

national shelter



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Round Table Report May 17 & 18, 2011

Queensland Shelter, 515 Wickham Terrace, Spring Hill

Contents

- 1.0 Attendees 3
- 2.0 Acknowledgement..... 3
- 3.0 Apologies 3
- 4.0 Introductions and welcome..... 4
- 5.0 Update on each State 4
 - 5.1 Victoria 4
 - 5.2 Tasmania 5
 - 5.3 Western Australia..... 5
 - 5.4 Northern Territory..... 6
 - 5.5 Queensland..... 6
 - 5.6 New South Wales 7
 - 5.7 South Australia..... 7
 - 5.8 Community Housing Federation of Australia 7
 - 5.9 Homelessness Australia..... 8
- 6.0 Key issues for discussion 9
 - 6.1 Situation for Indigenous urban population and housing 9
 - 6.2 ICHOs 9
 - 6.3 Transition of CHIP program to States/Territories 10
 - 6.4 Capacity of sector and opportunity..... 12
 - 6.5 Title 13
 - 6.6 NAHA issues 14
- 7.0 Where to next..... 15
- 8.0 Meeting with FaHCSIA Officers..... 15

1.0 Attendees:

NAME	STATE
Lyndy Bowden	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, TAS
Patti Chugg	Shelter, TAS
Gary Wilson	Shelter, SA
Auntie Coral Wilson	Shelter, SA
Dr. Alice Clark	Shelter, SA
Bronwyn Kitching	Shelter, WA
Shane Hamilton	Community Housing Ltd, WA
Jan Berriman	Central Australian Community Housing, NT
David Havercroft	Shelter, NT, Alice Springs
Barbara West	Chjowai Housing Cooperative QUEENSLAND
Pat Cora	Tenants Union of Queensland, Cairns QLD
Nicole Lawder	Homelessness, Australia
Garth Morgan	Queensland ATSI Human Services Coalition
Donna Clay	Queensland ATSI Human Services Coalition
Lois Towney	Aboriginal Housing Office Board Member, NSW
Gregor Macfie	Tenants Union of NSW
Prue Mewburn	Tenants Union of NSW
Adele Hyslop	NSW Federation of Housing Associations
Mary Perkins	Shelter NSW
Michael Calvert	Aboriginal Housing, VIC
Joanne Atkinson	Aboriginal Housing VIC
Eddy Bourke	Community Housing Federation Australia
Adrian Pisarski	Queensland Shelter (Meeting Chair)
Noelle Hudson	Queensland Shelter
Kate Cowmeadow	Queensland Shelter
Ernie Hoolihan	Yumba Meta, Townsville, QUEENSLAND
Kelly Greenop	University of Queensland, QUEENSLAND (Day 1)
Jon Eastgate	99 Consulting, note taker

2.0 Acknowledgement

Adrian acknowledged the traditional owners, the Turrbal and Jagera, and their elders past and present.

3.0 Apologies:

ACT Shelter, Jim Allen (NSW), Michele Craig (NSW – Chairperson AHO Board)

4.0 Introductions and welcome

Adrian introduced the process:

- The original round table in 2010 came out of Queensland Shelter work with indigenous community housing organisations.
- Saw the need for a national conversation involving State/Territory Shelters and Indigenous housing organisations and workers.
- First round table was the result. This arrived at a number of key points:
 - encourage development of a national peak
 - unmet need
 - transfer of responsibility of urban housing from Commonwealth to States not going well and needed to be monitored and improved
- Purpose of this meeting is to sharpen this message for dialogue with the Commonwealth, beginning with a meeting with senior FaHCSIA representatives on the second day of the meeting.

5.0 Update on each State

This section should be read in conjunction with the background paper which was circulated before the meeting.

