Aboriginal Remote Housing Forum

HOME

12-13 March 2015
Greek Hall, Darwin, NT

Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory

ABORIGINAL REMOTE HOUSING FORUM

12-13 MARCH 2015, DARWIN

Report prepared by Hal Bisset with support from staff at APONT, CAAHC and NT Shelter

NTShelter

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMPANY LTD.

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

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Acknowledgements

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APONT would like to thank all the participants who travelled such a long way and made this such a successful event. Thanks also to the APONT, NT Shelter and CAAHC staff who made the event possible, and to presenters for their thoughtful and insightful presentations.

1 APONT is an alliance between the Northern Land Council (NLC), Central Land Council (CLC), Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS).

Introduction

Over the last eight years there has been a significant transformation in the way Aboriginal housing is delivered and managed in the Northern Territory (NT). During the 1970s and 80s, many Aboriginal housing organisations were set up to manage housing in communities as part of the push for self-determination. In 2007, as the Australia Government began to roll out its secure tenure policy, self-management was replaced by public housing policies, procedures and contract arrangements.

The on ground experience of these reforms is that housing conditions have not improved and management approaches are contributing to a greater sense of alienation and lack of local control. With feedback coming to APONT from communities across the Territory, the member organisations came to the view that housing was fast becoming the number one issue in Aboriginal affairs:

- The Northern Land Council (NLC) and the Central Land Council (CLC), which advised and represented Traditional Owners in their negotiations with the Australian Government in relation to the leasing of their land, were receiving consistent feedback that despite new housing in some communities the level of service provided under new housing management arrangements had deteriorated.
- The North Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CALAAS) were frequently being approached by residents of remote communities with a myriad of complaints which indicated that their rights under residential tenancies legislation and human rights law were being repeatedly violated.
- The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT) was being advised by member services that one of the major threats to health was the inadequate or deteriorating condition of housing and the high levels of overcrowding that was contributing to declining conditions.

Minister Price speaking to Barayuwa Mununggurr, Laynhapuy Homelands and Robert Roy, Kalkaringi

This background provided impetus for this Housing Forum, with the purpose of bringing together community leaders and Aboriginal organisations from across the Territory to discuss issues and agree ways forward. The Housing Forum was held in Darwin on 12 and 13 March 2015. The objectives were to:

- Share experiences of housing management including issues of overcrowding;
- Hear about how new tenancy management and housing maintenance arrangements were working and their impact upon homelessness;

- Identify and promote alternative models of housing management that include a role for Aboriginal organisations;
- Hear from housing experts and specialists in the field;
- Engage with Commonwealth & Territory Governments about housing; and,
- Develop a network of Aboriginal organisations and community members who want to work on housing issues.

More than 150 people from all parts of the NT participated in the Housing Forum, indicating that housing is indeed a major issue for Aboriginal people at this time.

This report on the Housing Forum presents the outcomes of this important event. While the level of concern about the state of Aboriginal housing was high, the most significant theme emerging was the desire of all Aboriginal communities to work more closely with governments to find solutions to the problems. The formation of a new Aboriginal Housing Body at the conclusion of the forum signified this constructive approach.

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> **In white man's eyes we are all leaders.....all you Aboriginal people sitting here today, we are leaders in their eyes because we are educated, we work, we can speak English...but the REAL leaders are those old men and women out there [pointing outside] sitting under the tree, we are merely the messengers for them, we can take their message to the government. We need to stop going to them [non-Indigenous people], following them, learning their ways and how they want us to live, it's time for them to come to us, follow us, learn from us and learn OUR WAYS.**
> Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

> **Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT is an alliance of land councils, AMSANT and legal aids. We seek to work together on key issues that impact on lives of Aboriginal people in NT. We aim to work collectively to make sure that Aboriginal people's views, concerns and ideas are thought about when governments change their policies and programs. We know there are some times many wide and varying views amongst Aboriginal people... we do want to support you all, so that policy makers, governments and others working in the field take notice of your opinions and your ideas. The organisations involved in APONT recognise that by working together our voice can be louder and stronger, and hopefully more influential.** Theresa Roe, APONT

Context

From 2007 a series of changes were rolled out by the Australian and Northern Territory governments that changed Aboriginal housing from a model based on self-management to a public housing model managed by the NT Government.

These changes included compulsory 5-year leases over communities under the Northern Terrirtory Emergency Response (NTER), the abolition of Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs), and the transfer of community housing to NT Government.
The broader framework for the changes was the COAG Closing the Gap measures which included a series of National Partnership Agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. In 2008 the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) committed $2billion over 10 years for the NT. Its objectives were to reduce severe overcrowding, increase the supply of new housing, improve existing housing and implement tenancy management standards in remote communities. The NT Government was made responsible for both the capital works program and the ongoing management of housing.

Below provides a timeline of changes to Aboriginal housing in NT (for more detail on context – see Appendix 2).

Prior 2007	• Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) – Community housing managed through ICHOs. 75% of ICHOs in NT were Community Government Councils.
2007	• Price Waterhouse 'Sunburnt Country' Review of Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs (CHINS) **Positives with ICHOs** º Community engagement, participation, control and ownership of decisions º Localised management of the service which, at its best, was very responsive º Local skill development and employment opportunities in both tenancy management and property repairs and maintenance º Housing decisions made in the interests of a harmonious community **Negatives with ICHOs** º poor governance in many instances, which included self-interested decision making and poor financial control º the lack of a legal framework surrounding tenancies (tenancy agreements) º inadequate attention paid to long term asset management planning º those most in need of housing were sometimes not housed • COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement announced 'healthy homes' as one of seven building blocks
June 2007	Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) • Compulsory five year leases - exclusive possession, to repair, demolish or replace any existing buildings and infrastructure • Commonwealth became 'landlord' of remote housing
June 2008	Community Councils abolished, formation of 8 Shires
December 2008	NTG Department of Housing, Local Government & Regional Services (Territory Housing) contracted by FaHCSIA to provide property and tenancy management services under the 5 year leases. Territory Housing contracts Shire Councils to do repairs and maintenance work in remote communities.
January 2009	National Partnership Agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing – 10 year investment in housing for states, with states taking responsibility for housing management. $2B was committed over the 10 years with $1.7B coming from the Commonwealth and $240M from the Northern Territory Government.
June 2012	Commonwealth Ombudsman released its report *Remote Housing Reforms in the Northern Territory*
2012	Stronger Futures Northern Territory - $400M for housing programs
17 August 2012	NTER five year leases expire. Many communities still had not negotiated a voluntary housing lease. Land Councils agreed that Territory Housing should continue to deliver housing services even where a lease was not in place.
2010-13	Negotiations and consultations continue regarding the roll-out of voluntary forty year housing leases required by the government for continued housing investment.
2014	NT Department of Housing awards repairs and maintenance, and tenancy management contracts to separate external contractors. Shire Councils no longer provide these services in most communities.

Let me say that the process of negotiation between the Housing Associations and the Commonwealth to achieve the signing of these 40 year sub-leases was a long and hard road. The Housing Associations were reluctant to enter these agreements and only agreed to do so when the Commonwealth threatened the compulsory acquisition of our land. This was not a good place to start a new relationship. Walter Shaw, Tangentyere Council

We met with Nigel Scullion. He wanted a 99 year lease. I flagged with him that we already signed a 40 year lease. Where are the dollars that were promised with that? Three years straight we have been fighting on this. Me and my brother sweating it out to get something for our community.... I am disappointed with the lease deal and SIHIP. We still got problems today. Tony Jack, Borroloola and Robinson River

We are all in the same boat... We are all discussing a not very good story but we are discussing the story of our lives. Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

Housing forum participants

Assessing the outcomes of NPARIH

The Housing Forum began with an overview of the outcomes of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) and the roll out of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) on the ground through the experiences of Forum participants with the current NT housing context.

What has been delivered under NPARIH?

NPARIH has delivered significant investment in Indigenous housing in the NT. Andrew Clapham, General Manager of Strategic Governance and Supply at the Department of Housing (DHsg) stated that NPARIH is the largest Indigenous housing program ever undertaken by the Australian and Northern Territory governments.

As at 31 January 2015, DHsg had completed 1098 new houses and 2929 rebuilds and refurbishments (against NPARIH targets of 1456 new houses and 2915 rebuilds and refurbishments by mid-2018). No further rebuild or refurbishment works will be undertaken. However, DHsg was now gearing up for the construction of 70 new houses in remote communities over the remainder of 2014-15 and 2015-16. It was acknowledged that: "It is not clear what the funding will be after June 2018. NPARIH won't solve all of the issues". The current Agreement ends in June 2018.

DHsg also manages the funding related to the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (SFNT) which commenced in July 2012. The key objective of SFNT is to support Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, particularly in remote communities, to live strong, independent lives, where communities, families and children are safe and healthy. One of the intended

Virginia Nundhirribala, Ngukurr and Sheree Ah Sam, NLC

outcomes of this agreement is improved public housing in remote communities through upgrading houses to improve their durability and functionality. SFNT provides $230 million from 1 July 2012 to 20 June 2018 for a total of 2454 upgrades to remote public housing. Clapham noted the SFNT Implementation Plan for 2014-15 was recently revised to allow the flexibility to deliver upgrades appropriate to the condition of the houses targeted, rather than against the restrictive cost and location parameters. DHsg is negotiating a major revision of the SFNT Implementation Plan for the period July 2015 to 30

June 2018 with increased flexibility to allow new houses to be constructed and infrastructure upgraded. A total of 644 upgrades under SFNT had been completed at the time of the Housing Forum.

DHsg highlighted that the next phase of implementation of NPARIH and SFNT will see a significant shift of emphasis towards providing more sustainable local employment opportunities in the delivery of capital works as well as ongoing property and tenancy management by Indigenous community members. They are working on a new service delivery model, developed following extensive consultation, comprising contractual arrangements for the delivery of three discrete categories of services – housing maintenance and coordination services, tenancy management services and trade qualified services. DHsg believe the new arrangements will give communities a greater ability to address maintenance issues as they arise and allow for timelier planned and preventative maintenance of houses and to provide further opportunities for local Indigenous people employed through regional councils to have sustainable ongoing employment in the management of properties and tenancies.

DHsg advised at the Housing Forum that the new model has now been rolled out across all regions with positive results citing two examples:

- Overall, the new service delivery model has achieved a reduction in repairs and maintenance spending by 36% and cut the average cost per job by almost half.
- Significant inroads have been made regarding local Indigenous employment with 63% of housing maintenance staff and 75% of tenancy management staff employed being Indigenous.

Disappointingly, the Minister for Housing, the Hon Bess Price, in response to a question regarding the government's approach to homelessness, said 'I want people to go back to their country', despite the prevalence of overcrowding in remote communities, overcrowding being a cause of homelessness, and the poor state of housing in remote communities.

