

EDITORIAL: Housing and the Election

by Karel Eringa and Serena Williams

Shelter WA and WACOSS are hosting a pre election forum on housing on Tuesday 18 January 2005.

The Minister for Housing (the Hon Nick Griffiths MLC), the Opposition spokesperson for housing (the Hon Ray Halligan MLC), the WA Greens spokesperson for housing (the Hon Giz Watson MLC) and representatives from the Democrats and Family First have agreed to attend the forum. Each speaker will explain their party's housing platform and respond to a questionnaire.

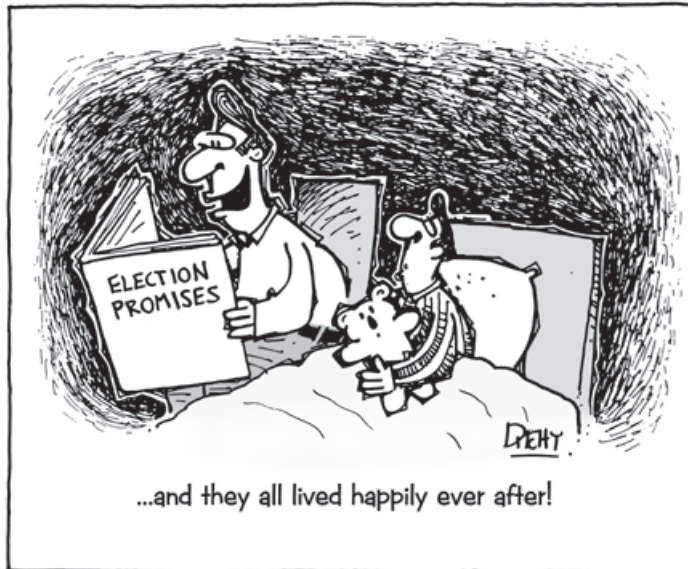
Shelter WA and WACOSS previously held a pre election forum in February 2001.

Issues of interest to all speakers at the 2001 forum included support for maintenance of public housing to current levels, increasing community housing and working towards resolving homelessness in WA. A report on the 2001 forum is still available from www.shelterwa.org.au/publications/htm.

In 2004, a quick perusal of the *News in Brief* section in this newsletters shows that these

issues are still topical. However, housing affordability and falling levels of home ownership have also moved up to the top of the housing agenda.

Further details on the pre election housing forum are listed in the open invitation to the forum on page 4.



5/10 2004-663 © John Ditchburn

This newsletter presents the housing policy platforms of all political parties who will be presenting at the pre election forum. All parties agree on a number of issues, including most notably that affordability of home ownership is falling and that there is a need to promote access to affordable housing in general.

The differences in individual party platforms can be seen in the emphasis each party places on these and other issues.

While the Liberal party platform mentions "a joint State/Federal home ownership proposal,... which would enable private homes to be purchased through a partnership agreement", Labor speaks more generally of protection for all housing consumers and a range of initiatives for low and middle-income home purchasers.

Labor and the Greens would require new housing developments to include a percentage of blocks for affordable homes. However, only the Greens will commit to a 10% requirement.

Each party mentions social housing in its platform, again with very different emphasis in each policy document. The Greens propose to increase the supply of "appropriate social housing" in WA. Labor makes no promise to increase supply, but intends to maintain public housing and to place greater emphasis on community housing as an option.

Continued on page 11

Elsewhere In This Issue

WACOSS Housing Discussion Paper.....	2
Homeswest Policy Update.....	4
Invitation: Pre Election Housing Forum.....	4
Housing Policies of WA Political Parties.....	5
News in Brief.....	10

WACOSS Housing Discussion Paper

provided by the WA Council of Social Service

Introduction

The experience of WACOSS and other housing-related non-government organisations over a number of years highlight the critical role of housing in people's lives, and the interconnectedness of housing with employment, health, education and other social, economic and environmental factors.¹ A growing body of research evidence at both state and national levels further supports this experience². However, these factors have rarely been addressed at the policy level, with responses to housing need tending to be ad hoc and uncoordinated.³

WACOSS strongly advocates that the current deficiencies in the supply of affordable housing to the financially disadvantaged is unacceptable and requires urgent, committed and holistic responses from government. This briefing paper outlines some of the key concerns and recommendations that WACOSS has put forward to government in our recent Pre-Budget Submission.

Key Housing Issues in WA

Research prepared for the National Summit on Housing Affordability shows that in 1998 an estimated 78,000 Western Australians were in housing stress, in 2004 this number has grown to 83,000 and represents 8.6% of income earners⁴. Within this, 7% of all Western Australian households (who rent privately and are in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance) spend more than 50% of their income on rent⁵.

The current situation of the availability of affordable temporary and long-term accommodation is distressing. Around Australia every day hundreds of women, children and men desperately seeking temporary shelter are turned away from services as there are insufficient services to support the number of homeless. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on any night the *chances of getting immediate accommodation are ... less than 50%*.⁶

In terms of longer-term accommodation, the situation is much the same with thousands of West Australians waiting years before being able to access subsidised housing.