5.1 Victoria

- According to the Census there are approximately 30,000 Aboriginal people in Victoria - 0.62% of population (ABS statistics are always an underestimate, real numbers much higher).
- Aboriginal Housing Victoria now a separate company, established with the support of the Victorian Government to take on management of Aboriginal social housing state-wide.
- 1,367 tenancies under management – over 1,000 on the waiting list. These 1,367 properties in the process of being transferred – these are tenancies from Office of Housing, with all ATSI tenants, other than those in multi-tenancy buildings, given a choice as to whether to transition or not. Tenancies transferred first, titles will transfer soon.
- Properties transfer with a caveat registering an interest in the title for Director of Office of Housing – does this allow for borrowing? Expectation of self-funded growth from OoH.
- AHV developed out of Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria which advised the Office of Housing on Aboriginal issues and acted as advocates for the Aboriginal community – this Board was made up of elders and community leaders. The plan was always to move towards self-management but it's taken 30 years to get there.
- AHV is in the midst of a complex establishment task – IT systems, management of maintenance, etc – still in start-up phase. This also involves detailed work with tenants to help them understand and deal with the change.
- AHV don't retain advocacy role for those who didn't transfer across – only management of their own tenancies. Mind-shift – hard to evict own mob. Housing support workers across the State still operate.

- They aim to broaden the model – e.g. to become a provider of construction services, employment outcomes and property development.
- The clear message from OOH has been that this is all the resources that will be passed over – further growth must be self-generated.
- They have the challenge of ensuring properties are handed over in good condition – OOH is currently still responsible for maintenance and AHV is holding them to this.
- The rent model is source of frustration – rents have gone up to capture rent assistance which tenants are now eligible for, and this is seen as unjust by tenants. Also disputes with Centrelink over whether the tenants are eligible for CRA.
- Have also taken on some properties where CHIP-funded organisations have folded - about ten properties.
- Not managing on “mission land” at the moment but would consider it if needed.
- In addition to AHV there are about six smaller Aboriginal community housing organisations that used CHIP funds – there isn’t any clear information about how this transition is going.

5.2 Tasmania

- Last Friday held a state-wide Aboriginal community meeting.
- The Aboriginal community would like to move towards the Victorian model, however the Tasmanian government appears to prefer a model where housing is handed over to one of the existing large providers.

5.3 Western Australia

- State government is transferring 8,000 social housing dwellings to community organisations (this is all social housing not just Aboriginal-specific) – they have brought in a three-tiered registration system to support this.
- Community Housing Ltd is registered as a growth provider in WA and is working with Aboriginal communities.
- This transfer process means about 1,000 per year – organisations feel this is small and need more to really achieve growth.
- The commonwealth has allocated \$50m for repairs and maintenance in WA as part of the transfer of CHIP – this is being negotiated community by community.
- There has been a detailed NRAS Round 4 application in Kimberley using traditional lands, Indigenous community ends up with the asset after 10 years.
- Issue of really high rents (\$800-1200 pw) in regional areas (mining areas) – disincentive for employment.
- Issues around street homelessness in inner city areas being driven by the CHOGM meeting to be held in Perth.
- WA Government has released a strategy which has started to look at the full continuum of housing – homelessness through to secure housing, public, private etc.

5.4 Northern Territory

- Issues around overcrowding and homelessness.
- Drift from remote communities into urban centres – eg town camps get new houses and leads to people moving in to get access to that.
- FaHCSIA has identified priority communities (21 in all) with a focus on bringing services to these – how will this impact on the 500 other communities?
- NT Government is supporting the creation of new community housing organisations – Central Australian Community Housing and others in start-up phase.
- Issue around evictions in remote communities – where can the evicted tenants go?
- Central Australian Community Housing – started by Tangentyere – focus on Aboriginal households but will also house non-Aboriginal people. Integrated health and housing process. Working with NT Govt to manage town camps, provide governance support etc for the local housing associations and provide management services.
- Lots of challenges with upgrades, application and allocation process, dealing with poor application processes by Housing NT. There are real problems with the NT Government’s move towards a public housing model for Aboriginal communities as the organisation is not skilled in dealing with these communities and operating in a culturally appropriate way.
- Issues with cyclical maintenance, tenant support processes, no new housing in some places eg Darwin, education of tenants around rights and obligations, information in first languages.