Annuciata Wilson and Patsy Loynes from Peppimenarti community share feedback from their workshop

The Minister expressed her and the government's support for outstations and stated that she would 'work hard to make sure that outstations in the Northern Territory would not be shut down like is currently happening in Western Australia. Minister Price stated that the Northern Territory Government wants to support people to live a healthier lifestyle.

What has not been delivered by NPARIH

The Forum participants reported that the lived experiences of residents of remote communities did not correlate with the DHsg positive assessment of NPARIH's outcomes.
Workshops sessions asked participants whether the remote housing system is working. Feedback included:

- *Government has a blackmail approach and the government is not working with people properly.*
- *Tenants not involved or consulted about SIHIP upgrades and no flexibility for tenants needs.*
- *Contractors are not accountable, shonky jobs and nobody checks. The loss of the Community Development Employment Projects program (CDEP) has had a huge impact on local people doing repairs and maintenance (R&M) jobs in their own communities.*
- *Where is the rent money going? Houses are getting older but rents are going up.*
- *Housing Reference Groups also need to be supported and treated with respect from the Government.*
- *No community control over where money is spent*
- *Procurement process works against local employment, economic development of community control (outside NPARIH).*
- *The removal of CDEP took away the potential economic base for communities. Excluding local communities from being considered in tender process for R&M is yet another indication of the Government's lack of commitment for Indigenous Economic Development.*
- *Not enough houses – almost all houses are overcrowded*
- *No support from government to ensure Indigenous people are mentored on the job*
- *Community has lost its voice in housing decisions*
- *Funding for insurance is needed.*

Leonard Norman, Raymond Hector and David Djalangi, NLC Executive Members

- *Design – costing, consultation – we need more than 4 designs.*
- *Repairs and maintenance is too slow, dysfunctional*
- *Employment and enterprise has gone backwards*
- *Separation of tenancy and maintenance is causing issues - needs to be one entity.*
- *Too many levels of governance: slow process, cost ineffective, no local control*

Much was expected of NPARIH, but perhaps the most important was a reduction in the extent of overcrowding. Unfortunately two housing market indicators provide an insight into the difficulty of addressing this issue and the severity of the situation confronting Aboriginal communities:

- The National Housing Supply Council reports that the NT has by far the largest housing shortfall relative to the total number of households at 14.6% - a shortfall of approximately 10,600 dwellings[2].
- Homelessness in the NT is 17 times higher than anywhere else in Australia at a rate of 730 per 10,000 people[3].

Given the very high level of overcrowding in Aboriginal communities the vast majority of homelessness is experienced by Aboriginal people. This is what makes the issue of housing the most significant challenge confronting Aboriginal communities today. It is the reason why this Forum was so important and why Aboriginal people are so concerned with the lack of progress.
Feedback about what is not working in remote communities is summarised under themes below.

1.The supply of new housing under NPARIH is not meeting the expectations of the communities.
Forum participants were critical of the way in which SIHIP delivered the new dwellings.

- There was little consultation about where the new housing went – some communities got a lot while others received none. New housing was only allocated to 16 larger communities prioritised by the Australian Government, and there are 73 remote communities (not including homelands/ outstations) in the NT.
- There was little consultation about housing designs with just 4 floor plans on offer – these did not take account of the vast differences in geography and climate or the family structure of community members. There needs to be much greater flexibility in housing design.
- There was no financial transparency – communities could not tell if the houses were constructed efficiently. The funding allocation against number of houses built seems to indicate that the dwellings were in fact very expensive. In the face of continued overcrowding there was a feeling that more houses might have been delivered with a more efficient procurement strategy.
- In some communities houses were knocked down or condemned without there being a transparent process.
- There are quality and workmanship issues with the new houses appearing already.
- Delivery of houses is not keeping up with population growth.

> **Elliott has had no new houses in over 15 years. No revamps or renovations in over 4 years. Houses are appalling. Every time you ask, they say they have got no money. Where has all the funding gone?** Ray Aylett, Barkly Regional Council

> **Where are the dollars we were allocated, we were promised? We have to take control of this thing. I'm disappointed about SIHIP – I went to Numbulwar, to Ngukurr they still have problems. Is it a band aid fix when it still bleeds there?** Tony Jack

2 Referred to in the NT Shelter paper on an overview of housing in the NT - http://ntshelter.org.au/
3 See 2012 Revised Estimates of Homelessness available at the following link - http://ntshelter.org.au/ The ABS definition of homelessness states: a person is homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement is in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure or their initial tenure is short or not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

Our last new house was built 10 years ago. New houses are what is needed to grow healthy and happy family. Laynhapuy resident

2. The new maintenance arrangements are failing to ensure that houses are maintained and meet the standards necessary for healthy living.

The strongest theme throughout the Forum was the apparent failure of the repairs and maintenance system to provide an adequate service.

- In some communities there did not appear to be any system in place for reporting or accurately recording requests for repairs and maintenance. Neither the Tenancy Manager nor the Housing Maintenance Coordinator were at community or contact information was not available. In most communities, DHsg and its contractors do not have offices where repairs can be reported.
- Maintenance issues reported simply did not get done or could take many months, even for urgent items.
- The quality of workmanship was bad – plumbing issues might be fixed one day only for the problem to return the next day.
- In other areas, such as Town Camps, it was reported that there were too many people involved (Tenancy Manager, Housing Maintenance Coordinator and DHsg as well as the Maintenance Contractors) with no-one really seeming to take responsibility.
- Property inspections were not being undertaken, or were only focused on whether tenants were properly cleaning their houses, not on whether the basic health hardware was functional.

Northern Land Council members from left: David Djalangi (Galiwin'ku; East Arnhem), Virginia Nhundhirribala (Numbulwar; Ngukurr), Djawa Yunupingu (Ski Beach; East Arnhem), John Sullivan (Daly River West; Darwin/Daly/Wagait), Leonard Norman (Borroloola; Borroloola/Barkly), Raymond Hector (Pigeon Hole; Victoria River District), Wesley Bandi Bandi (Gapuwiyak; East Arnhem), and Matthew Ryan (Maningrida; West Arnhem).

This issue was powerfully presented by Patsy Loynes from Peppimenarti who showed photographs of three dwellings in her community:

Lot 64: Leaking plumbing in the ceiling of the house has caused the ceiling board to rot and collapse in one room, excessive mould in the ceiling and walls, rusting the ceiling fan, and rotting of the skirting and floor boards (compounded by the fact that the floor covering was not fitted properly and left exposed floorboards). This house was upgraded under SIHIP in 2014 and is now condemned so no-one can live in it.

Lot 62: Leaking solar hot water service causing erosion around the foundations of the house, washing away of the termite barrier, potential structural damage as well as health risks with stagnant water; this house also had exposed electrical wiring hanging out of an external wall and the power from the Power and Water Corporation sewerage pump being connected to the wrong side of the power meter

Lot 84: Overflowing septic tank which has been that way for 2 years despite the water being turned off to the house, waste now flowing to neighbour's yard causing serious health risk. The sewerage can be smelt inside the house and inside the neighbour's house. There is a daily problem with overflowing toilets. There were no caps on the inspection holes. This house is not unique - it happens to many houses when it rains.

Deewin Kirim would like to take responsibility for the repairs and maintenance contract, for small to major problems. We have 13 Peppimenarti residents with building expertise, but only one local person is employed at the moment. Patsy Loynes, Peppimenarti

Contractors are used from outside – local people are not employed. It takes too long to fix things. There are no local people employed by Zodiac (DHsg Contractor). There is no accountability for the work being done. Annunicata Wilson, Peppimenarti

Maintenance is a problem, We get people all the way from Katherine to do the plumbing. The wet is very hard for us, from the rain. We need to cyclone proof houses in coastal areas. Virginia Nundhirribala, Ngukurr

Rental income has not been used for insurance. We have houses damaged by fire that have not been repaired. The Department of Housing has said it's unlikely that those houses will be repaired. Walter Shaw, Tangentyere Council

Participants involved in workshop session, Day 1

We are not satisfied with the repairs and maintenance work. Response times are long - it takes months and the quality of the work is unsatisfactory – there is no quality control by the Department of Housing. Houses are left vacant while we wait for repairs and maintenance. And tenants have legal rights – tenants should get an appropriate level of service. We have the right to functional and well maintained houses. Walter Shaw, Tangentyere

3. NPARIH did not deliver new employment opportunities in the construction process and the new management arrangements have resulted in a loss of jobs within communities.

- Few local people were employed during the construction phase. Most of the Aboriginal people employed were not from local communities. This was seen as an opportunity lost.
- A big criticism was the loss of jobs in many communities under the new management arrangements with all handymen and contractors coming from the regional centres. There were no longer handymen in the communities employed to respond to simple tasks nor was there training for tenants to attend to the simple maintenance.

We need to create employment opportunities in our communities. Shut the gate on the outsiders coming in. Tony Jack, Borroloola and Robinson River

Annunciata Wilson delivering session outcome

All the jobs have been lost. We used to do it ourselves. My people have been let down. Aboriginal people can pump the sewerage themselves. Aboriginal people know how to fix a tap. We know. Barry Abbott, MacDonnell Regional Council

We trained 22 local men in certificate 2 in construction and 13 of them are still on the community. We also employ a licensed builder. We have the team ready to go. Patsy Loynes, Peppimentari

4. The new management arrangements are not delivering an improved service as they are overly complex with too many organisations involved.

- Separating tenancy management from housing maintenance coordination is inefficient and ineffective – too easy for different organisations to blame one another for maintenance failures.
- Having DHsg maintaining an involvement in approving all maintenance works is inefficient and results in duplication.
- Tenancy support is focussed on tenants moving into new houses and does not appear to extend beyond the initial sign up to a tenancy agreement – no tenancy support is provided to tenants living in refurbished houses or 'legacy dwellings'.
- There is no financial transparency in the system – no-one knows the relationship between rent paid and maintenance budgets. If communities could see where the money is going they could support initiatives to get better value from the system.

Workshop participants discussing housing on outstations

> **We got a lot of housing problems. People are paying rent, but where the dollars going? The money isn't being spent on fixing houses...** Barry Abbott, MacDonnell Regional Council

> **People need to understand who Aboriginal people are, and how they can do things for themselves.** Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

5. The application of public housing policies and procedures is patronising, punitive and culturally insensitive.

- DHsg ignores the fact that community members are often the Traditional Owners of the land on which they live and treat them as 'tenants' under the *Residential Tenancies Act*.
- The remote tenancy agreement in place across the NT does not comply with the *Residential Tenancies Act* and contains provisions that are punitive and culturally insensitive. For example it states that tenants need to get written permission to 'keep or use in the Premises a portable kerosene heater, oil burning heater or heaters of a similar kind'. It states that tenants cannot 'light a fire, or allow Residents or visitors to light a fire to burn Rubbish, household or garden refuse or other matter in or near the Premises or Ancillary Property'.
- Residents are not supported with tenancy management or where they are. It is narrowly focused on compliance with little weight being given to community education and community development to build the capacity of tenants and assist them achieve sustainable tenancies.
- Urban public housing policies designed for non-Aboriginal culture are insensitive to Aboriginal culture when it comes to things like accommodating extended families and understanding the cultural obligations of sorry business.
- The weight of documentary evidence and the volume of paperwork necessary for completing applications and rebate renewals, etc. are very complex and burdensome for Aboriginal people for whom English may be a second language and who may not be experienced in managing bureaucratic systems.

