

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND

SUBMISSION BY

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Introduction

This submission refers to the Committee Inquiry into the Sale or alienation of public land for private development.

The Gippsland Carers Association has a critical interest in:

1. The sale of public land and subsequent relocation of residents of the Kew Cottages Residential Service under the guise of de-institutionalisation as the impact of this Bracks government decision has repercussions upon all disability support services.
2. The closure of two public hospitals and the Hobson's Park Mental Health Services in the Latrobe Valley with the subsequent disposal of public land to private use and the impact of these Kennett Government decisions upon disability and mental health support services.

All of these transactions have as their primary government purpose the effect of 'selling off the farm' to pay for services that should be an integral part of government policy and ongoing budget planning for the people of Victoria.

The disposals of such public lands have not had the effect of improving services to the people of Victoria, on the contrary, such actions by governments have failed to provide dividends and instead placed ever increasing burdens upon families as unpaid care providers and the public have a right to know why?

The Gippsland Carers Association Inc is a wholly voluntary organisation of unpaid family carers of people with disabilities, handicap or frailty. We have an association with the Kew Cottages Parents and the emotional dislocation of these families who have decades of ties with the residents forced to relocate to benefit private developers of the land.

As far back as the 1980's the caring families of Victoria have heard empty promises from governments that the closure of congregate care facilities and the sale of valuable public lands to provide alternate services in the community would mean that families managing without support would receive it.

It is clearly obvious by looking at government budgets for disability services and comparing budget growth with growth in client numbers that the sale of such public lands at Kew has not benefited the people with disabilities.

In 1999 expenditure on congregate care and shared supported accommodation was \$282million for 4790 persons. The 07-08 Disability budget estimate for these services was \$525million for 5070 persons, a capacity increase of around 6% for a budget increase of 86%. This alarming escalation in the cost per person and miniscule growth in capacity is responsible for the crisis that exists in disability services today with unmet and under met needs rampant.

The closure of the mental health accommodation service in Gippsland and subsequent disposal of public land has created a crisis in mental health care with people having mental health care needs either blocking acute hospital beds or abandoned to the vagaries of the streets.

The closure by the Kennett government of two public hospitals and disposal of public lands in Latrobe City with a failed privately owned public hospital in their place was another experiment that failed with the Bracks government then forced to 'buy back' the hospital into public hands.

This experiment also fails the families caring for the disabled persons the government fails to provide with a service. The Senate Inquiry into the funding and operations of the Commonwealth, State and Territories Disability Agreement (CSTDA) 2006 made bi-partisan and unanimous recommendations in their Report, which said the "burden of care on families was crushing and unreasonable."

This burden is reflected in the failing health of primary carers who then are required to stand in line for reduced health care services and failed disability and mental health services.

If the sale of public lands for private development does not benefit the community, we have to ask why?

The Gippsland carers Association made detailed submissions to the Senate Inquiry into the funding and operations of the CSTDA and appeared to give evidence at hearings. We also co-wrote the Submissions for the National Carers Coalition.

Our detailed submissions included the proposal to introduce ‘population based benchmark funding to disability services’ as a means to end forever the state and federal blame game and put in place a formula that ensures adequate services would be funded to end unmet and under met needs.

We comment these documents to the Committee as a clear view of how desperately under-funded disability services are and how the Bracks government has failed to act to remedy this disgraceful state of affairs. Both documents are attached.

All of the issues raised in our submissions are relevant to the failed disposal of public lands on the pretext of redirecting the funds into better disability services.

This is clearly not the case and we would be most alarmed if this government is allowed to continue down this path with other congregate care facilities on public land.

Families today remain the principal providers of accommodation and personal care to people with dependent disabilities delivering 92% of all supported accommodation in this state. There are presently over 13,500 persons with severe or profound disabilities aged over 34 years living with aged co-resident parents who provide care.

The Bracks government and the Department of Human Services have failed all these families just as assuredly as the present government has failed them by not delivering beneficial funding arrangements in the current CSTDA negotiations.

We also submit for your information, our document “Without Reprieve” published recently on the website Australian e-journal of social and political debate – On Line Opinion. This paper asks the hard questions about what kind of nation we are when we let family carers die without reprieve from care.

The disposal of public land/s for private development and the neglect of public housing to support our most vulnerable citizens is a clear measure of the lack of worth of the government to its people.

We would be pleased to provide any further information on our submission and attachments that the Committee may require.

Jean L Tops

Attachments: 1. Gippsland Carers and NCC Submissions to Senate CSTDA Inquiry.
2. Population Based Benchmark Funding for Disability Services
3. Without Reprieve