5.5 Queensland

- Desire for an ATSI housing peak, partnered with Queensland Shelter – based on QATSIHSC model of partnership with QCOSS.
- Discussions with corporate constructor with a track record of rapid delivery of housing to communities (properly designed not “cookie cutter”). Good for disaster response.
- Making the market place for private capital more “real” for ICHOs – pursued through the “Futures Forum” which is an outcome of the Queensland Compact.
- Working towards resources for practice evaluation/business reviews and improvements.
- John Anderson signed up to do next phase of consultation with ICHOs for Shelter – follow up on the issue in the light of government work on stock transfers.
- “Future of Housing Assistance” project about to start – Queensland Government.
- Yumba Meta rapidly growing in Townsville – taking on wide management responses, highly engaged with the State system.
- Chjowai housing still not registered – still have unanswered questions (Innisfail) – dealing with maintenance issues, loss of stock, have a 10-year growth plan.
- 80 organisations in Queensland – 5 folded, 20 have gone over to State system, rest are still sitting on the fence in “no mans land” – really difficult situation for them and this impacts on tenants especially when housing is in declining condition.
- Example of Kuranda – 2 ICHOs and public housing – very poor condition in a very well off town.

5.6 New South Wales

- Forums going on around NSW in relation to the Build and Grow strategy this month and first half of next month – aim is to inform organisations and tenants.
- NSW Government is filling vacancies on the Aboriginal Housing Board.
- Build and Grow Implementation Plan now approved – on AHO web page, along with rent policy, update to PARS. Moving ahead but not without its problems. The AHO board is committed to work with Build and Grow because there really is no choice.
- Most players recognise the need for change in NSW Aboriginal housing.
- There are Aboriginal 200 housing organisations, 60% land councils, 40% corporations. Issues of very low rents, organisations in serious financial trouble as a result.
- Problem of multiple small corporations with no resources – this needs major change. Current policies skate around the issues, don't get to the heart of the matter.
- There is a historic separation between Aboriginal and mainstream sectors – this is now breaking down.
- There seem to be opposite directions for Aboriginal and mainstream housing – mainstream focuses on stock transfer to community organisations and a growth model, Aboriginal housing on leases back to AHO and no growth on offer.
- Issue of absence of Minister for Housing but even when there was one, didn't meet with the AHO anyway – relied on CEO of HNSW/AHO. More broadly, public housing assets (but not AHO assets) transferred to finance dept.
- What is there between highly targeted social housing and home ownership? Reliant on private rental but no strategy around this.

5.7 South Australia

- SA has a whole of government “cultural inclusion framework” including training and 30 cultural advocates in Housing SA.
- Government focus is on remote not urban and regional.
- Focus on controlling houses more than on people.
- Long term push for temporary housing in cities for visitors now bearing fruit, properties developed in various locations.
- Aboriginal people make up 13% of applicants for social housing, 8.3% of existing tenants, 18% of new allocations and 12% of allocations to stimulus housing.
- 12 homelessness agencies specifically serving homeless Aboriginal people plus all agencies required to serve 20% Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal Housing Authority was abolished in, properties now managed by Housing Trust.
- Very long waiting times – 20 years, 4 years for priority 1, high levels of homelessness.
- “Proof of Aboriginality” – “prove that I'm not!”

5.8 Community Housing Federation of Australia

- National Regulation – FAHCSIA is working on this at the moment. Will include Aboriginal housing organisations. Minister wanted genuine national system. What seems likely is “host state” system, with WA initiating this but NSW driving it. This means States will work together to agree a set of regulations that they will all

work with, this will be trialled in WA, bugs ironed out then all States enact mirror legislation and registration recognised across State borders.

- Cumbersome, almost no consultation, meeting next week at very short notice.

5.9 Homelessness Australia

- They are doing a lot of work on the Census in relation to the homelessness count – this is very complex and major changes are being made this year.
- Two issues – one with count itself (are the homeless people actually reached) and how ABS interprets their answer – methodology.
- There are lots of issues with undercounting of Aboriginal people including homeless people; meeting participants had strong passion about this issue.

6.0 Key issues for discussion:

Some overall comments:

- Need to both support Aboriginal sector, and get mainstream sector to do its job – not an “either/or”.
- Aboriginal organisations provide support and community integration, not just housing like a real estate agent.
- Issue of racism in non-Aboriginal sector eg the real estate industry.

6.1 Situation for Indigenous urban population and housing

Some of the key issues facing Aboriginal people in urban and regional areas were identified as:

- Discrimination in the private market.
- Overcrowding.
- Shortage of large housing when there are many large families
- Housing management which is culturally inappropriate – for instance an older single woman will be allocated a one-bedroom unit, but has a cultural obligation to house family members.
- “extension of NIMBYism” – no-one wants public housing near them and certainly not Aboriginal families.
- Crowded houses – Queensland AHURI has just written a report based on the NATSISS (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey) which suggests that there is not a lot of overcrowding in Aboriginal organisations – this is so far contrary to the expressed experience of people that something must be wrong.
- Access to home ownership – some expressed the opinion that IBA criteria are so restrictive that most Aboriginal people don’t get through.
- Locations make a difference – people pushed to the margins, etc.
- Younger generation moving from communities to the cities and this leads to homelessness.