Forum participants discuss housing on Town Camps

- People applying for new or refurbished houses were not told that they needed to provide reasons and evidence of why they needed a house under DHsg policy with their application form. There are concerns that houses were not allocated to those most in need.
- Town camp representatives were frustrated that they do not have more say in setting rules around the duration of visitor stays - they would like the lease to be amended to reduce the period from 6 weeks to 2 weeks. Town Camp representatives stated they felt disempowered and frustrated by DHsg's management style and that the procedures implemented gave them less autonomy and control.

> **This home ownership really upsets me. I look at the [forum] title 'home is where the heart is'. We own our land and our home is on the land. Our land is where we have ceremony and share culture. We do own our home. Our home is our land. Home is where our grandmothers and grandfathers have been hunting and living. Home is where we belong to, it's our land. The land is our home.**
> Phillip Wilyuka, Titjikala

6. Many residents do not appear to be afforded their rights under NT Residential Tenancies Act.

- While there is increasing emphasis on tenants complying with their responsibility to pay rent and look after their home there is not a reciprocal emphasis on the landlord maintaining the property in a habitable condition.

John Sullivan, Yantjarruwu Outstation Resource Centre

> **People have been paying rent! Where is the rent going? Maintenance, Jobs? We have repeated to Territory Housing all of the mishaps that occur on our housing, but nothing is being done about it. Government are quick to take our money but not wanting to fix the problems.** Barry Abbott, MacDonnell Regional Council

There were many reports of plumbing and electrical faults which posed a threat to health and safety not being attended to in a timely manner (i.e. in accordance with the timeframes specified in the legislation for completing emergency repairs).

- DHsg has not kept accurate or up to date records of rent. To get their rent statement tenants have to make an application under the Information Act, which can take up to a few months to get back.
- Tenants have been told by DHsg that they have a rent debt when they have not. DHsg needs to reconcille the person's rent account back to 2010 before it tell the tenant if they have debt or not.
- Concern was also expressed that all remote tenants are on periodic tenancy agreements, which means that their tenancies can be terminated for no reason if the DHsg provides 42 days notice. Tenants in urban public housing are in fixed term agreements, which give tenants security of tenure. In response, the DHsg announced that all public housing tenants, urban and remote, will be transferred onto periodic tenancy agreements, meaning that no public housing tenants will have secure tenure and could be evicted from their homes without reason.

Forum participants engaged in the presentation

The impact of periodic tenancy agreements is that we have no security - we have no security of tenure. Walter Shaw, Tangentyere

7. Homelands are excluded from the arrangements and are falling into disrepair due to lack of services.

- There were numerous complaints that homelands were being excluded from the whole new housing framework and as a consequence were not receiving funding or adequate levels of service.
- Concerns expressed that the Homelands Extra Funding of about $5000 was inadequate to undertake R&M in extremely remote areas, and funding is only available for houses already in existence. Houses that exist are up to 30 years old and in state of disrepair; there is no funding to build new houses.
- It was also noted that there is a strong relationship between homelands and communities – if homelands receive reduce services or close down then people may move to the fringes of communities or towns, where there are already housing shortages.

What is the relationship between Territory Housing and the homelands?

I don't think there is one.

Geoffrey Barnes from the CLC question to Andrew Clapham from DHsg

Barayuwa Mununggurr, Chair of Laynhapuy, presenting on housing issues for homelands

8. **Town Camps are caught between remote communities and mainstream public housing.**

- It was noted that Town Camps in regional centres represent a special case and seem to find themselves caught between remote communities and urban public housing.

One of the biggest frustrations with the public housing model is that the DHsg tenancy management contract requires strict adherence to public housing policies and procedures, and that we cannot get maintenance items fixed immediately, as we can at St Marys. Sue McGregor, CAAHC

- It was pointed out that there is a special link between communities and Town Camps – when people come to Town from Communities they generally end up on a Town Camp.
- The point was repeatedly made that Town Camps provide a unique opportunity to develop a new approach to housing management with special purpose Aboriginal Housing Companies in control.

Homelessness has been identified as a major issue for the Larrakia People. Donna Jackson, Larrakia woman

9. Communities have experienced great disempowerment as a consequence of the changes to housing – a winding back of the hard fought gains of the land rights and self-determination movement.

- A continuing theme throughout the Forum was the sense that the implementation of the NTER and NPARIH, despite the best intentions of the initiatives, represented a phase in the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land.

- Because communities are places where kinship groups have traditionally lived together, having some control over who lives in their community and what goes on in their community is very important.
- The implementation of mainstream public housing policies and procedures makes no allowance for this difference and it is experienced by Aboriginal people as disempowering and denigrating.

- Many communities, stated that the so-called Housing Reference Groups were either not meeting or if they did meet, met infrequently and their recommendations were rarely acted on.

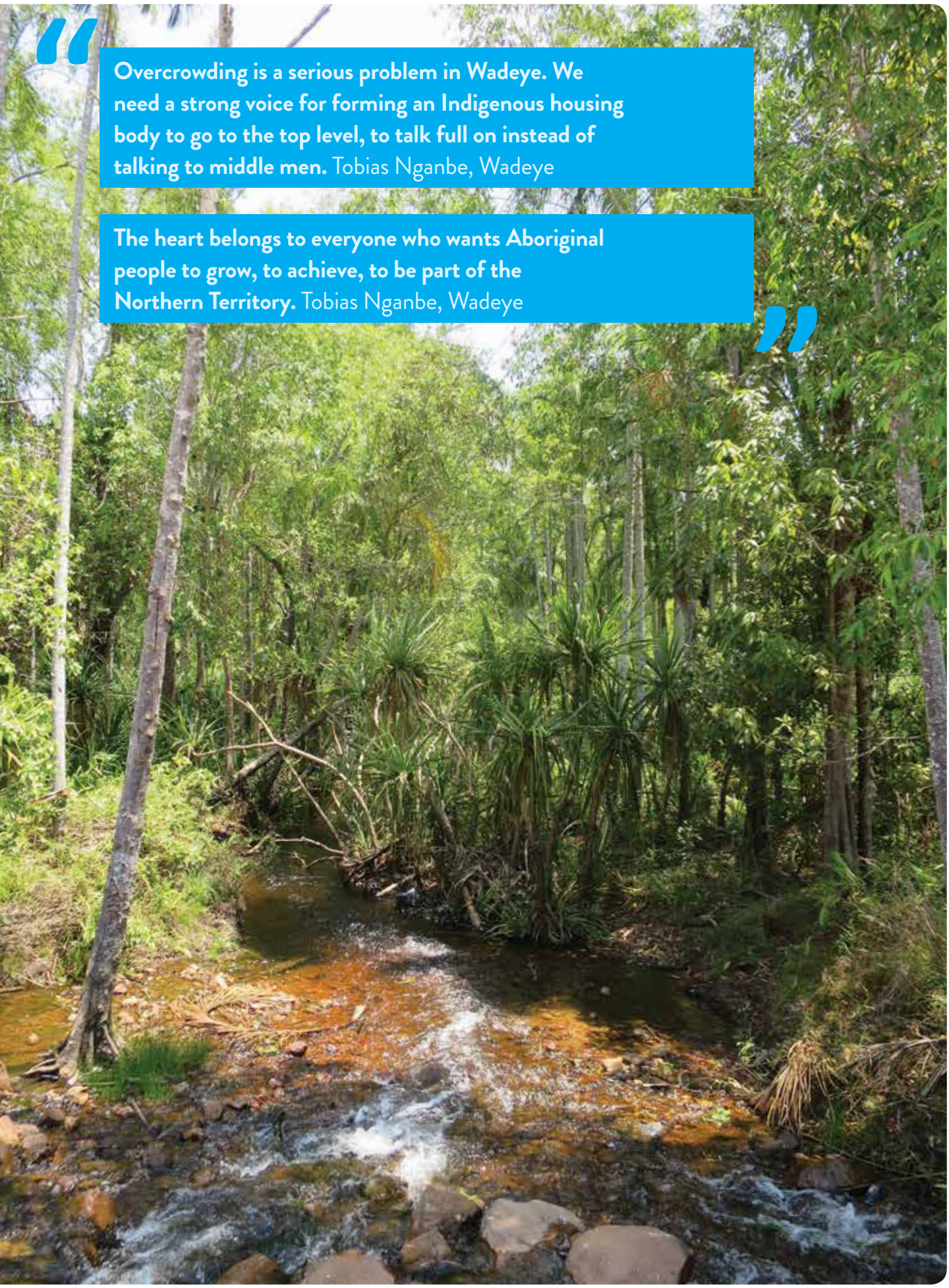
NTG stole all the communities off us, they were our houses, and all of a sudden they belonged to Territory Housing and we are totally reliant on government. Daisy Yarmirr, Minjilang

You and your leaders need to go back and give community control back to the communities. You need to give it back to the community. Give responsibility back to look after the community in our own right. We used to have a housing construction crew on the ground. Phillip Wilyuka, Titjikala

10. Despite the investment there remains a high level of overcrowding and the future appears to be one of continued shortage of supply of housing.

- Many representatives spoke about there being no new or additional houses being built or proposed to be built in their communities.
- The communities which received new houses, cited examples of significant overcrowding despite receiving additional houses.
- In some cases the construction of new houses acted as a magnet for people to return to the community on the basis that they may have better chance of securing a house than where they are currently residing, worsening already severe overcrowding.

Forum participants involved in workshop sessions



Overcrowding is a serious problem in Wadeye. We need a strong voice for forming an Indigenous housing body to go to the top level, to talk full on instead of talking to middle men. Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

The heart belongs to everyone who wants Aboriginal people to grow, to achieve, to be part of the Northern Territory. Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

Emerging NT responses

Lessons from NT experience

The key lessons that can be derived from the presentations made by Aboriginal organisations in the NT engaged in housing management can be summarised as follows:

Special purpose Aboriginal community housing organisations with skilled governance, sound financial planning and management and staffed by trained housing professionals have been established in the NT and are ready and willing to follow the lead of the growing community housing sector across Australia.

These organisations have a strong partnership with local communities and Traditional owners and work across regions that are geographically and culturally connected.

These organisations accept the need for regulation but want to see a commitment by the NT government to empower them to deliver a community housing model of housing management rather than the bureaucratic and culturally irrelevant public housing model.

Training and employment of Aboriginal staff is a high priority for these organisations with opportunities in both construction and management.

Better housing outcomes will be realised if communities are involved in the planning and design of houses and communities.

A responsive, competent and cost effective maintenance system is the most critical factor in achieving tenant satisfaction.