A number of problems have been identified across the housing sector that are of particular concern to WACOSS and the non-government housing sector. These include:

- The severe lack of social and community housing
- The lack of financial support and resources to existing Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services
- The lack of an emergency crisis response with the capacity to assist people with serious mental health and/or drug related problems
- The deepening regional inequalities that have become evident across the country and some regions are emerging as pockets of high, and increasingly entrenched disadvantage.⁷ These problems are exacerbated by the withdrawal of services by both private and public sector agencies.
- The lack of appropriate housing options for certain population groups, notably youth, the mentally ill, single women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people exiting the prison system

Particular groups in the community are significantly over-represented in the numbers of West Australians in need of housing assistance. These groups include: Indigenous peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, youth, single mothers, the disabled and mentally ill, and the unemployed and underemployed. In addition to the need for assistance with housing, many of these individuals also access a range of support programs that are funded by other government departments such as the Health Department, Disability Services Commission, Department of Community Development and the Department of Justice. Currently however, the integration and coordination of the provision of housing with these

other policy frameworks is severely lacking. Instead, programs are largely evaluated in isolation, and as a result opportunities to develop a web of mutually reinforcing responses are lost.

Locational disadvantage has been well recognised as having negative impacts on a range of social and economic factors. Among others, it has been linked with higher incidence of the experience of social exclusion and severely diminished employment opportunities⁸. While the current state government has stated that they will continue to disperse social and community housing across the state, WACOSS holds concerns as to the continuation of this policy approach should there be a change in government. At the recent Anti-Poverty Week event, 'Setting the Agenda', the Hon Colin Barnett MLA, Leader of the Opposition, indicated that, should he be elected, he would reconsider this policy approach. This prospect of concentrating social and community housing in particular areas runs a real risk of creating pockets of disadvantage that will become entrenched over time leading to a wide range of negative social outcomes.

Recommendations:

Recommendations put forward in the WACOSS Pre Budget Submission 2005-2006 included:

- The State Government lobby the Commonwealth Government to increase their annual commitment to social housing in Western Australia by \$74.2 million to \$173.4 million per year.
- The State Government increases its annual commitment to social housing by \$52.1 million to \$86.6 million per year.
- That the State Government commit to supporting the Community Housing Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008 to encourage a more viable and financially independent community housing sector through honouring its previous pre-election commitment to provide an additional \$10 million to

Continued on page 3

WACOSS Housing Discussion Paper (cont'd)

community housing⁹. (\$10m to be allocated from the total of \$52m requested under recommendation above) each year for four years from July 2005.

- That 25% of the \$10 million to Community Housing (referred to in the previous recommendation) be directed towards the development of affordable housing options.
- That the Premier and Cabinet commit to the examination and resolution of national and state government policy issues impacting on the delivery of services to community housing tenants. A high priority to be placed on identifying strategies to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their mutual clients. An essential component of a coordinated initiative would be the development of an integrated emergency crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues.
- That Regional Housing Associations be established progressively in all regional areas of Western Australia.
- That funding be provided for a housing policy position to assist in the development of Regional Housing Strategies.
- That Regional Development Commissions and Metropolitan Regional Councils be adequately resourced by the State government to ensure extensive consultation across a broad range of stakeholders in the preparation of regional housing strategies.
- That priority is given to developing a culturally appropriate housing response to the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and singles.
- That the State Government extends the Department of Planning and Infrastructure initiative requiring that all redevelopment has a minimum of 15% of dwellings allocated to social and affordable housing. It is recommended that this requirement be extended to all future

development on Government owned and Crown land.

- That where existing and new planning mechanisms and processes are used to increase the availability of affordable housing (for rent and for purchase), a comprehensive definition of 'affordable' be developed in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, to ensure consistency of application.
- That the State Government commit to a 25% increase in their contribution to funding under SAAP V, and that this funding be directed into increasing the funding levels for existing agencies.
- That the State Government commit to the application of the State Indexation Policy in relation to its contribution to the SAAP Agreement regardless of the outcome of the agreed bilateral indexation formula.
- That the State Government continue to provide funding to support the SAAP services which were either implemented or enhanced in response to the State Homelessness Strategy, and that this funding be additional to the State's component of funding for the SAAP V Agreement.
- That the Department of Health, in consultation with Independent Living Program (ILP) housing providers develops a funding formula for ILP funding. Such a model should offer a transparent and consistent approach based on the amount of funding required to deliver an appropriate level of service.
- That the State Government commit to increasing the number of accommodation units available to people exiting the prison system, and; that adequate funding be made available to specialist support organisations thereby increasing their capacity to assist their clients to re-establish themselves in the community and hence reduce the rate of recidivism.
- That the State Government increase the stock of public housing appropriate for single women and mothers.

- That the State Government removes age based criteria that prevent young people accessing public housing and increases the public housing expenditure for youth.

For further information on these recommendations, please refer to the WACOSS Pre Budget Submission, available at www.wacoss.org.au.

Footnotes

¹ See for example WACOSS (2000) *Housing for a Sustainable Community: the State of Housing in WA*, Perth; National Shelter (1999) *The Links between Housing, Employment and Income Support: Implications for Housing Policy*, Discussion Paper, National Shelter, Canberra; People With Disabilities (1997) *Planning to meet the growing demand for accommodation services: A Discussion Paper for the Industry Commission*, People With Disabilities, Perth; Shelter SA and SACOSS (1998) *Redefining the Contribution of Housing to Stronger Communities: A South Australian Policy Perspective*, Shelter SA and SACOSS, Adelaide.

