, and I really think across the whole sector and that you are not just looking at the \$2 million or \$3 million places that you can go into. You need to look across the whole sector and that.

Thank you very much for the opportunity for being able to come along and to listen to everybody. I do hope — we are hoping — for a great outcome for all the people whose voices are silent. We can be a voice for them.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ms Ellery. Thanks for being part of it today.

**Witness withdrew.**