There are new sources of capital for the development of new housing for Aboriginal people – if these sources can be tapped then government dollars can be leveraged to achieve a much better outcome.

Community housing providers can help the Department of Housing to improve the quality of run down public housing through higher rental revenue generated from tenant's access to Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

Housing strategies must be regional – the relationship between Town Camps, remote communities and homelands is strong and must be understood in planning and managing housing programs.

Case Studies

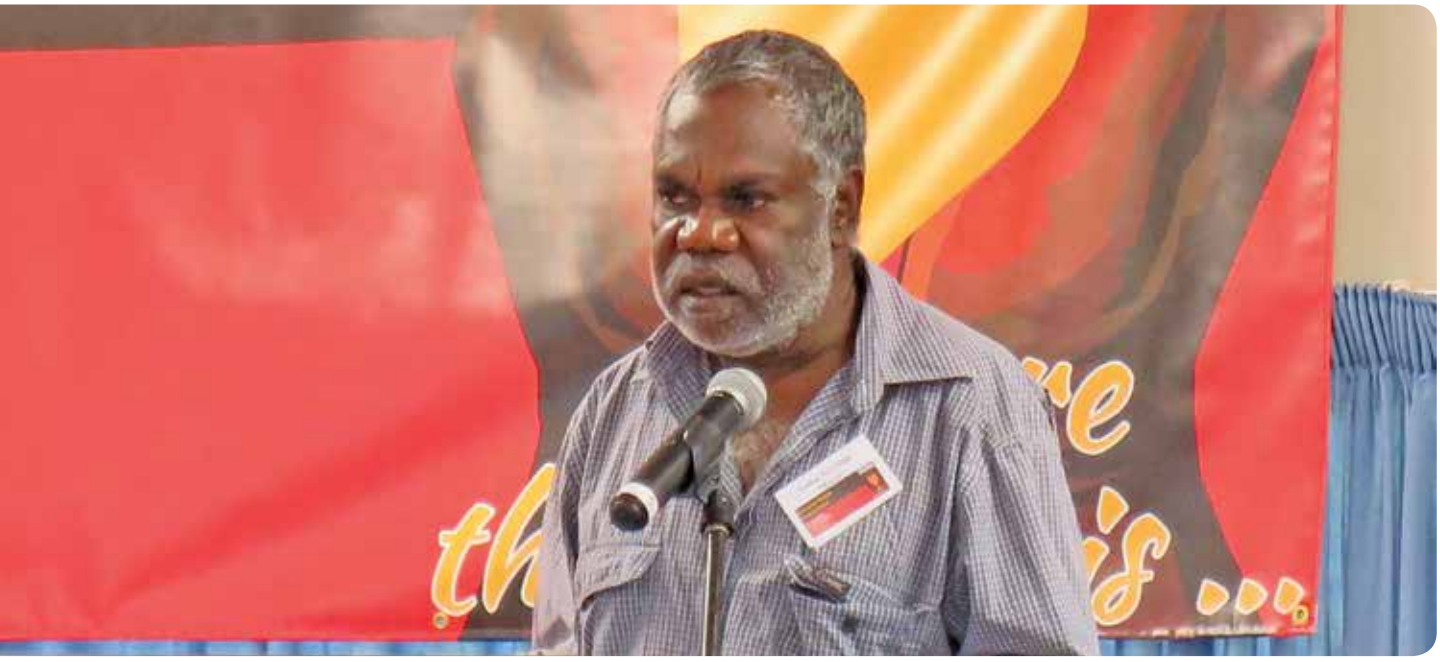
Thamarrurr Regional Authority Aboriginal Corporation (TRAAC), Wadeye

Thamarrurr Regional Authority Aboriginal Corporation (TDC) is a Wadeye community organisation delivering commercial and selected government service activities within the Thamarrurr region. TRAAC is the commercial arm of TDC.

> **Our ancestors are warriors. We are intelligent. We have our own mind and our own soul which tells us how to live. We are in the same boat – all the problems, the slides and the stories told – all disgusting stories. That's the story of our life, so it seems. Sitting in the backyard. Giving us scraps. That's the mentality of people who don't understand who we are and how we can do things ourselves...We can do this – not to be lead anymore, but for everyone, home is where the heart is and the heart belongs to everyone. We are the messengers for our people, people sitting under the trees, we are merely messengers, strong to voice our views to government.** Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

In 2007, TRAAC was one of the few Aboriginal Corporations awarded a contract to build new houses for the community under SIHIP. With excessive overcrowding (an average of 16 people per household prior to 2007) a total of 105 houses were to be built at Wadeye.

The contract to build 54 of these houses enabled TRAAC to develop new industries including a concrete batching plant and a concrete tilt slab facility. Labour and materials are sourced locally



Tobias Nganbe from Wadeye community presenting on the work of TRAAC

wherever possible. In addition to the new houses, the enduring legacy of the investment will be the training and employment of local Indigenous people.

> **We know what we are doing and how to live on our land in sustainable communities.** Tobias Nganbe, Wadeye

Groote Eylandt & Bickerton Island Enterprises (GEBIE)

Groote Eylandt Bickerton Island Enterprises Aboriginal Corporation (GEBIE) was incorporated in December 2001. The objectives of GEBIE are to assist Aboriginal residents and communities on Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island to: develop and operate enterprises and conduct and /or operate schemes that will enhance the social wellbeing of its members; and, negotiate and represent Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island people in any matter connected with the social, economic or financial well-being of those people.

The organisation is fortunate to have access to significant funding through mining royalties and funds negotiated under a Regional Partnership Agreement. Nevertheless, there has been disappointment over where funding is directed, so GEBIE has set up a local Chamber of Commerce to agree upon community priorities and argue for wiser investment of royalties.

GEBIE has taken over management of a number of houses in the communities and homelands on Groote Eylandt but the allocation of maintenance funds for outstations is "pathetic". GEBIE currently own and manage nine houses on Groote Eylandt. GEBIE Civil and Construction are the DOH's current contractors for repairs and maintenance in Groote Eylandt. GEBIE are training local Indigenous staff to complete repairs. They do not want to be reliant on outside sources. They intend on building their own houses (and establishing an organisation to collect rent and complete repairs and maintenance. This new organisation would act as landlord for the houses. The GEBIE representatives spoke about needing a further 60 to 100 houses in the community as entire families were sleeping in one bedroom. Its experience under Departmental management was that repairs and maintenance was virtually non-existent, and that infrastructure needed to be upgraded as one community had the experience of 'raw sewerage in the street'. It described the Housing Reference Group as effective if called, but considered that meetings were not regular

Grant Burgoyne and Alfred Mamarika, Groote Eylandt & Bickerton Island Enterprises

enough. The organisation believes that it could be more efficient and effective in both management and construction of housing if it was given a genuine opportunity through adequate funding.

Yilli Rreung Housing Assoc, Darwin

Yilli Housing is a provider of affordable housing in Darwin. It is an independent, Indigenous organisation, which aims to deliver professional housing management, maintenance and construction services to the Top End.

In partnership with Indigenous leaseholder organisations and the NT Government, Yilli Housing provides housing management, maintenance and municipal services to seven Town Camp communities in Darwin and seven Outstations in the Top End.

Yilli Housing also houses clients in a range of affordable rental properties where rents are set 25% to 40% below mainstream rental rates. The aim of the company is to provide good quality accommodation with affordable rents, allowing people to save for a deposit for a home or to enter the mainstream property market. It also provides an avenue for people who are discriminated against in the mainstream rental market to gain a tenancy.

Yilli staff and contractors undertake all housing repairs and maintenance on their properties. The company works with quality local contractors with a commitment to employing Indigenous people. Yilli holds a building licence and also carries out larger scale works such as housing upgrades and landscaping on Yilli properties and under contract for external and government organisations.

Yilli Housing believes in providing employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people with over twenty Indigenous staff in full or part time employment.

Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (CAAHC), Alice Springs

CAAHC is a not-for-profit special purpose Aboriginal community housing development and property management company based in Alice Springs. It was founded by Tangentyere Council with 3 other member organisations: the Central Land Council, Healthabitat and MLCS Corporate in 2009.

Participants reporting back from the workshop session, Day 1

The initial priority of CAAHC was to provide tenancy and property management to 16 of the Town Camps in Alice Springs, a role that Tangentyere Housing had previously fulfilled since 1979. As part of the lease arrangements between Town Camp Housing Associations and the Australian Government, DHsg was given a six year sub lease over all Town Camp housing, on the condition that a non-government agency was appointed as the housing manager. CAAHC was created to fulfil this role.

CAAHC are passionate about engaging with each individual Housing Association on the Town Camps and each community housing site it manages, to deliver a service that is proactive, well-resourced and recognising the expressed needs of the communities we service.

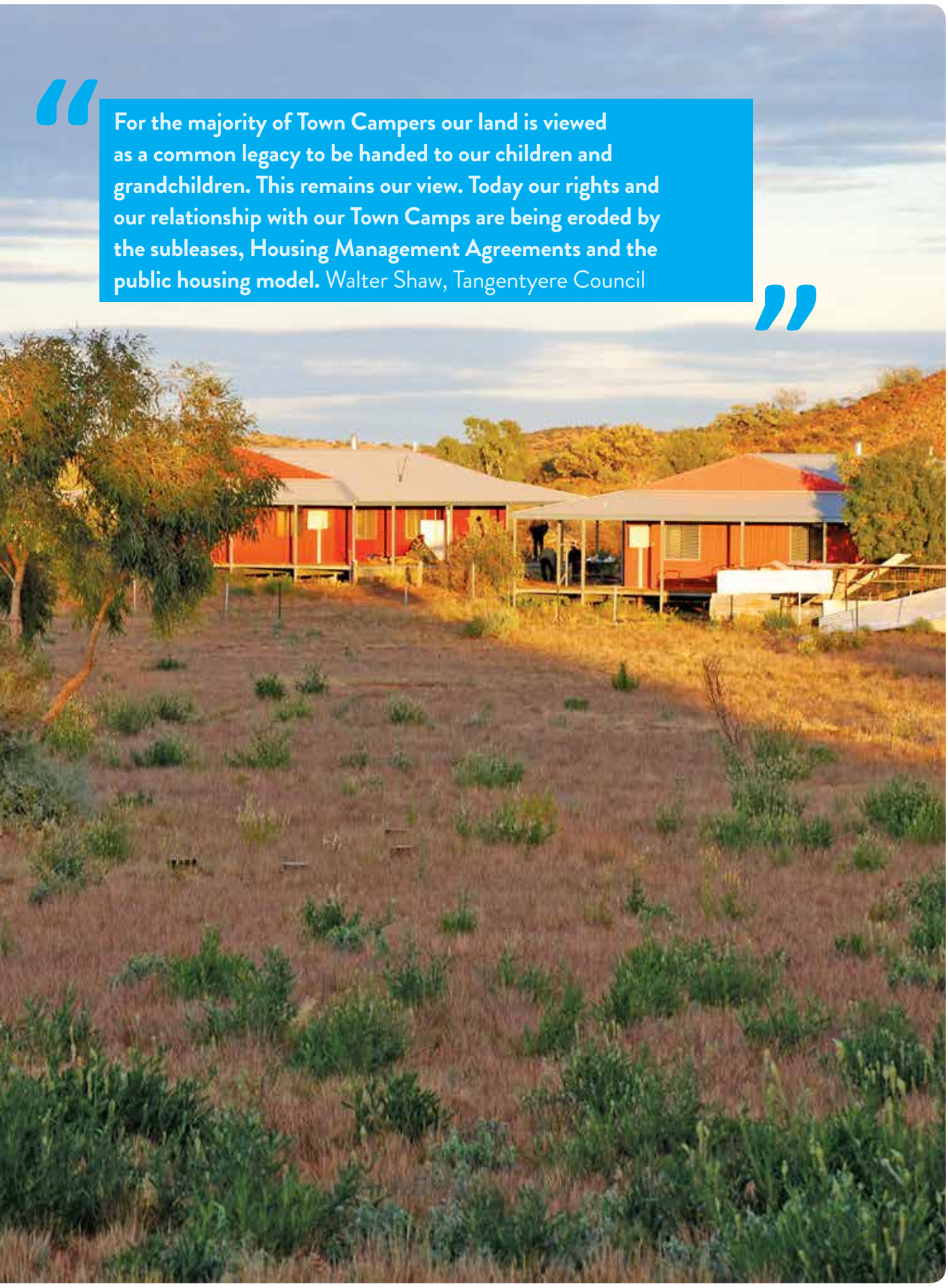
> **We create trusting partnerships and constructive working relationships between organisations so that CAAHC can achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people.** Sue McGregor, CAAHC