² See for example Burke, T. (1998) "Housing and Poverty" in Finch, R. and Nieuwenhuysen, J. (eds) *Australian Poverty: Then and Now*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; Farrar, A. (1999) *Housing and sustainable communities*, Paper presented at There's No Place Like Home, 2nd National Conference on Homelessness, Melbourne, 19-21 May 1999; Finch, R and Wulff, M (1998) "The Locations of Poverty and Disadvantage" in Finch, R. and Nieuwenhuysen, J (eds) *ibid*; National Housing Strategy (1992) *Australian Housing: The Demographic, Economic and Social Environment*, Issues Paper 1, AGPS, Canberra; Newman, P., Kenworthy, J. and Vintila, P. (1991) *Housing, transport and urban form*, National Housing Strategy Background Paper 15, AGPS, Canberra

³ Barron, L. and Gauntlett, E. (2001a) *Housing and Sustainable Communities Indicators Project Working Paper*, unpublished, WACOSS, Perth

⁴ Anne Harding, Ben Philips and Simon Kelly, (2004) *Trends in Housing Stress NATSEM*.

⁵ Productivity Commission (2003) *Report of Government Services 2003 Table 16A.49* AGPS, Canberra

⁶ Australian Institute of health and Welfare (2003) *Demand for SAAP Assistance 2001-02*, Media Release www.aihw.gov.au downloaded 30th of October 2003.

Continued on page 10

INVITATION to attend a

Pre Election Housing Forum

Shelter WA and WACOSS are hosting a pre election forum on housing on Tuesday 18 January 2005. The speakers at the forum will be Minister for Housing (the Hon Nick Griffiths MLC), the Opposition spokesperson for housing (the Hon Ray Halligan MLC), the WA Greens spokesperson for housing (the Hon Giz Watson MLC) and a Family First representative (Nigel Irvine).

Shelter WA and WACOSS previously held a pre election forum in January 2001. A report on that forum is still available from www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm. Issues of interest to all speakers at the 2001 forum included support for maintenance of public housing to current levels, increasing community housing and working towards resolving the homelessness problems in WA. This time around housing affordability and falling levels of home ownership are also at the top of the housing agenda.

The details of the forum are as follows:

City West Lotteries House Conference Room

Tuesday 18 January 2005

9:30am – 12:30pm

Morning tea and a light lunch will be provided. To RSVP and register for a copy of the Discussion Paper, please contact Serena Williams or Karel Eringa at Shelter WA on 08 9325 6660 or serena@shelterwa.org.au / karel@shelterwa.org.au by **Monday 10th January, 2005**. Please feel free to distribute this invitation through your networks.

To keep up to date with developments regarding this forum please consider joining SWA Update, Shelter WA's housing email list. SWA Update appears roughly fortnightly and is available to associate members of Shelter WA. You can become an associate member free of charge at www.shelterwa.org.au/subscribe.htm.

Homeswest Policy Update

provided by the Department of Housing and Works

Homeswest rental policy is developed within a consultative and feedback framework. The Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) reports directly to the Minister for Housing and Works.

The Homeswest Operational Standing Committee, which is a HAC Standing Committee, deals with operational housing policies for public housing. HOSC provides the Department of Housing and Works with an effective means of consulting with the community sector on rental policies and has helped to ensure that Homeswest's rental and maintenance policies are customer orientated.

The members of HOSC met bi-monthly during 2004 and nine changes to existing policy have occurred.

Interest deemed on money in non-interest bearing accounts was

brought into line with Centrelink deeming rates and the threshold for cash assets was increased and cross-referenced where appropriate.

New Zealand citizens with a protected or non-protected visa were acknowledged as being entitled to public housing subject to meeting normal eligibility criteria.

Due to Homeswest tenants making complaints against private owners or private rental tenants, policy was included to instruct officers and advocates of the relevant action required in such circumstances.

With the abolishment of stamp duty, its reference in the Individual Property Market Rents Manual was removed.

The Debt Discount Scheme was no longer made available to Homeswest tenants who incurred a debt as a result of being transferred to another Homeswest tenancy.

Employment obtained in another town or Homeswest zone was recognised as being grounds for priority assistance to both new and existing customers.

Homeswest properties that have been fully converted or purpose built to meet the needs of a person with a disability are used exclusively for customers with special needs. Where the person with a disability no longer resides in such a property, the remaining householders can stay for up to 12 months before they will be required to transfer. All such instances will be dealt with sensitively.

The specific policy change details are in the Document History table at the front of the Homeswest Rental Policy Manual. The manual is available on the Department's web site at www.dhw.wa.gov.au

Housing Policies of WA Political Parties

collated by Serena Williams



HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION: The Equitable Provision of Quality Housing

HOUSING

1. Labor believes:
 - a. that all Western Australians have the right to access housing that is affordable, appropriate, safe, sustainable and secure; and
 - b. that crisis services must be guaranteed sufficient housing to offer to the people they are helping.
2. Labor recognises:
 - a. the importance of providing all Western Australians with a range of accommodation options;
 - b. the problem of homelessness in our community;
 - c. the role that community housing plays in meeting the housing requirements of people with special needs or disabilities, young people, people in housing crisis, seniors and people from culturally diverse backgrounds; and
 - d. that a vibrant housing construction industry is a critical element in the state's economy.
3. Labor will:
 - a. continue to fight for the continuation of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and seek increased funding to compensate for the loss of funding that has occurred since 1989;
 - b. redirect the emphasis of the CSHA back to providing affordable, secure and appropriate housing;
 - c. consult key stakeholders such as local government, unions, tenant organisations, industry bodies and community organisations in the provision of housing;