6.2 ICHOs

Key concerns for ICHOs at the moment:

- Lack of capital growth, repairs and maintenance issues mean we are losing houses and tenancies with nothing to replace them.
- Commonwealth maintenance funds appear to be going into administration and project management not to the housing – participants question whether the funds will cover the maintenance needs.
- Organisations are dependent on capital funding for growth and this has not come through to any degree for a long time, so the organisations are struggling.
- Organisations are unlikely to be able to survive purely on their rental income, especially those who are not “at scale”, especially when these rents are subsidised and all tenants are highly disadvantaged.

- Costs tend to push housing to the margins, different locations have different viability implications because of different market costs.
- Disincentive built in for people to work because people lose their security of tenure – Aboriginal tenants face discrimination in the private market even if they have good incomes so they have fewer choices.

There was a lot of discussion around rent models which is a very contentious issue for ICHOs:

- How to ensure fairness and viability together, difficult ensure the viability of the organisation on wholly subsidised rents.
- Can organisations have a mix of tenants and rents to cross-subsidise – especially since higher income Aboriginal tenants still experience discrimination in the housing market.
- How to get access to home ownership? NSW land councils looking at long-term leasehold model – mixed tenure, shared equity, community land trust.
- Need to avoid pushing higher income tenants out into the current private rental market – what policy changes will make the rental market more sustainable?
- Rents commonly set to capture CRA but there are a lot of problems with this in practice – tenants feel their income is being unjustly taken in rent increases.

6.3 Transition of CHIP program to States/Territories

QUEENSLAND

- Shelter has engaged well with State and some Aboriginal community housing organisations. Difficult to get accurate information about where this is up to from the State and get accurate feedback.
- Queensland government gave information freely but the information provided was inconsistent, the story kept changing and this led to confusion. The process was rushed and not thought through and this meant that the sector disengaged.
- State did not handle the transition process well – disrespectful, token negotiations initially although State did make changes as a result of organisations' objections. This means that trust is low and organisations are reluctant to deal with a body they don't trust.
- \$60m is budgeted for repairs and maintenance – is this enough?
- There are 80 ICHOs – 25 have become registered providers or handed properties to the State
- The other 55 are either reserving a decision or decided not to participate
- These 55 still have a caveat from the Commonwealth over their properties
- Current State policy for those who register allows “grandfathering” of existing tenants – OSHS rules apply to new tenants
- A lot of issues still unresolved – some organisations have put a few properties in to test the water – however there are community issues where some tenants get upgrades and others don't
- Issue of skills in small organisations – making good decisions, managing the process
- Money is still being held for those organisations who haven't entered, despite the fear that the money would be lost.

NSW

- Information comes to some extent from the State body. AHO Board operated without a chairperson for a long time and there are still board vacancies, no access to the Minister and AHO doesn't have its own CEO.
- Build and Grow Strategy was imposed from above and cut across what the sector had been working on. Lack of transparency and communication with small local providers.
- A lot of Aboriginal organisations are unsure of their legal situation between FAHCSIA, AHO and State eg how do caveats operate, differences between corporations and land councils – lots of small providers not sure where they stand.
- Organisations can either register under the Provider Registration and Assessment System (which mirrors the mainstream community housing regulation) or sign 10 year leases (5X5) with the AHO (not a 40-year lease as in other places) in exchange for up to \$50K per property in R&M.
- State Land Council also has its own housing policy which covers local land councils (60% of all providers).

VIC

- There is no peak housing organisation and no source of consolidated information or consultation, information is murky.
- Office of Housing led the process – a lot of distrust in this, feeling that the State was trying to take over the properties.
- AHV has 52 of these properties, approx 6 other organisations across the state.
- There is no centralised point for negotiation and limited communication between the organisations – the State Government is negotiating individually with each organisation.