While the management of the Town Camps presents some challenges, CAAHC is pioneering new and innovative community housing projects as a way forward for the future. Projects now include: management of residential housing at St Mary's Community in Alice Springs; management of a housing complex at Elliott St in Alice Springs; and ownership of a new community housing development under construction in Bloomfield St, Alice Springs.

> **We use St Mary's to show what would be possible on the Town Camps, if they were able to be fully managed as community housing. What started out as a problem site for the NT Anglicare Diocese, with derelict, vandalised buildings, has become a place where the community housing and social enterprises thrive.** Sue McGregor, CAAHC

Sue McGregor presenting the work of CAAHC

The current restrictive leasing arrangements on the Town Camps dictate CAAHC'S service model and prevent it from being true community housing; which is by its nature responsive, economical and provides real community ownership and engagement of their housing.



> **For the majority of Town Campers our land is viewed as a common legacy to be handed to our children and grandchildren. This remains our view. Today our rights and our relationship with our Town Camps are being eroded by the subleases, Housing Management Agreements and the public housing model.** Walter Shaw, Tangentyere Council

Housing Solutions from NZ and around Australia

Lessons from international and Australian experience

Key themes emerged from the experiences of New Zealand and the rest of Australia including:

Aboriginal housing, particularly in rural and remote settings, is very different to mainstream housing and as such must be subject to different development strategies and management policies.

Aboriginal people with an interest in and passion for better housing outcomes in communities need to organise themselves so they can advocate for effective reforms to housing systems.

Effective housing strategies and solutions will be those developed and implemented with Aboriginal people in the lead role.

Local responses developed in consultation with local communities provide better outcomes for those communities.

Regional strategies, resources and structures are essential for supporting local successful initiatives.

The success of regional housing structures will depend on State Housing Authorities being prepared to transfer management of state owned public housing for Aboriginal people to these structures.

Aboriginal housing organisations need to meet the highest governance and service standards by registering under established regulatory frameworks.

It is necessary to build capacity in the Aboriginal community housing sector to be effective and efficient housing managers.

Aboriginal housing strategies need to encompass different accommodation types to meet different community housing needs including older persons, extended families, supported accommodation, visitor accommodation and shared facilities.

Aboriginal housing needs to move to a business model that does not rely on recurrent subsidies for operations.

Training and employment plans need to be developed to ensure the economic benefits of both construction and management activity are retained within local communities as much as possible.

There is great potential for partnerships between well organised and highly capable Aboriginal housing organisations and other market players, both public and private, to deliver new housing at scale.

Case study on Māori housing solutions, New Zealand

The Forum was very fortunate to have Victoria Kingi, Managing Director of Papakainga[4] Solutions Limited and Chair of Māori Advisory Committee to the then Associate Minister of Housing and guided the development of the National Māori Housing Strategy, as a guest presenter. At a local level, Victoria is Deputy Chair of Nga Potiki a Tamapahore Trust, a Treaty of Waitangi settlement tribe, which is currently planning housing development of 460 houses on land returned under Treaty settlement, and a Trustee of Mangatawa Papamoa Blocks Inc, a large Māori land owning trust developing Papakainga housing on Māori land.

Kingi spoke of the fact that Māori face serious housing deprivation in NZ today noting that 75% of Māori owned their own homes in 1926, whereas today this has been reduced to less than 44% and many of these are old homes in need of repair and maintenance. 34% of state housing is occupied by Māori people and;

> **...there is a direct correlation between the loss of land and loss of identity; sense of place; self-esteem; wealth; health and quality of life. Alienation of Māori land has played a significant role in the appalling quality of life now experienced by Māori today. Taking land to build houses is an anathema – we don't want housing done to us.** Victoria Kingi, New Zealand

Victoria Kingi from New Zealand presenting

4 Papakainga brings together two words, Papa meaning land and Kainga meaning to be sustained, to express the concept of being sustained from the land.

It was against this background that the first National Māori Housing Strategy was drafted and adopted by the NZ government in 2014. The strategy identified 6 key directions:

- Ensure the most vulnerable have secure tenure, and access to safe, quality housing with integrated support services.
- Improve the quality of housing for Māori communities.
- Support Māori and their whanau to transition to preferred housing choices.
- Increase the amount of social housing provided by Māori organisations.
- Increase housing on Māori owned land.
- Increase large scale housing developments involving Māori organisations.

The important thing we did was change the government mindset. The development of National Māori Housing Strategy led by Māori has helped to create opportunities. We have money to build our houses, design our houses and manage our houses. Victoria Kingi, New Zealand

Papakainga Solutions Limited has been working with all of the land trusts in the Western Bay of Plenty District Council region since 2009 to form a collective of land trusts to lobby government to improve their housing conditions. This included strategies to change local and regional government rules to make it easier to build on Māori land and to lobby government for specific funding to build houses. Their regional collective approach was very successful with $11 million invested in 2011 – 2013 and a further $24 million committed.

Victoria Kingi from New Zealand

Papakainga Solutions Limited has a number of developments in the Western Bay of Plenty area including:

- Horaparaikete Trust: 5 dwellings for home ownership, 1 communal whare (community facility)
- Mangatawa Incorporation: 12 two bedroom Kaumatua rentals
- Tauwhao Te Ngare Trust: 4 x Kaumatua homes, 1 x whanau home
- Pukekohatu Trust: 3 homes for

- Nga Potiki/Pirihima Trust: 6 Kaumatua homes
- Mangatawa: 12 x 4 bedroom homes
- Nga Potiki: 230 homes and retirement village

Importantly, each of the local land trusts is involved in the design, construction, ownership and management of the houses on their land. To enable this Papakainga Solutions Limited[5] assisted a collective of Māori organisations and government agencies to develop a Housing Toolkit[6] which enables communities to navigate their way through the technical and complex process of property development.

It was clear that the role of Papakainga Solutions Limited, a specialist housing company which works exclusively with Māori and Government to achieve Māori housing aspirations, was crucial to the success of the regional strategy. During the three years from July 2011 the region secured nearly 50% of all capital grants provided by the national government.

The factors that were identified as contributing to a successful National Māori housing strategy were identified as:

- The development of housing strategy was led by Maori people.
- The implementation of housing solutions was led by Maori people.
- Local responses provide better outcomes for local communities while regional strategies and resources are essential for supporting local initiatives.
- It is necessary to build capacity in Maori community housing providers if they are to be financially prudent managers.
- There is great potential for partnerships between Maori groups and other market players to deliver new housing at scale.

Matthew Ryan, West Arnhem Regional Council and Norman Winter-Nadika and Charlie Gunabarra, Malabam Health Service

Now that we've built them, we have to manage them. We will lead our own housing solutions, tenancy management and community development. Victoria Kingi, New Zealand

5 See http://www.papakainga.co.nz/
6 See http://www.westernbay.govt.nz/our-services/cultural-relations/maori-housing-toolkit/Pages/default.aspx

Case studies: Indigenous organisations working in housing, Australia

1. Yumba Meta Housing Association Ltd, Townsville

Yumba Meta is a not for profit organisation established in 1973 by a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Its purpose is to provide and lead the housing agenda in North Queensland and advocate towards stronger more sustainable policies and programs for disadvantaged groups, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

> **We started from very small beginnings. It began with a handful of us sitting round my kitchen table and talking about how difficult it was for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to rent a property in Townsville.** Eva Kennedy, Yumba Meta

> **We found that even when we got funding to purchase eight properties that we were discriminated against. People didn't want to sell their house to us, as they saw that an Aboriginal family would move into the neighbourhood and they thought property prices would fall. We finally found a real estate agent that was sympathetic to our cause.** Eva Kennedy, Yumba Meta

Eva Kennedy and Dushy Thangiah from Yumba Meta Housing Association, Townsville

> **We have been going for 40 years. We now have 146 properties and 75 staff. Our housing options include short, medium and long-term housing options. We are also helping get home ownership for those clients who want it. We took charge of our own destiny. We decided our community needs. We set our own goals and we got skilled people with passion to develop those ideas.** Dushy Thangiah, Yumba Meta

The organisation provides long-term, medium-term and short-term accommodation and housing related support services to disadvantaged people in the Townsville region, including: Flora House Women's Shelter; an aged care accommodation village; a diversionary centre providing temporary accommodation for those at risk of incarceration for public intoxication related offences; and, medium term accommodation to assist clients to transition to long term affordable housing. Their tenancy support services are based on a structured case management process and trust based approach – there have been no evictions in the past four years.

In addition, Yumba Meta purchased 26 acres of land in December 2009 to venture into housing for Indigenous home ownership. Townsville City Council has approved a 22 lot subdivision of the land for this project.

Yumba Meta believes its success factors are:

- The patience and resilience of the Management and Directors of the company.
- The commitment to good governance including training for all Directors.

Forum participants involved in housing management workshop, Day 2

- The commitment to quality service provision by undertaking to register under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing and thereby meet recognised national standards.
- Being prepared to raise funds from the community and use these to leverage government capital grants for projects.
- Offering a range of housing services on the continuum from short term crisis accommodation to home ownership opportunities.