- d. support and strengthen programs that deal with the issue of homelessness;
- e. improve coordination and collaboration between government departments and the community sector to ensure an improved response to homelessness;
- f. ensure a diversity of affordable housing locations within the community with access to essential amenities
- g. provide affordable housing through the following areas:
 - i. *Public Housing*
___by providing and expanding appropriate public housing for those in need, including people with disabilities, young people, the aged, people escaping domestic violence, Indigenous Australians and other disadvantaged groups; and
___by supporting the growth of public housing availability in rural and metropolitan regions.
 - ii. *Community Housing* (community-based, non-government, not-for-profit accommodation generally directed at people on low incomes)
___by supporting and strengthening the community housing sector as an alternative housing option.
 - iii. *Other*
___by encouraging land developers to include a percentage of affordable blocks in all land developments;
___by supporting low and middle-income people who choose to purchase their own homes through a range of initiatives and housing programs; and
___by identifying and supporting strategies developed to encourage investment in affordable housing to strengthen the private rental market.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

4. Labor recognises
 - a. that housing provision plays a central role in the lives of all people; and
 - b. that people must be protected in obtaining housing for themselves and their families.
5. Labor will:
 - a. introduce adequate laws and strengthen existing ones to protect consumers and ensure proper quality standards are enforced in housing constructions; and
 - b. ensure a high quality of housing and commercial construction in Western Australia.

SUSTAINABILITY

Housing

Improving Energy Efficiency

11. Labor will:
 - a. develop a program requiring the measurement of the energy efficiency of all new dwellings and existing dwellings undergoing sale and for such measurements to be disclosed; and
 - b. examine the introduction of incentives to encourage the retrofit of existing dwellings to become more energy efficient.

Continued on page 6

Housing Policies of WA Political Parties (cont'd)



Liberal Party

HOME OWNERSHIP: AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE

The Great Australian Dream

It is the great Australian dream to own your own home to provide a comfortable and safe environment in which individuals and families can live.

Access to affordable and quality housing for all Western Australians is the centrepiece of the Liberal approach to housing.

As at 2001, 68 per cent of all occupied private dwellings throughout Western Australia were either fully owned or being purchased. This figure rises to 70 per cent in the Perth metropolitan area – four per cent higher than the national average. However, we must not take this for granted.

AFFORDABILITY

In reality, it is becoming increasingly difficult for younger people to enter the property market. The Liberal Party is faced with the challenge of preserving and enhancing the existing high levels of home ownership.

By encouraging home ownership, we can help to shape a community where people can have both physical and financial security.

Government taxes and charges

The family home has traditionally and rightfully been afforded tax-exempt status at both a State and Federal level. For example, State land tax and Federal capital gains tax are not payable on the owner-occupied family home.

The Liberal Party strongly opposes any new government tax or charge on the family home. In September and October 2001, the Liberal Party, together with concerned residents, successfully rallied against the Gallop Labor Government's introduction of the greedy and divisive "premium property tax" on the family home.

However, in its first budget, the Gallop Labor Government removed the principal place of residence land tax exemption for family homes held in the name of a trust or company. Many small business owners have no choice but to own their family home through their company. This measure, effective 1 July 2002, will force more than 1,500 WA home-owners to pay, on average, \$1,000 to \$5,000 per annum to remain in their family home. If those affected choose to transfer their home into direct ownership, they may be liable to pay capital gains tax on the unrealised increase in the value of the land. Either way, the Gallop Labor Government is forcing hundreds of home-owners to pay tax on their family homes.

Just as it did in 1995/96, the Liberal Party in Government will again reinstate the application of a land tax exemption for owner-occupied family homes owned by a company or a trust for legitimate business or estate planning purposes.

First home-buyers

In its second budget, the Gallop Labor Government increased stamp duties on property purchases by an average of 10 per cent across the board. As a result, the WA home buyer is paying \$5,500 in stamp duty on the purchase of a median-priced \$180,000 home. This almost completely negates the financial benefit that first home-buyers receive through the Howard Government's \$7,000 first home-owners' grant.

Building Costs

The cost of building a home in Perth is less than any other capital city. According to recent ABS statistics, the cost of building a home in Western Australia (average cost across metropolitan Perth and rural and regional WA) in March 2002 was \$541 per square metre. This compares with \$639 per square metre in NSW, \$689 per square metre in Victoria and an average \$625 per square metre across Australia.

The major reason for this is the use of the sub-contract system for housing construction in WA – a system based on small business

and private enterprise. Under the Gallop Labor Government's industrial relations "reforms", this industry, in particular the sub-contract system, will be under serious threat.

The Liberal Party is committed to an industrial relations system underpinned by choice and flexibility – free from inefficient operators. This is necessary to ensure the continuation of the sub-contract system and WA's comparatively low building costs.

Home indemnity insurance

Another critical issue affecting the home building industry at present is that of home indemnity insurance. The Gallop Labor Government has not made this issue the priority it ought to be, despite pressure from the Liberal Party and industry groups. As premiums rise and insurance becomes more and more difficult to obtain due to the lack of competition in the market, many small businesses are being forced out of the building industry and those who remain must increase their prices.

Smaller and regional builders are most affected and are losing their market share to the big 3 or 4 Perth based builders. As the number of builders in our regional areas decline, consumer choice in will also be eroded.

The Liberal Party is currently consulting with industry groups and businesses in the housing sector with the aim of developing a sustainable long-term solution to the insurance crisis.

FIRST HOME BUYERS – A NEW INITIATIVE

The WA Liberal Party is supportive of a joint State/Federal home ownership proposal, discussed by Prime Minister John Howard and state and territory Liberal leaders in September 2002.

The basic tenet of the proposal, put forward by the Menzies Research Centre, is to enable private homes to be purchased through a partnership agreement. The home would be purchased by a combination of a normal mortgage raised by a prospective householder and

Continued on page 7

Housing Policies of WA Political Parties (cont'd)

finance from an institutional investor who would provide equity capital.

