



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Defence Houses at Eaton, Northern Territory

SPEECH

Monday, 30 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Mr ROBERT

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(Fadden) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (11:50): When it comes to defence housing, as at 31 October last year, the DHA owned or had a lease for 15,770 houses. By virtue of history, and anachronistically, Defence still owned 2,383 houses. The vast majority of those were then managed by DHA. Of those 2,383 houses owned by Defence, 678 are at Alice Springs. Defence owns them and DHA manages them. We all know that Defence does not do well in managing housing. DHA is set up as a statutory authority and is the professional housing manager. It manages over 15,500 houses. The question has to be asked: why is Defence continuing to hold on to 2,383 houses? I can see why the government is hesitant to hand them over, especially with 81 of them at Inverbrackie being turned into an asylum seeker detention facility due to the lack of accommodation because of the government's botched attempt to try to stop the boats. Indeed, all it has done is seen over 250 boats and over 12,000 people come to our shores seeking asylum.

I can see why the government are super keen to retain defence housing under the Department of Defence rather than under DHA—not to assist defence members per se but perhaps to build on what they have done at Inverbrackie. This motion, moved by the member for Solomon, quite rightly calls on the professional housing manager, DHA, which has over 15,500 houses under its management, to control and own all of the stock, which includes the 2,383 houses that Defence currently has. This will require those 678 houses in Darwin to be handed over to DHA. This motion raises particular concern with respect to the 396 houses at Eaton. Defence conducted a strategic review into all of its property in Darwin in 2009, and Minister Warren Snowdon, in a press release, concluded:

... that there is a continuing strategic need to retain the housing land at RAAF Base Darwin to accommodate future Defence capability and contingency needs.

That may well be the case, although the report was due to be released in early 2011 and it has not been, so it is very hard for the community to work out what this Labor government is doing. We promised to release a report and, surprise, surprise, it has not released it.

As of June last year, of those 396 houses at Eaton, 102 were empty. Presumably, the number is now higher. Currently, Territorians are experiencing a house vacancy rate of four per cent. The median house price in inner Darwin is \$760,000. The median rental price for a three-bedroom house is \$526. Territorians are living on the street, living in cars because this government will not listen to the local representative, the member for Solomon, who is pleading for these empty houses—over 100 of them—which have now been empty for over 12 months, to be made available to local Territorians. This government talks of social justice as if it knows something about it but, when the single greatest opportunity is here for it to demonstrate justice and love for a community, it is found desperately wanting.

The member for Solomon has stood here on numerous occasions in this place and pleaded with this stone-hearted, cold government, saying, 'Over 100 houses are available; please help Territorians.' That is what a good local member does, standing up for her community for what is right and what is just—as opposed to this government, which does not heed the calls of the local Territorians—and it simply falls on deaf ears.

Eaton is 3½ kilometres from the city, and the nearest primary school, at Ludmilla, is 400 metres away. This housing area of Eaton feeds a lot of children into that primary school, and, for that primary school to continue to be vibrant and viable, Eaton housing is an important component. It is important to support the local Winnellie business owners and to rebuild a vibrant inner city community. The golf course is also part of the area around there, as is the childcare centre. The bottom line is that there are over 100 houses empty, built in a style that is particular to Darwin and a style that I note that the DHA is spearheading at the Muirhead development. They are using the same style—the style of houses at Eaton. The defence personnel want to use Eaton because it is close to the base. With over 100 houses available that DHA is able to either sell and rent back from the community or lease to the community, the member for Solomon quite rightly calls on the government, as a responsible member does, to provide options for this housing to the community. I support the member for Solomon for her work.