Not everyone fits into long-term accommodation. The government didn't agree with our idea for this, but it has grown. We now have 20 self-contained male and female rooms. Lots of clients stay for about 2 years but some have stayed for 4 years. We have cooking classes, men's group, beading, etc. for our clients. We have not had 1 eviction in 4 years. The tenancy support service team work with clients and have engaged in case management for the clients. Dushy Thangiah, Yumba Meta

2. Common Ground, Port Augusta

Common Ground Adelaide (CGA) is a not-for-profit organisation which aims to provide high quality housing coupled with resources and support for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. CGA was established in 2006 by members of the Adelaide business community and the South Australian Government. Common Ground generally brings together people on low incomes in a residential complex which includes self-contained apartments and communal spaces as well as office space for support services, workshops, and training activities.

The Port Augusta project, opened in late 2014, was the first regional Common Ground development in Australia and first Australian Common Ground 'scatter site', with the units spread across two sites – Boston Street and Augusta Terrace. The two sites have been developed specifically to address the needs of local homeless Aboriginal people.

Kirsty Dadleh, Port Augusta Common Ground

Fifteen newly renovated units in Boston Street mainly house working people and students who can live independently with minimal support. The Augusta Terrace site is located next to the Port Augusta TAFE and close to the town centre. It comprises 20 brand new units and a common room/office designed to blend into the desert surroundings.

The aim of the service is to provide a stable home along with support, understanding and opportunities so that individuals can become self-sufficient and achieve permanent independence in all aspects of their lives.
Common Ground Port Augusta works in partnership with The Salvation Army, who provide a support service and case management for tenants living in Common Ground accommodation.

3. Emama Nguda Aboriginal Corporation, Derby
Emama Nguda Aboriginal Corporation (ENAC), is a not-for-profit, Indigenous, community-controlled and managed charitable organisation, which has been operating in the Derby region for the past 20 years. ENAC was established by a proactive group of local Indigenous people with a shared goal of providing culturally appropriate employment, training and support services to people living in the region.

Today ENAC provides administration and management of employment services to the Derby township including Kamalinunga Aboriginal Corporation, Ngunga Women's Centre, Djimung Nguda Aboriginal Corporation, Burrinunga Aboriginal Corporation, Mowanjum Aboriginal Community and the Derby Family Healing Centre. ENAC has, for the last 5 years, successfully managed a Housing Management Contract for the West Australian Department of Housing and Works. This government contract involves ENAC managing 100 houses scattered in communities throughout the Derby/Malarabah Region. The contract includes establishing and maintaining tenancy agreements, rent collection, tenant's liability provisions/charges, property inspection and condition reports. A major component of this contract also includes ENAC being responsible for the management and provision of repairs and maintenance to the houses.

Maureen O'Meara, Emama Nguda Derby

> **We need a housing report card for states, Territories and Federal Government so we know what is happening with housing and we know where the money is going.** Maureen O'Meara, Emama Nguda

The management of this program requires close contact and good relationships with tenants, their families and community boards. These relationships have been built up over the past five years. ENAC is also required to work closely with contractors and service providers to ensure that repairs and maintenance are carried out in an appropriate and timely manner to the satisfaction of the tenants and community.

With changes taking place to the management of Aboriginal housing under NPARIH, ENAC had to think laterally. The Western Australian Government has decided to seek a contractor with the capacity to manage all social housing within a region – in this case the whole of the Kimberley. ENAC has neither the capacity nor the interest in managing housing in the west Kimberley and Kununurra areas so it has formed a partnership with Community Housing Ltd (CHL).

CHL is a leading international not-for-profit company delivering affordable housing to those on low incomes. It was established in Australia in 1993 and has spread operations to South Asia, South-East Asia and South America. Internationally CHL aims to assist those who are disadvantaged by market failure by securing a pathway to home ownership. In these developing countries CHL has adopted a community development approach by:

- Developing a housing product that is affordable and which generates employment.
- Focus on local capacity building.
- Reduce imports of building materials – wherever possible use locally made products.
- Focus on research and development of affordable local building technologies.
- Training and generate skills in the local community so labor is from the community.
- Establish a local self-sustainable economy.

CHL developed an Interlock Compressed Soil Bricks (ICSB) technology for use in the remote communities, which creates:

- Formal and certified training in production and construction with ICSB, resulting in an increased skilled workforce.
- Ability to design and build high quality new houses tailored to the needs of local communities.
- Support for local entrepreneurship. Sustainable and inclusive jobs.

CHL use mobile training units and take advantage of the transportability of the machines to reach remote communities and train residents/tenants in the production of bricks.

In the East Kimberley, CHL and ENAC work together servicing 40 transitional tenancies in Kununurra and 15 in Halls Creek. This service includes providing linkages to support services such as financial counselling, monitoring health, employment and schooling and where necessary intensive support. ENAC and CHL can see great synergies by working together rather than competing. Each will remain focused in their own part of the region while sharing their different expertise – CHL in housing and ENAC in training and employment.

Alternative housing options

Workshop ideas

The Forum participants were asked to consider solutions and ideas on four central housing themes: Housing Management, Housing Supply, Housing on Town Camps and Housing on homelands/ outstations. Table 1 presents some of the feedback from these workshops.

Table 1: Feedback from the workshops

Theme	Ideas
Community housing management	• *Bring control and decision making back to communities and use local builders.* • *Working with Traditional Owner's to make decisions through the whole process.* • *Recording system of complaints, R&M by using new technology, smart phones, social media and good communication.* • *Look to moving back to local management rather than centralised management.* • *Rent, should be flexible / open discussion. The group cited inconsistencies and unfairness in current rent model and the complexity of the rent calculations used by the Department. Many people can't understand why paying more or different rent now when houses were in such poor condition to begin with and there is such disparity of condition between houses. We had a brief discussion about different models and what would be most fair but didn't decide on a preferred model. Ideas for what is needed include the possibility of flexibility (to take into account the condition of particular houses) and also a dialogue with communities about setting of rent and what communities think is fair.* • *Training local tradespeople to do R&M work; keeping skills in the community.* • *The Department has not taken adequate steps to make communities aware of where to report repairs and maintenance and how to follow up with when repairs and maintenance. Communities similarly frustrated with not knowing how to report repairs or the process changing (with changes to repairs and maintenance from Shires to independent contractors). Remote residents find the system impenetrable and accessing information or following up repairs challenging and too difficult for many people.* • *Learn from mistakes, better planning, better involvement in planning what the community needs, for specific families - Need to sit down with HRG/TOs and talk about which families need which houses; better design of houses for big families; more discussion about where houses go, how houses should be grouped (e.g. family groups).*
Community housing supply and diversity	• *No coordinated strategy from Government on all the housing in communities, Town Camps and homelands.* • *Cost of new houses is very significant. Aboriginal Association/Organisations can construct new and better houses more cheaply* • *NPARIH - No Strengths to current system identified.*

Housing on Town Camps	• *The land tenure arrangements on Town Camps are very different across the NT, which means the service delivery arrangements and residents ability to influence decisions about services also differs.* • *NPARIH should have been extended to all Town Camps. No new housing to Darwin Town Camps for 10 years.* • *Introduction of community housing model on Town Camps rather than a public housing model. This requires government support.* • *Big disparity between funding levels for some Town Camps in comparison to remote communities, this should be more level and funding decisions need to be made transparent.*

Housing on homelands/ outstations	• *What is NTG doing with the funding that comes from the Australian government for outstations? Where does it go?*
	• *No funds for new houses on homelands/outstations. Not even 1 house per year, which is problematic in areas where there is high population growth*
	• *The move from CDEP to RJCP has cut jobs – no top-up of funding and no local workers working on housing maintenance on outstations.*
	• *Repair and maintenance funding programs cannot keep up with demand on homelands. There is not enough funding in the system.*
	• *We want to do the work ourselves – should direct funding to training.*
	• *Our source money needs to go back to the community, use it for community development projects on homelands.*
	• *Elliott – What are we classed as? Outstation or Town Camps? No-one taking ownership of houses. Everyone is passing the buck and no-one is taking responsibility.*
	• *We need clarity on policy and programs for homelands funding*
	  • *Classification system*
	  • *Funding story*
	  • *Transparency on funding – who gets it, where it goes.*
	  • *Accountability on jobs that are done, before they are paid.*
	  • *Grants are small and an admin burden.*

Research findings

University of Tasmania and Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute (AHURI) researcher, Associate Professor Daphne Habibis, noted that there has been a radical change in the delivery and management of Aboriginal housing with the introduction of NPARIH. The shift in housing policies promoting self determination to policies of mainstreaming service delivery in remote and urban areas has brought a significant increase in investment in remote housing but a withdrawal of funding from the traditional ICHOs.

Habibis is working on a collaborative research project under the AHURI which is looking at the outcomes in service delivery under NPARIH. She presented on the preliminary findings of recent research into Aboriginal housing.

> **With public housing in the Australia community generally, we have seen a shift to community sector. The national policy framework is in the opposite direction to what is happening in Indigenous housing policy, even though there is no evidence that public housing works for Indigenous tenants.** Daphne Habibis, AHURI

She noted the many challenges to service delivery in remote areas:

- Negotiating with traditional owners in relation to land tenure prior to investment,
- The significant shortage of housing and the consequent overcrowding,

Honourable member Bess Price, NT Government Minister for Housing

- The distance to regional centres and the poor transport networks,
- The lack of an available skilled housing management and maintenance workforce and the difficulties in supervising the workforce,
- Communication difficulties caused by governments not taking proper account of language diversity, culture and distance,

- Cultural differences that impact upon attitudes to housing; e.g. sorry business,
- The availability and adequacy of other services – municipal services, essential services, health & education services, and
- Availability and adequacy of IT equipment and infrastructure to support effective housing management.

The early evidence from this work does suggest some improvement in housing conditions but overcrowding remains a concern, as are the apparent constraints on repairs and maintenance budgets. Both these factors impact on long term maintenance of houses and the ongoing tenancy standards for tenants. There was strong evidence in the research that the diversity of Aboriginal communities, the cultural differences and the remote context requires housing policies and services that are flexible and housing providers that are adaptive.

Habibis noted that head tenants are in vulnerable positions and needed better support to manage their responsibilities. She reiterated the importance of experienced staff to work in remote housing as there can be difficulties in having local staff undertake community housing work. She spoke of the difficulties in identifying what is wear and tear in a house which is the responsibility of the landlord and what is intention or negligent property damage that is the responsibility of the tenant.

Habibis concluded that there was a tension between the national policy objective of implementing a mainstream public housing model and the need for flexibility in policy and delivery and, more importantly the need to build trusting, local partnerships which ensure the strong inclusion and participation of local communities. She advised that governments would benefit from investing in building the capacity of local providers and consultative bodies.

Philip Wilyuka, Central Land Council executive member, from Titjikala

> **We need flexible policies that create a collaborative, adaptable and diverse housing system, especially in the remote context.**
> Daphne Habibis, AHURI

Professor Paul Memmott from the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre at the University of Queensland has been involved in Aboriginal communities in the NT for a number of decades and has watched the changes in housing polices play out. Memmott also spoke on the learnings from research but his emphasis was on the approach to the delivery of new housing.