The householder would pay less out of his or her own pocket over their lifetime. The only entitlement the institutional investor would have is that they receive a proportionate share of the sale price when the home is sold. The householder would occupy the residence and retain complete control of the property with the right to determine the timing of its sale.

This initiative would be aimed at encouraging first home-buyers, but if deemed to be financially viable, it may also be extended to home-buyers who were wanting to upgrade their owner-occupied residence. The tax advantages applicable to family homes may be able to be extended to the institutional investor making the partnership agreement equally as attractive to both parties.

Not only would this mean that prospective home buyers would not have to single-handedly bear the burden of entering the increasingly expensive property market, but the disposable income of families would increase as a result of the reduced cost of home ownership and the associated reduction in mortgage repayments.

CHOICE IN HOUSING

A contemporary policy targeting home ownership must also recognise and account for the changing housing needs of an ageing population. The Liberal Party is committed to ensuring that Western Australian retirees and seniors have access to quality residential accommodation that meets the requirements of their individual lifestyle.

According to 2001 Census data, around 12 per cent of Western Australia's population is aged 65 years and over. In recent times, we have seen a significant increase in the number of seniors aged 75 years and over, many of whom live alone.

The Liberals will encourage greater levels of private sector investment in housing for seniors which is within the means of middle income earners and which includes a care component. It is also essential to examine ways in which the retirement village industry can be ex-

panded in consultation with the private sector, local government, consumer and seniors groups. Innovative policies adopted in other jurisdictions will be examined and put out for public comment by the Liberal Party.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The WA Liberals remain committed to such successful programs as the *Right to Buy Scheme*, that gives long-term HomesWest tenants a chance to purchase their homes at a discounted market price. The Liberal Party will also look to build upon the success of its urban renewal *New Living Program* including lowering the concentration of HomesWest properties in certain areas, replacing and refurbishing inappropriate public housing, improving streetscapes and parks and enhancing community infrastructure. These initiatives will be developed further and detailed in a future Position Statement.



FAMILY FIRST PARTY

Family First recognises that housing should be affordable and accessible to all Australians.

Family First recognises that housing stability and security are crucial to healthy and stable family life and ultimately for the optimal development and education of children. Family First also recognises that home ownership provides a fundamental plank in Australia's Social Security Safety Net and is an important aspect of sound retirement planning.

Specifically

1. Family First will support the ongoing and improved availability of public housing, particularly to those in the community who are physically, socially and economically disadvantaged.
2. Family First will seek to identify and promote public policy that provides real incentive and opportunity for home ownership, particularly for first home buyers. Family First will seek to identify and support measures to redress the decline in housing affordability.



Detailed Policy 2004

Appropriate housing enhances people's health, dignity and life opportunities. It is an essential prerequisite to social equity.

There is a major housing crisis in Australia. Affordable housing [1] must be provided in areas with access to jobs, education and public transport. Housing design must respond to changing demographics and community aspirations, as well as meeting energy efficient housing design standards. It is vital that these issues are addressed if we are to maintain our quality of life.

SPECIFIC POLICIES

The Greens (WA) will support actions and legislation that:

1. *Encourage shared responsibility for an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable housing by:*
 - supporting community dialogue on housing;
 - providing more information and opportunities to enable the community to participate in planning decisions; and
 - using inclusive consultation processes for major decisions so that local concerns are balanced against the needs of the region as a whole.
2. *Increase the supply of appropriate social housing [2] by:*
 - directing funding from rent assistance back to the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) to provide targeted, supported housing for those in need, including people with disabilities, young people, the aged, people escaping domestic violence and indigenous Australians, in rural and metropolitan areas;

Continued on page 8

Housing Policies of WA Political Parties (cont'd)

- providing targeted rent assistance for those in need of short term accommodation, such as students;
 - supporting and strengthening the community housing [3] sector, including a review of relationships with the Department of Housing and Works, such as headleasing fees; and
 - consulting with the community to set targets for social housing, including diverse dwelling types targeted to people with special needs, in all Local Government Areas (LGAs) to achieve social mix and shared responsibility between State and Local Government.
3. *Increase the supply of affordable rental housing in the private market by:*
- investigating arrangements such as bonds, partnerships and tax credits to encourage investment in low cost rental housing in place of negative gearing; and
 - encouraging alternative arrangements such as lodgers, boarders, caravan parks and shared accommodation, with support readily available to tenants and landlords.
4. *Increase the affordability of home ownership by:*
- requiring new residential developments over 30 dwellings to provide at least 10% affordable housing;
 - eliminating the tax bias towards passive investment in property by making expenses incurred deductible only against income from the same type of investment in current or future years;
 - improving the targeting of and coordination between property-related taxes and concessions, such as stamp duty, GST, First Home Owners Grant and land tax to support first home buyers in the bottom 40% of incomes; and
 - consulting with builders, real estate agents and lending institutions to promote smaller, more diverse housing as a legitimate option, not a resale risk.

5. *Foster affordable housing that translates into affordable living by:*

- reviewing the provisions of the Building Code of Australia (BCA), Western Australian Residential Design Codes and Town Planning and Development Act to reduce barriers to medium-density and mixed-use developments in transport and amenity rich areas, particularly for seniors, singles and other people with special needs;
- facilitating redevelopment around public transport to increase accessibility to employment and other facilities by means other than the private car;
- increasing developer contributions for new fringe developments, directing government expenditure to support well-located, high-quality infill development;
- assisting households to purchase in areas where living costs will be lower, through schemes such as location-efficient mortgages [4]; and
- locating new public housing [5] close to employment, transport and other services.