TAS

- The information was community driven – community had to press the Tasmanian government for information and discussion, the government was not proactive. Information is clearer on NPP for remote housing but not with the urban/regional housing.
- Still having community consultations – community is scared and don't trust any of the players.
- Community and government are discussing formation of a community organisation to take this over.
- Organisations on the islands managing housing – main part of Tasmanian has no Aboriginal community housing providers.

SA

- Unsure how this is going – organisations on APY lands have signed leases with the State government but not sure about urban/non-remote organisations.

WA

- Much the same as other States – ICHOs have to register to get access to R&M, some have and some haven't.
- In remote areas \$475m for new housing, conditional on 40 year leases and use of Residential tenancies Act – serious practical issues with this on

communities. Once again controversial and communities have varying views – eg in Kimberly 3 of 25 communities have signed up.

- The Aboriginal housing sector is very poorly resourced and consultation/communication is very difficult. Lots of time and energy on remote communities – happening on a one-by-one patchwork of initiatives – no information about how it is happening, no shared learning or unity of voice or consistency of information.

NT

- Government initiating a public housing model across the Territory, ICHOs have been folded into this.
- Information is not getting out to community level, message is inconsistent.
- Smaller communities amalgamated into bigger local government areas.
- In town camps 40 year leases signed for all areas now and housing is being built.
- Town camps and other places – compulsory acquisition has left people feeling disempowered.

IN GENERAL

- Consultation is poor, not listening to community and particularly no listening to elders.
- Agenda originates in the Brough years and has a strong flavour of “taking over” and State control.
- General feeling that despite change of government the agenda has continued in the same way – general disenfranchisement and a lot of disappointment with the lack of change under Labor – still the same officials working under the minister.
- General feeling that government is not listening, or only listening to certain people.
- Organisations have negotiated compromises in various States – these are improvements but are not necessarily what organisations really want or what they believe is the best response – just the best they could get.

6.4 Capacity of sector and opportunity

- There is a lot of diversity in how well the organisations are operating – some are going very well, some struggling.
- Organisations have received small bits of funding intermittently over the past years, not a clear medium or long term plan. This is this is part of the reason that many organisations are struggling.
- Government has the dilemma – the organisations often lack the basic capacity to give government confidence to fund them, but there is no long-term funding and capacity building strategy to build this confidence. We need a strategy to break this cycle. It is often seen as a “strategy of neglect” – organisations are set up to fail, left without resources then blamed for not complying with requirements.
- ORIC also has a role to ensure organisations are compliant with basic governance requirements.
- There is a distinction between organisations that just do housing and those that do a range of programs – there can be a huge capacity difference

between these and housing authorities may not recognise this because they are only concerned with the housing aspects.

- It's easy to fall into the trap of looking exclusively at the governance of individual organisations – need to think in terms of overall social outcomes and what it will take to achieve this – can't blame individual organisations for the failure to resource properly.
- Capacity means widely different things to different people – does it mean skills, money, etc? Differences depend on size and starting point.
- Need for resources, templates, training etc to support organisations to reach standards, but also important to look at on the ground resources – an organisations with one staff member can't implement any of this even if it is available.
- Important not to be too negative – governments are taking action, the question is, is it the right action and is it going well?
- Government is clearly moving towards larger providers not small struggling ones. This is a good model to some extent – tiny organisations are not sustainable – how do we engage with this agenda? This is not exclusive to Aboriginal organisations, it's a general trend in housing and social services.
- Concern about “re-inventing the wheel” – can we implement past policies, not keep changing direction?
- Agenda for Aboriginal organisations has been about control and problem solving, in the mainstream sector has been about growth, consolidation and resources. Can Aboriginal organisations be supported to get to this place?
- Across the whole sector, questions about the role of smaller/specialist organisations.
- Shift resources for compliance to support? Need to bridge the gap for disadvantaged communities (aboriginal and others) not just put the goalposts in front of them and say “here's your opportunity”.
- Aboriginal organisations are creative and could be seen as giving Government opportunities, not just the other way around – can we get government to listen to these organisations and make the most of these opportunities?