At present, the political imperative to deliver the new housing and upgrades within government election cycles had led to a procurement process which could only be delivered by large construction companies thus limiting the involvement of small Indigenous building companies. This resulted in a loss of jobs in communities and a deskilling of the local workforce.

> **... housing supply procurement is often driven by the pressure of maximum numbers of houses on the ground as fast as possible (as in much of recent NPARIH housing) which reduces the capability to value-add multiple Aboriginal social and economic capitals to remote communities, including strengthening governance, leadership, training, enterprises, employment.** Prof. Paul Memmott, University of Queensland

Professor Paul Memmott presenting on his research findings to participants

Memmott spoke of the need for long term continuity of housing policy, that is resistant to political cycles and has bipartisan support, tenancy management that adapts to community practice, the employment of local people and organisations in order to drive local employment and enterprises, and lobbying to address unmet demand for housing.

The emerging challenge is what will happen at the conclusion of NPARIH in 2018 when it is expected that the new and refurbished dwellings will be handed over to housing management agencies. If capacity is not built into Indigenous organisations now then there is no way they will be ready to provide services.

From the perspective of procurement, the research indicates:

- Supply programs need to ensure that design and construction must be focused on the durability of housing, minimising the breakdown of both structure and hardware.
- New housing needs to be followed by a regular program of maintenance to extend the life of the dwelling.
- A wide portfolio of housing designs should be developed (not just the 4 used in NPARIH) to accommodate the significant variation in household composition, climate, site features and geography.
- Housing designs need to allow simple renovation to accommodate changes in household composition.

Memmott concluded that conventional mainstream housing supply contracts involving lump sum contracts and time pressured delivery, such as those used under NPARIH, are in conflict with Aboriginal culture and the capacity of Indigenous organisations. He argued for an "integrated project delivery framework" for Aboriginal housing which would include the following features:

- Capacity to incorporate joint ventures between Aboriginal enterprises and mainstream building contractors.
- Encourage collective teamwork and administration mentoring to build capacity in construction and secure licenses for future work.
- Incorporate meaningful training and employment outcomes in local communities to contribute to economic stimulus.
- Include long term exit strategy with training outcomes, tenancy and asset management programs and a repairs and maintenance program so that staff, equipment and trades are not lost to the community.

For the benefits of a large scale procurement program to be sustained, once delivery has been completed, the local enterprises need to be part of a broader hybrid economy including (but not limited to) ongoing repairs and maintenance and a smaller scale supply program.

An alternative approach

Hal Bisset, formerly the CEO of Central Australian Affordable Housing Company (2013-2014) and now a consultant to the social and affordable housing industry, was asked to comment on what an alternative approach to housing might look like in the NT.

Drawing on 30 years of experience in social housing, Bisset said that no social housing system can be developed or operated in a vacuum. It must be planned, developed and managed in a manner which is interconnected with:

- Management of the physical environment – power, water, rubbish, waste, roads, animals and pests.
- Management of the social environment – tenants, health services, schools, aged care, family support, mental health, drug & alcohol and emergency services.
- Management of the economic environment – industry, training, employment, wages.

The interconnectedness of the housing system with other systems required housing development and management to be characterised by the following:

- Place based – the provider needs to be "located" in the community with the capacity to interact with all other systems such as municipal services and community services.
- Integrated business model – all aspects of housing management (tenancy management, property maintenance, asset management, tenant support) needed to be integrated into the one coherent organisation so that each of the component functions could work in harmony with the others and there are no gaps in the service.
- Community engagement – the provider should operate within a community development framework establishing trusted relationships with key stakeholders (residents, community leaders, other service providers, government representatives) and develop the management model in consultation with those stakeholders.
- Commercial focus – the provider needs to operate the housing management role as a business, with financial transparency and a business plan which is financially sustainable over the long term.

Hal Bisset presents some alternative options

- Professional work force – the provider needs to employ trained professionals with skills and experience in housing management to recruit and train Aboriginal people into the business.

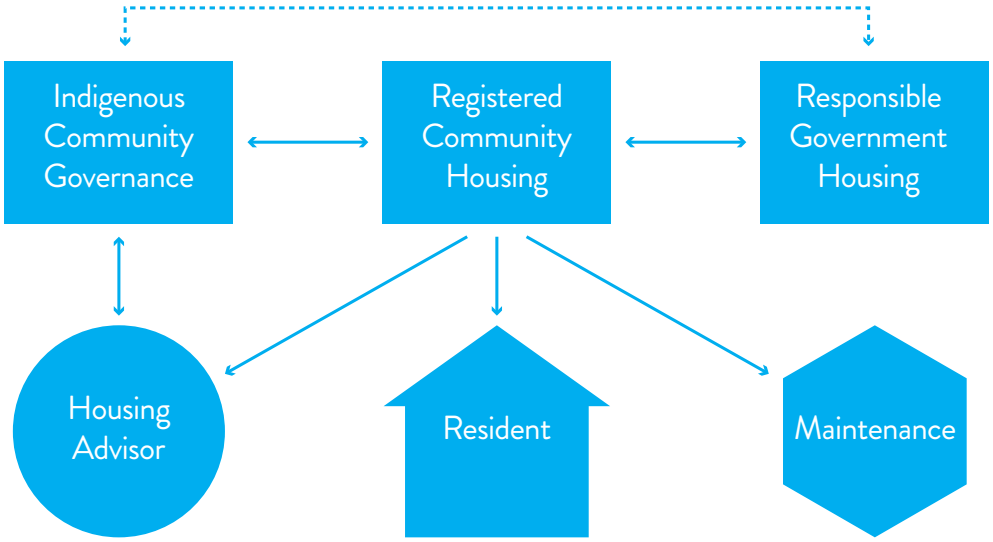


Figure 1. Example of Aboriginal controlled Community Housing Organisation

A community housing model similar to that which has emerged throughout the rest of Australia but through Aboriginal controlled organisations was presented to the forum. The model would rely on special purpose community housing organisations which were regulated by a government authority and funded by either the Australian Government or the State Housing Authority in addition to funds raised from other independent sources (such as royalties). See figure 1 below for more details.

It was suggested that the new generation of ICHOs would need to have the scale to employ key professionals and engage with local communities through an agreement to manage housing within that community. Figure 2 presents ideas on management of funds and expenditure. It was noted that the geographical size of the NT demanded multiple housing providers; however the relatively small volume of housing management business in remote NT communities implied that only a small number of community housing providers would be financially viable.

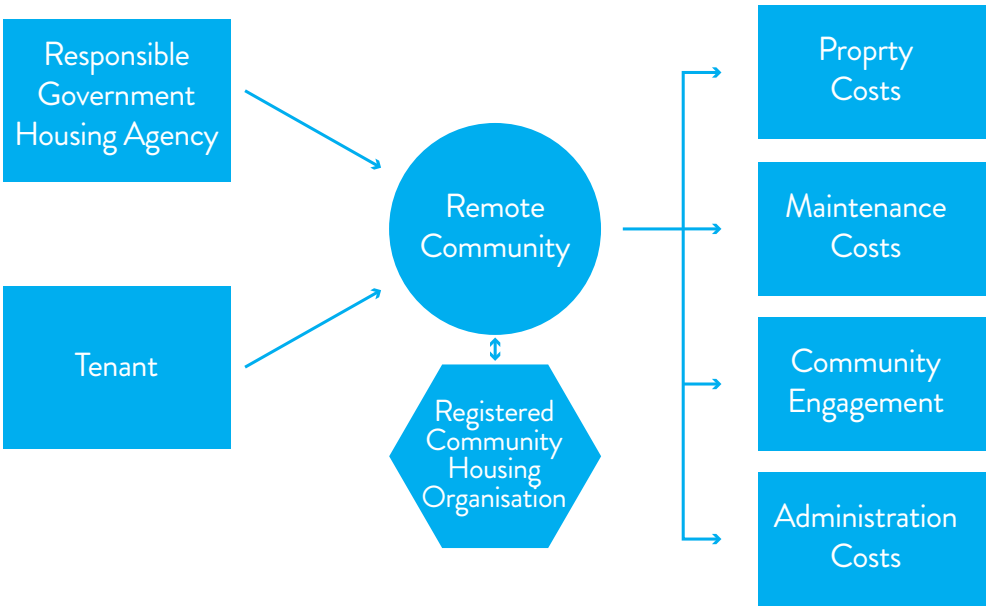


Figure 2. Community Housing Trust Account

Conclusion and future directions

The Forum presented a unique opportunity to engage with Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal organisations to work with governments on the future of housing in NT. There was a strong sense from the Forum that the current state of housing is appalling, housing management structures are not working and DHsg is not keeping up with the demand for repairs and maintenance.

In the NT, the shift away from ICHOs to a public housing model and the significant investment of NPARIH has not done enough to improve houses. Aboriginal leaders are demanding and willing to have a more significant role in future options. There was unanimous support for an initiative to work towards an Aboriginal housing body.

The Forum signalled some key directions for the future that include:

- Collaborative action – representatives from Aboriginal communities in the NT need to organise themselves into a coordinated group to speak collectively with both NT and Commonwealth governments and advocate a coherent alternative approach to the management of remote Indigenous housing.
- Community housing approach – the approach best suited for the NT is a community housing approach consistent with the rest of Australia but delivered through Aboriginal owned special purpose housing organisations.
- Integrated management systems – a key feature of the community housing approach is that all housing management functions should be delivered by the one organisation in an integrated package.
- Place based approach – housing management will be most effective when there is a presence of the housing provider in each community, someone that members of the community can relate to on a daily basis.

Tony Jack from Borroloola and Robinson River was chosen as interim Chair to establish a new Aboriginal Housing Body

- Capacity building – governments will need to invest in building the capacity of these organisations at both governance and management levels; most particularly training strategies that will enable local community members to be engaged in basic tenancy management and maintenance activities.
- Engagement with local communities – the community housing provider must have a commitment to engagement with each community and developing strategies and priorities in consultation.
- Financial transparency – establishing an accounting structure which provides transparency for all and enables informed decisions to be made about policies and budgets is necessary to win the support and confidence of all stakeholders.

There has been a chipping away at Aboriginal peoples' rights. We need to go back and think about the Land Rights Act, what have we got and what can be improved? We don't want crumbs from the table, we need to start thinking seriously about how we can get a better deal. David Ross, CLC

Home is where land is and that is where the heart is.
Phillip Wilyuka, Titjikala

We as Aboriginal people have to take responsibility. We have to be prepared to train and get qualifications. Your community has proved it, the willingness to take on a job and get things done for yourselves. The Hon. Bess Price MLA, NT Minister for Housing

Appendix 1: Forum statement

New NT Aboriginal Housing Body to tackle Aboriginal housing crisis in the NT, 16th March 2015

A landmark NT Aboriginal Housing Forum in Darwin has resolved to form a new NT Aboriginal Housing Body to tackle the worsening Aboriginal housing crisis in the NT.