6. *Improve the resource efficiency of new and existing buildings by:*

- increasing minimum requirements for energy and water use efficiency and waste reduction in new construction and substantial alterations/additions, and providing incentives for people who wish to better these minimum requirements;
- reviewing the energy provisions of the BCA to encourage innovation for sustainability;
- providing incentives for people to renovate commercial or residential buildings to improve their energy and water use efficiency and waste reduction;
- requiring the assessment and marketing of the energy efficiency of all existing as well as new buildings for sale;
- including the testing and promotion of affordable,

sustainable development models in the key objectives of the Department of Housing and Works and the Department for Planning and Infrastructure; and

- supporting the development of appropriate new technology, including recycling of building waste in line with the State Waste Minimisation Strategy.

BACKGROUND

There is a major housing crisis in Australia. The shift in government focus from the provision of social housing (Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA)) to market incentives rent assistance, negative gearing and the First Home Owners Grant) has contributed to high property prices and a shortage of affordable rental stock in the public and the private sector. Housing-related poverty, inappropriate housing and homelessness are increasing, particularly among young people. The Western Australian Council of Social Services identified public housing as its priority in 2004.

Housing affordability is lowest in employment and amenity-rich areas. This compounds poverty by making it difficult to access jobs, training, public transport and other opportunities. The continued release of large areas of land on the urban fringe as a primary strategy for housing affordability is not sustainable, as higher transport costs are likely to be a major burden on low-income households. Further, expanding the urban area involves high costs to health (car dependence leads to urban air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and physical inactivity), the environment (loss of natural habitat, encroachment on agricultural land and water catchments) and the economy (high infrastructure costs and vulnerability to changes in oil supplies).

There is broad support in the community for sustainable development, for example, more energy-efficient buildings and more compact, mixed use communities suited to walking, cycling and public

Continued on page 9

Housing Policies of WA Political Parties (cont'd)

transport. Demographic changes also point to a need for smaller, more diverse housing. In 2001 nearly half of all households were occupied by only one (23%) or two (25%) people. Despite this, local governments in inner areas are reducing density limits, and new residential construction is dominated by large homes that rely on air-conditioning rather than climate-sensitive design.

GLOSSARY

[1] affordable housing is housing that costs less than 30% of household income.

[2] social housing is affordable rental accommodation and includes housing provided by the State and by the community sector.

[3] community housing is rental accommodation provided by not for profit community-based organisations, church groups or Local Government that offers tenant participation in the management of their housing.

[4] location efficient mortgages (LEMs) allow purchasers of homes near public transport who agree to own only one car to qualify for a larger loan, enabling access to communities that might otherwise be out of their reach. LEM's assume that less of their income will go toward car costs if they can walk, cycle, or take public transport.

[5] public housing is rental accommodation provided by the State (Homeswest)



*Official Democrat Policy - as balloted
6 June 2004*

OBJECTIVES

The Australian Democrats aim to ensure equitable access to housing for all Australians, including public or community housing for those who require it, and that economic and planning practises of all levels of government are applied to meet these goals in a sustainable way.

PRINCIPLES

1. We believe that government should play a role in smoothing the boom and bust cycles in the housing market by ensuring all legislation that encourages property investment and which impacts on lifestyle and affordability, is monitored and reviewed to minimise negative effects.

2. We will ensure land taxes are extended to certain owner-occupier properties at the top end of the market and reduced for multiple investments in low cost rental housing.

3. We will work towards the abolition of stamp duty on homes that are bought as a principal place of residence.

4. We will legislate so that there is increased funding for public and community housing of an adequate standard, and that this funding is indexed and cannot be used for any other purpose.

5. We will work to ensure that the Commonwealth and States governments support investment in affordable rental housing through a variety of taxation and other incentives.

6. The Democrats commit to ensuring that housing strategies are developed to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, including youth, people with a disability, indigenous people, senior Australians, and people with intellectually or mentally impaired.

7. will actively encourage governments at all levels to become more proactive in facilitating community housing and low-cost housing projects, by working together to

reduce development, infrastructure and energy costs and provide an integrated approvals and funding process.

8. believe tenants should be given every opportunity to have an effective role in managing their own homes and communities.

9. support the universal introduction of tenancy tribunals to protect the rights of all people who rent, board or lodge.

10. will work towards uniform national laws that ensure security of tenure for renters.

11. believe State Governments should apply consistent and sustainable urban and environmental planning processes to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing.

12. support the enforcement of environmental standards within the building code, including energy efficiency standards.

13. advocate design and construction practices that reduce reliance on non-renewable power sources.

14. believe that the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement should be maintained, and that the Commonwealth must play a continuing financial role in ensuring affordable and appropriate housing for all Australians.

15. support initiatives for people on low and moderate incomes to have access to a choice of affordable housing options, as well as access to rent and mortgage subsidies.

16. will provide incentives so that urban planning processes are improved to better integrate the environment with urban development, and improve community input into major infrastructure and planning decisions. will work towards legislative change so that all subsidies and schemes to assist people to rent or buy homes are means tested, combined with a review and revision of eligibility requirements.

17. support the use of independent organisations to provide low cost land and housing infrastructure, and to encourage innovative planning to meet community needs.

News In Brief

No Place Like Home: Homelessness in Western Australia

No Place Like Home is the outcome of a three year project investigating the causes and consequences of homelessness in Western Australia. Combining data from the project with information from a range of other sources, the report demonstrates that a significant proportion of the state's population is denied the basic human right of housing.