6.5 Title

The following are some key issues raised around property title:

- Queensland legal advice is that the Commonwealth can lift the caveats but their interest is enshrined in legislation so their interest still exists until legislation is changed.
- Across the mainstream sector, there is wide variation between States e.g. Queensland trend has been for State to take title, NSW process is under way to transfer title to community organisations, Vic organisations have title and already borrow against this, SA organisations have heavily encumbered title, WA mainly have relatively unencumbered title.
- The long term international trend is to vest title in NGOs.
- Part of the justification for this is that title can be used to get bank finance, but this needs to be managed carefully – how much leverage you can get depends on cash flow to service the debt and this is governed to a large extent by rent policy.

- With the Aboriginal community housing sector with their income portfolio, it may not be a good idea to borrow at all – title would be about self-determination and control, not about finance.
- NSW organisations have looked at options – rejected borrowing because not sustainable on income, looked at things like development and receiving houses as part of return. Financial and cash flow situation is very tight.

6.6 NAHA issues

Participants felt that the discussion about Aboriginal housing needed to be seen in the light of broader housing policy issues - social security, tax, private rental regulation and funding for social housing are all in need of fundamental reform.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance

- CRA is basically being used as a back-door operational subsidy for community housing organisations. Is this a well-designed subsidy?
- Does Treasury support this more than direct subsidy to government or community housing providers?
- Public housing tenants don't qualify for CRA where community housing does, so this creates an incentive for public housing authorities to transfer properties.
- Issue of whether the CRA should go directly to community housing providers – pros and cons in this issue.
- The issue creates a lot of consternation amongst Aboriginal tenants – if their properties are transferred (as in Victoria, for instance), tenants see their rent increased and don't understand the link between this and their increased CRA – they just feel the organisation is treating them unfairly.

NAHA issues

- Should we look at a change in the way housing funds are distributed? Currently all funds for social housing are capital (theoretically for new growth) and per capita. Shelter is arguing to separate out operational funding to be distributed on a per property basis and growth funds on a per capita basis. The Commonwealth Minister has started to use this terminology. The main issue is the risk that this will disadvantage States with low levels of public housing in percentage terms (Queensland and Victoria) who would then sabotage the concept.
- Currently the NAHA has no “stick” for those who don't perform, unlike the old special purpose payments – there are general outcomes but not a lot of very specific performance measures. Can we develop incentives to growth, rather than in specific administrative arrangements?
- Data and evaluation questions are important for driving improvement in performance.

NRAS

- Adrian Pisarski provided a summary of NRAS program for the meeting – few or none of the Aboriginal organisations in the room had used this and many were not aware of it. Central Australia CH and CHL WA are working on options under this program.
- Need to focus on self-determination, not just government money.

7.0 Where to next

It was agreed to follow up the meeting with FAHCSIA with meetings the Ministers or at least their advisors.

Ministerial delegates – 3 or 4 of the following depending on availability

1. Adrian Pisarski
2. Mary Perkins
3. Garth Morgan
4. Adele Hyslop
5. Lois Towney/Michele Craig
6. One from AHV
7. NT rep to be determined – contact via Toni Vine Bromley
8. WA rep to be determined – contact via Bronwyn Kitching

8.0 Meeting with FaHCSIA Officers

Sean Ennis and Magda Vincent joined the meeting.

The following is a record of this discussion – the items in bold are the key points identified by the meeting for discussion which were presented to Sean Ennis and Magda Vincent by Adrian Pisarski on behalf of the group. The points that follow in plain font are a record of the discussions that followed around each point.

- **Would like FaHCSIA to prepare and circulate a report about the transition to State systems – progress made and current status for each State and Territory.**

FaHCSIA officers are happy to work with State colleagues to bring this about. They asked for feedback from the group about how this is going in each State from our point of view. Participants shared some of the key points summarised in Section 6.2 above.

Participants also stressed that it is important to see this as a national issue not just state by state, because the States are implementing national policy.

All providers are different and have their own issue. Governments are not listening to Aboriginal community and Aboriginal voice – this dialogue needs to take place.

FAHCSIA is aiming to negotiate for all States to publish their implementation plans for various programs. Most States have agreed but a couple haven't.

- **We would like to see National Shelter resourced to coordinate twice-yearly meetings of Aboriginal organisations to maintain the national conversation and keep making progress on these issues.**

Aboriginal participants really value these and would like to broaden the discussion to other providers and representatives. FAHCSIA didn't commit to this as it's a budget decision but were receptive to the idea.

