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SWA Update: Shelter WA Housing News – 8 February 2006

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1. New Housing Ministers

Welcome to this first edition of SWA Update for 2006. Since our last edition just before Christmas, there has been a change in Ministers responsible for housing at both the State and the Commonwealth levels.

At the Commonwealth level, a Cabinet reshuffle has resulted in the appointment of Mal Brough as Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Mr Brough replaces Kay Patterson. Mr Brough will be assisted by NSW National Party MP John Cobb, who has been appointed as the junior Minister for Community Services, which includes housing.

At the State level, our new Premier appointed former Police Minister Michelle Roberts as the new Minister for Housing and Works. Ms Roberts has also been appointed as Minister for Consumer Protection, Heritage and Land Information, creating some interesting possibilities for synergies.

Michelle Roberts comes to the portfolio at a time when there are a number of challenges and opportunities. In the immediate future, she will need to appoint a new Director General to head the Department of Housing and Works. In the medium term, important policy decisions need to be made in order to finalise the State Housing Strategy and the bilateral housing strategy for Indigenous people. Finally, Ms Roberts will need to think strategically on how Western Australia can best position itself for the end of the current Commonwealth State Housing Agreement in 2008.

Shelter WA wishes Mr Brough, Mr Cobb and Ms Roberts well in their new portfolios

2. Regional Housing Analysis: Housing in Hedland

Between January and December 2005 Shelter WA conducted a Regional Housing Analysis of Port and South Hedland. The project combined a series of community consultations, interviews with stakeholders and background statistical research. A final report on the project has now been released.

The report's key finding is that Port Hedland's housing market is severely dysfunctional. It characterises Hedland as a town of 20,000 people that provides adequate housing to only 12,000, with the remainder living in caravans, dongas or overcrowded housing. This lack of appropriate and affordable housing acts as a bottleneck that curtails the town's economic development and is a key cause of many of its social problems.

Firstly, the housing market acts as a factor that exacerbates the severity of Hedland's economic cycle. Decision makers have allowed this situation to persist, on the implicit assumption that any increase in demand for housing will only be temporary, ie. until the next downturn of the economic cycle.

However, long term under-investment in appropriate housing has resulted in a substantial proportion of Hedland's long and short term residents living in inappropriate accommodation. It has resulted in high housing prices, often poor maintenance, lack of diverse accommodation stock, homelessness, overcrowding and at

the same time underoccupancy. It acts as a poverty trap for the, mostly Indigenous, people who reside in public housing. It is the root cause of Hedland's difficulties attracting people to work in its service industries.

A solution to Hedland's housing problem is therefore a precondition to both its economic and social development. The severity of Hedland's economic cycle, its lack of services, and the dependence of its Indigenous population on Homeswest for its housing needs all stem from a common source, being a lack of appropriate and affordable housing. Any solution must start with a recognition by all key players that Hedland can no longer afford not to cater for the housing requirements of such a substantial proportion of its residents. The town must provide housing for all of its residents, and stop regarding housing needs generated by economic activity as 'temporary'.

The report calls on industry and the three levels of Government - State, Commonwealth and local - to come together to develop a housing strategy for Hedland. In addition to this, the report makes 31 recommendations that are aimed at resolving particular issues faced by specific groups.

The report can be viewed and downloaded from www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm.

3. Community Consultations: *Housing Strategy WA*

As reported in the previous edition of SWA Update, Shelter WA is conducting consultations on the draft *Housing Strategy WA*. So far, we have conducted major forums in Mandurah (with the Peel Community Legal Service) and West Perth (with WACOSS). Another three forums are scheduled as follows:

- Indigenous people (with Equal Opportunity Commission): 10am, 9/2/06, Equal Opportunity Commission Seminar Room, 2nd Floor, 197 St Georges Tce, Perth
- Tenants (with Tenants Advice Service): 1pm, 14/2/06, Claisebrook Lotteries House, 33 Moore Street, East Perth
- People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (with Ethnic Communities Council): date and venue to be announced

In addition, Shelter WA is conducting focus group meetings to tease out housing issues related to seven specific groups of low income housing consumers, being young people, Indigenous people, seniors, women, men, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and Homeswest tenants.

Shelter WA is working closely with partner organisations tying in with existing meetings as much as possible. We are still looking for partner organisations with whom to conduct these specific issues focus groups. Please contact Helen Doran-Wu (helen@shelterwa.org.au or 08 9325 6660) if you are interested in being a partner organisation.

The draft discussion paper for Housing Strategy WA is available from www.dhw.wa.gov.au/housingstrategywa. Submissions close on 28 February 2006.

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Shelter WA also has an Urgent Response Network, which is restricted to financial members. If you are a financial member of Shelter WA and wish to join the Urgent Response Network, please email karel@shelterwa.org.au.

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