No Place Like Home contains an overview of statistical and other information on homelessness in Western Australia presented in a number of recent reports and projects. However, the core of the project is information gathered in five surveys of agencies dealing with homeless people, which Shelter WA conducted between June 2001 and March 2004. These surveys provided information about a total of 412 homeless households and demonstrated that single income households are most at risk of homelessness. Children and young people make about half the homeless population, and most are Indigenous.

In addition to the surveys, the report also presents the views of homelessness agencies and the people accessing these agencies. A series of interviews highlight the responses from the homelessness agencies to the problem of addressing homelessness and compares this to the experiences of those people who are homeless and in contact with these agencies.

Finally, the report makes three key recommendations based on the findings of the report. These recommendations focus on increasing both the supply of affordable housing and the availability of support options.

Go to www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm to download the report.

Regional Housing Analysis Kalgoorlie-Boulder

Earlier this year, Shelter WA conducted a series of consultations and a community forum on housing issues in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Shelter WA has now released its final report on housing in Kalgoorlie-Boulder based on these consultations and subsequent statistical research.

The Report finds that "Kalgoorlie-Boulder's housing market can be described as somewhere between the mature housing markets of state capitals such as Perth and the immature, volatile markets of small mining towns." The report's key finding is that there is a mismatch between housing stock and the requirements of residents, resulting in high levels of both overcrowding and underoccupancy. For instance, "while 52.9% of households in Kalgoorlie-Boulder only contain one or two people, only 19.9% of its dwellings have two or fewer bedrooms."

Other findings include:

- Significant swings in real estate and rental prices,
- Homelessness and overcrowding are concentrated among Indigenous people
- Poor standards and maintenance in the private rental sector
- Lack of access to affordable private rental housing for certain groups, including young people and Indigenous people
- A shortage of land suitable for development
- A shortage of both small (1/2 bedroom) and large (5+ bedroom) dwellings

The report's 20 recommendations focus on addressing the current mismatch between Kalgoorlie-Boulder's housing stock and requirements, making optimal use of available land, and providing practical support to tenants with high needs.

The report is available at www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm.

EOC Inquiry into Public Housing for Aboriginal People

The Equal Opportunity Commission has released the final report of its inquiry into public housing for Aboriginal people, *Finding A Place*. The report identifies a number of shortcomings of public housing for Aboriginal people, including poor maintenance, poor training of officers and a lack of stock. The report confirms many findings published by

Continued on page 11

WACOSS Housing Discussion Paper (cont'd)

⁷ Gleeson & Carmichael (2001). *Thinking regionally, acting locally: lessons for Australia from overseas housing and regional assistance policies*. AHURI

⁸ See, for example, Randolph, B. (2000) *Community Renewal and Disadvantaged Areas – A National Agenda For Action*. Presented at Creative Approaches to Urban Renewal: A Conference on the Redevelopment of Public Housing. Shelter WA, Perth

⁹ The Labor Party committed up to an additional \$10m to Community Housing from the funding provided to the Department of Housing and Works in its pre-election commitments (see www.wa.alp.org.au/dl/camp2001/housing.pdf, p2.) ac. In addition, The Premier in correspondence to WACOSS (2 February 2001) states "Labor supports the continued development of Community Housing and believes it has not

received the priority under the Court Government it deserves. In government, we would be looking to restoring community housing." According to statistics provided by the Department of Housing and Works there has been no increase in funding to Community Housing as yet under the Gallop Government.

News In Brief (cont'd)

Shelter WA over the last few years in a range of reports, and Shelter WA supports many of the report's recommendations.

Regrettably, however, *Finding a Place* misses the single most important point, namely that public housing in Western Australia and across the country is under-resourced to cope with the demands that are placed on it. Consecutive funding cuts and an increased focus on those who are 'most in need' have resulted in falling income for our State Housing Authority, forcing it to reduce costs in order to prevent shortfalls.

In order to achieve this, Homeswest has cut corners. Its expenditure on maintenance is at a questionably low level. It pays its accommodation managers at a junior rate, but requires them to deal with people who have increasingly complex needs after giving them minimal training. Accommodation managers are expected to manage up to 400 tenancies, compared to an average of 75-100 in the private sector. They are assessed on the extent to which they collect rent and limit vacancies, not on how well they deal with tenants with complex needs.

Many of the recommendations made in *Finding a Place* are laudable and need to be implemented. However, the Report fails to recognise that increasing public housing stock, better maintenance and better training for Homeswest officers all cost money. Homeswest needs to be properly funded if it is to adequately house some of the most disadvantaged people in our society.

The report is available from the Commission's website, www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au.

Shelter WA Info Sheet #24: What Housing Jargon Means

Shelter WA Information Sheet #24 goes a step further than Sheet #23, which sought to decode a range of housing acronyms. The latest Information Sheet provides a brief description of key housing agencies, programs and key policies. The sheet covers a number of commonly used housing terms, including State and Commonwealth funding programs.

Both Information Sheets are available at www.shelterwa.org.au/info_sheets.htm.

SAAP Campaign: More than a Bed

Australia's homeless service system is funded by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Every five years, SAAP funding levels and priorities are renegotiated. On 26 November, Commonwealth, State and Territory Community Service Ministers are scheduled to meet to agree on SAAP funding levels and priorities. As these agreements are signed once every five years, now is the only time the homeless service system and the community can lobby for increased Federal SAAP funding to provide extra resources to assist homeless Australians.