- **Housing is seen as a human right and this should be the basis of policy in this area. Maintenance funds should be applied immediately as a “closing the gap” measure, to show good faith. This money should not be used as a bargaining chip to force registration and should be made available to the Aboriginal community housing organisations without condition or reservation. In the meantime until this is resolved the funds need to be frozen not allowed to lapse from the budget.**

Further explanation from participants was as follows.

- The current link to registration is causing confusion and should not be a condition of getting the funds. The link between the two creates a huge amount of resentment because people feel they are being forced. There is a strong ownership of the housing as having got control of country and they are unwilling to give this up as requested in many States and territories in various ways (either through long term leases, mortgages or through being bound to regulations which limit their ability to manage as they see is appropriate).
- It is also difficult for organisations to commit to regulation when the regulatory environment is constantly shifting – it is difficult for organisations to be clear what they are signing up to.
- Registration in many States is a huge task in itself – eg in NSW organisations have to comply with PARS which is a major new set of standards for them and quite complex.
- For example in Queensland only 25% of organisations have signed up, less than 25% of the housing is getting the needed maintenance. This is not acceptable and is not a question of the competence of the organisations – many organisations which are managing well have not signed up because of what they see as inappropriate conditions.
- The issue is not about registration and accountability – everyone understands that accountability is required. The issue is the process and the specific content of the regulations.
- Governments can get accountability by various ways and these organisations are already incorporated and get government funds so need to rely on registration. Organisations are being asked to make intergenerational decisions about long leases – it's not surprising that they are reluctant – organisations feel the land is being taken away from them and they fought hard for it.
- Many of the regulations organisations are being asked to comply with are seen as culturally inappropriate, or inappropriate for the particular communities they are being applied to – for instance, standard public housing rent policies cut across Aboriginal kinship obligations, provisions about continuing eligibility and eviction do not work in communities where there is no alternative housing.
- Registration is about following State Government housing policy, not about running a sustainable organisation that meets its objectives.
- Objections from organisations have included concerns about rent policy, allocations, who would do the repairs and maintenance.
- In more remote communities, information about issues this complex needs to be in first languages – this is not the case at the moment.
- Organisations have got mixed messages in response to this and this has led to a breakdown of trust.

- Why are we moving back towards public housing for Aboriginal residents when we are moving towards devolution in the mainstream? Public housing is consistently inappropriate for Aboriginal communities. There is strong support for the development of capacity in Aboriginal communities to deliver housing and services.
- What is currently on offer for organisations is limited, one-off funds for repairs and maintenance – there is not promise or even firm suggestion of growth funds in the long term. This means the financial incentive doesn't offset the loss of autonomy. There is a need to work out a longer term growth and viability strategy as with mainstream community housing.
- Aboriginal households are living in substandard housing while these issues are debated and this is a key human rights issue which should be addressed urgently – it's not fair to these households to hold up repairs while we sort out the policy issues.

FaHCSIA were open to hearing this message but obviously were unable to commit to any change in policy. Some key considerations include:

- The Minister will want to know how organisations would be accountable to proper use of funds in an appropriate way. State registration is seen to be the answer to this at the moment.
- They hear the message about the breakdown in relationships and acknowledge that the change management process hasn't been managed as well as it should have been.
- It is useful to have as much information as possible about the barriers to registration, the changes that are being asked of organisations and what they are being asked to give up.
- The more information they have about the tenant mix, the better – policies are often based on assumptions about this and these may not be accurate.
- They hear the message about the amount of change. Housing policy has been a bit underdone in recent years and governments are starting to pay attention to this now and to support of the individuals – this is likely to mean there will be more change.
- Aboriginal housing has been done to the side of housing policy, and Minister Macklin would say this has not been a good thing and would like to see this better integrated.
- There is a need to come to grips with the difference between public housing and Aboriginal housing.
- WA Governments new affordable housing strategy is an example of a more holistic approach.

There was further discussion of the business model in Aboriginal housing. Aboriginal housing organisations have a mix of tenants and rent levels. If they move towards the most common social housing policy settings, there are ongoing eligibility requirements which ask you to move on tenants whose circumstances improve. This doesn't work for Aboriginal tenants because they experience discrimination, and for the organisations because their income declines. In addition, what is currently on offer does not appear to organisations to offer a path towards sustainability – the funds on offer at this point only address immediate maintenance issues.