A coalition of community groups has started a campaign to increase SAAP funding called "More than a Bed: a Campaign for Better Services for Homeless People". They are asking concerned organisations and individuals to write or fax letters to the Commonwealth and State Community Services Ministers, and to write to local MPs regarding the issue. Form letters are available from www.afho.org.au. More information regarding the campaign is available at www.morethanabed.org.

Consultation: East Perth Power Station

Planning Minister Alannah MacTiernan announced this week that a new inner city precinct housing 1,300 new residents will be developed around the former East Perth Power Station. The Minister released a draft masterplan for the site, which envisages a mix of uses, including residential, commercial and cultural activities.

The overarching objective of the draft masterplan is to "pursue a policy of mixed-use development in the precinct that would achieve a sustainable environment integrating living, working and leisure." It looks at two possible built form options for the site. The first option, called 'Urban Gateway Model,' involves mainly three to four-storey developments, but also includes two 12-storey buildings and one 16-storey building. The second option, called 'Urban Garden Model,' involves mainly five to six storeys, with four eight-storey buildings near the Graham Farmer Freeway. Under both options 10 to 15% of dwellings will be for social and affordable housing in accordance with East Perth Redevelopment Authority's Housing Diversity Policy.

The draft masterplan is available for public comment at www.eastperthpowerstation.com.au. Submissions close in February 2005, and the final masterplan will be released later in 2005.

Continued on page 12

Editorial (cont'd)

Family First " will support the ongoing and improved availability of public housing...", while the Liberal policy is very distinct in its mention of only two Homeswest programs under the heading of "Social Responsibility": the Right to Buy scheme for long term

Homeswest Tenants, and the New Living program of urban renewal.

Finally, there are some unique policies in each platform. For instance, the Liberals intend to encourage more private investment in the provision of

housing for the aged, while the Greens promote community dialogue and input into increasing the supply of affordable housing. The ALP wants to use consumer protection policies as an aid to protecting access to housing.

News In Brief (cont'd)

Consultation: Network City

In September 2004 the State Government released the Network City Strategy, a new community planning strategy for Perth and Peel. This strategy is a significant step forward in planning for the Perth metropolitan area. The strategy has been released for public comment

The report, action plan and submission forms are available at www.wapc.wa.gov.au/publications/network/network.html. The public comment period has been extended to 31 January 2005.

Report: Housing Industry Forecasting Group

The Minister for Housing and Works, the Hon. Nick Griffiths, MLC launched the HIFG's latest set of forecasts on Thursday 21 October. The Housing Industry Forecasting Group was established in April 2000, under the auspices of the Department of Housing and Works. It consists of industry and Government representatives and its role is to provide background information, interpretation of trends, and medium-term forecasts for the housing market in Western Australia.

The Report finds that housing in Western Australia has "experienced a buoyant period of activity over the past three years. This has led to a lengthening of the development pipeline and a substantial backlog of work yet to be done due to burgeoning material and labour shortages." Building approvals in 2003/04 were at their highest level for a decade, while dwelling commencements increased for a third consecutive year. "As expected, Perth dominates the activity but Regional WA has also experienced an increase in activity, primarily in the Peel and South West." The Report also highlights the return of first home purchasers to the market after the new State Government's stamp duty concessions for first home buyers took effect in July.

The HIFG identified industry capacity as the key issue confronting the sector that may have long term implications on housing production and affordability in Western Australia. While completions continue to be in the order of 18,000 per year, commencements have been greater than this number, with 22,400 starts in 2003/04. As a result, the number of dwellings under construction is increasing dramatically. The HIFG is forecasting 21,000 dwelling commencements in 2004/05 and 19,000 in 2005/06.

The Report can be downloaded at www.dhw.wa.gov.au/policy/policy_hifg0410.pdf.

New Shadow Housing Minister and Departmental Changes

The Australian Labor Party has named a new front bench, including a new Shadow Housing Minister. Kelvin Thomson is the Member for Wills in Victoria, and has been named Shadow Minister for Housing and Urban Development as well as Regional Development and Roads. He was previously the Shadow Minister for Sustainability, the Environment and Heritage and has also served as Shadow Assistant Treasurer.

On the other side of the political fence, the Senator the Hon Kay Patterson remains as Minister for Family and Community Services. However, she will be in charge of a Department with a significantly reduced role, focusing on providing policy advice. A newly created Department of Human Services and Minister for Workforce Participation will oversee direct service delivery, much of which had been part of Family and Community Services.

Christmas Break

The Shelter WA office will close on Friday 24 December and reopen on Tuesday 4 January. The next edition of SWA Update is scheduled for Wednesday 12 January 2005. Shelter WA wishes you a happy Christmas and New Year.

Shelter WA

Shelter WA is Western Australia's peak independent housing organisation. Shelter WA is community managed and represents the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues. Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

We do this through:

- ⊙ co-ordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- ⊙ developing and responding to policy;
- ⊙ providing education and information ; and
- ⊙ promoting alternative housing models.

Newsletter Production

Publisher	Shelter WA
Editor	Karel Eringa
Contributors	Karel Eringa, Serena Williams, WA Council of Social Service, Department of Housing and Works

If you have any queries or comments regarding the articles in this newsletter, or if you would like to contribute to future Shelter WA newsletters, please contact Karel Eringa (details below).

While we are happy to consider any articles submitted for publication, we reserve the right to edit material in consideration of space, content and relevance.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Shelter WA.

Contact Details

1st Floor, 33 Moore Street,
East Perth WA 6004
Ph: 08 9325 6660
Fax: 08 9325 8113
Mob: 0417 295 896
shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au
www.shelterwa.org.au