The forum brought together about 150 delegates in Darwin on the 12-13th March to voice their concerns with the current housing management system in the NT, and to develop solutions and alternatives. Convened by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT[7], in conjunction with NT Shelter and the Central Australian Affordable Housing Company, the Forum brought together Aboriginal people living in remote communities, Town Camps and homelands along with national and international housing sector experts, community housing groups from across Australia, regional councils and government representatives.

APONT spokesperson and Chair of the Forum, David Ross, said "this was a critical opportunity for Aboriginal people from right across the NT to share our experiences and frustration with the housing system, and develop our own solutions for our communities. It doesn't matter where our people live the housing issues are the same."

Tony Jack from Robinson River was appointed interim Chair of the new Aboriginal housing body. "Individuals are just a voice in the wilderness and we need a new body to move this issue forward", Mr Jack said.

The new body will work towards a new Aboriginal housing system which is diverse and flexible, allows for local control over services, generates local employment and suits the needs of our people. We need to do more with the funds available, and diversify funding sources, to provide better housing management outcomes and increased housing stock to counter overcrowding.

The NT public housing system is in crisis and millions of dollars in housing investment has not had the outcomes we were promised. Dollars are disappearing into the bureaucracy while the housing system is falling to pieces on the ground.

The Hon Bess Price, Minister for Housing, attended the Forum. The Forum called on the Northern Territory Government to abandon the current approach and support a more diverse, flexible and locally appropriate housing system that would put Aboriginal people back in control of the design, construction and management of Aboriginal housing.

While the national mainstream housing sector has shifted to a diverse, community-based sector, Aboriginal housing in the NT has gone in the opposite direction. Aboriginal housing in the NT has been moved wholesale to government control.

Stories from participants painted a vivid picture of a housing system which is failing; it is expensive, ineffective and wasteful, disengaged from communities and tenants, and working against local employment and local capacity building. The following common problems were highlighted:

- Failure of the public housing management model to adapt to the cultural and geographical demands of remote communities in both the design and management of houses;

7 APO NT is an alliance of the Central and Northern Land Councils, the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT, the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service

- Lack of maintenance, poor quality maintenance and poor response times to urgent maintenance requests;
- Poor quality housing stock with many of the new houses poorly constructed;
- A lack of transparency at all levels of the system, including funding and expenditure of rent collected;
- Limited local employment and a reliance on expensive outside contractors;
- No accountability for outside contractors leading to poor workmanship and no process for checking the quality of the work performed;
- Houses are overcrowded and no new houses being built in many communities;
- Housing Reference Groups are not working well in some areas – they are not meeting or not being listened to;
- Funding for outstations and Town Camps is uncertain and unclear, and no new houses have been built for many years;
- Public housing tenants do not have long term security of tenure because they are not given the opportunity to enter into fixed term tenancy agreements; and,
- Overall sense of loss of control and inability to understand the system or have a say over the decisions which impact life in communities.

While the scale of the problems could have been overwhelming, the Forum also heard inspiring examples of local, national and international Indigenous and community housing organisations that are implementing effective community housing alternatives. Factors for success included:

- Taking control over your own destiny – becoming a leader in housing delivery and management;
- Working collaboratively in regions and calling on the expertise of qualified and committed professionals;
- Developing strategic and realistic plans for the short and long term;
- Building strong and capable special purpose housing organisations at a regional level to work in partnership with local communities;
- Identifying low cost building alternatives; and,
- Developing new finance models that do not rely solely on government funding – particularly operational funding.

Our colleague from New Zealand, Victoria Kingi, made an important point, and one which was reiterated by leaders from across the NT, she said 'you need one group and one voice to get governments to listen. You need an empowering framework from which to move forward'. Tony Jack from Robinson River said 'individuals are just a voice in the wilderness and we need a new body to move this issue forward.'

The Forum has charged a group of leaders, supported by APONT, with the responsibility to work on housing issues and drive an alternative agenda for housing. We will not continue to accept a housing management system which is controlled and implemented by government and fundamentally fails to deliver at any level.

Aboriginal leader, Phillip Wilyuka from Titjikala, summed up the strong feeling at the Forum, *'Home is where the land is, and that is where the heart is'*. Forum participants are going home with a renewed sense of unity, strength and inspiration to challenge the failures of the current system and build a new future in our communities, Town Camps and homelands.

Appendix 2: NT context

Aboriginal housing prior to 2008

Prior to 2008, all remote Aboriginal community housing funded by Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments was managed by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs)[1]. Approximately 75% of ICHOs were run through local community council, who had the authority over allocations for new houses and other management issues. Decisions were made within the community. ICHOs managed accommodation for almost all Aboriginal community residents irrespective of their income. Tenancy agreements over a dwelling were rare. Eviction was also rare to non-existent. Maintenance was responsive and done on a request basis as the budget allowed rather than on a cyclical or inspection basis. ICHOs created local skill development and employment opportunities in both tenancy management and property repairs and maintenance.

Despite these positive aspects, the system was acknowledged to be fraught with problems. A report by Spiller Gibbins Swan in 1998 identified inadequate recurrent funding as the critical impediment to effective housing management by ICHOs[2]. The report found that even where ICHOs were following best practice, there were significant shortfalls of available funding to meet recurrent funding needs. More recent studies by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)[3] and Price Waterhouse Coopers[4] highlighted financial viability of small scale operations, the lack of a prudential regime, poor governance in some ICHOs, a paucity of funds, lack of legal framework surround tenancies (tenancy agreements), inadequate attention paid to long term asset management, under-maintenance and overcrowding as critical issues affecting the performance of ICHOs.

Change to public housing

It was these negative aspects of housing arrangements by ICHOs that prompted the Commonwealth and Territory governments to devise changes to remote housing management from 2006 onwards[5]. From 1 July 2008, most ICHOs ceased to exist when the community councils under whom they operated were dissolved and amalgamated into eight shire councils. The major policy shift to a public housing model was further made possible by the compulsory acquisition of the 5 year leases over many remote communities as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

The new approach to remote housing allowed the roll out of the Northern Territory Government's public housing model to remote communities. This became the joint Commonwealth and NT

1 As Porter notes, '[i]n effect there were two distinct housing administrations: IHANT for Aboriginal community rental in remote areas, and Territory Housing for public housing in the main centres.' Broadly speaking all funds (e.g. ATSIC, CHIP, Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement, Aboriginal Rental Housing Program and NT Government contributions) were channelled through the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (IHANT) to the ICHOs. See Porter R. 2009, *From community housing to public housing in Northern Territory remote Aboriginal communities: the policy context.* (DKCRC Working Paper 44 Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs)

2 Commonwealth / State Working Group on Indigenous Housing & Spiller Gibbins Swan (Firm) & Australia, Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing (1998). V*alidation of the report Financial viability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations*. Spiller Gibbins Swan Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Vic http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/35591047

3 Hall, Jon & Berry, Michael, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute & RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre (2006), *Indigenous housing: assessing the long term costs and the optimal balance between recurrent and capital expenditure.* Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, [Melbourne http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/3504895

4 Price Waterhouse Coopers, Department of Families, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, "Living in the Sunburnt Country" - Indigenous Housing: Findings of the Review of the Community Housing Infrastructure Program, 2007 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/.../05.../livingsunburntcountry.pdf

5The review of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme by Price Waterhouse Cooper was particularly influential in shaping this change.

Government approach following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2007 which provided that:

> [f]or all communities, access to …funds for repairs and upgrades will be dependent on those communities agreeing to the transfer of their housing to publicly owned Territory Housing on the completion of the repairs and upgrades.[6]

This shift was further reflected in the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) in 2008 (which applies until 2018)[7].

However, the agreement to the transfer community housing to Territory Housing was not sought up front. Territory Housing was granted permission by the Commonwealth to take over community housing through the power of the NTER compulsory 5 year leases. It was only as 5 year leases were coming to an end (expired in August 2012) that a commitment to the 'regularisation of tenure arrangements' by agreement of community landowners was sought. As a consequence of the NTER and secure tenure policy, Aboriginal housing in NT communities and town camps is almost exclusively managed under a public housing model.

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Houisng

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) introduced the National Indigenous Reform Agreement in 2007[8]. As a part of the reform, "Healthy homes" was one of seven "building blocks" for increased activity to reduce the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (Closing the Gap Plan). Then in November 2008, COAG endorsed the NPARIH as the means through which to achieve "healthy homes". NPARIH stands for 10 years ending June 2018 with a total of $5.5B committed by the Commonwealth over the period (including $3.5B of funds already committed under previous programs). The objectives of the agreement were to:

- significantly reduce severe overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities;
- increase the supply of new houses;
- improve the condition of existing houses in remote Indigenous communities; and,
- ensure that rental houses are well maintained and managed in remote Indigenous communities.

In the Northern Territory, funding of $2B was committed over the 10 years with $1.7B coming from the Commonwealth and $240M from the Northern Territory Government (NTG). Under the Agreement, the Commonwealth is responsible for funding housing and infrastructure works and for tenancy and property management reform while the NT Government is responsible for the delivery of a program of capital works, including new, rebuilt and refurbished houses, and the associated infrastructure. The NT Government also delivers property and tenancy management.

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6 *Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Governments in respect of Indigenous Housing, Accommodation and Related Services* (September 2007).

7 Paragraph 16 of NPARIH provides that the Northern Territory will have responsibility for 'provision of housing in Indigenous communities and through State and Territory housing authorities be the major deliverer of housing for Indigenous people in remote areas of Australia'

8 The commentary on NPARIH is drawn from 3 documents:

- National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing (Council of Australian Governments, 2008) http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/housing/remote_indigenous_housing/national_partnership_variation.pdf
- National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing – Progress Review 2013 (Council of Australian Governments, 2013)
- Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement of Remote Indigenous Housing – Audit Report No. 12 2011-12 (Australian National Audit Office)

The targets for NT capital investment under NPARIH were:

- 1456 new houses
- 2915 refurbished houses

The funding was framed as a significant, potentially once in a lifetime, investment which therefore justified "systemic reform" of existing Indigenous housing arrangements. It was claimed that housing and related infrastructure had to be built to a standard that would be sustainable over a 30 year life cycle. Australian construction standards and the National Indigenous Housing Guide were used for construction standards and management was to be consistent with public housing standards. The two governments agreed that the Reform would include:

- Robust and standard tenancy management arrangements based on public housing standards, to ensure rental houses are maintained, rent is set at an appropriate level and collected, support services are in place and an ongoing maintenance and repairs program is established.
- Secure tenure arrangements for housing assets, including long term leases, which respect the role and interests of the Traditional Owners of the land, while protecting the government investment, providing clarity about government responsibility for effectively managing and maintaining the houses over the long term and, importantly, paving the way for improved land administration and long term town planning in remote communities.
- Employment, training and economic development opportunities for Indigenous people in construction and management, with a 20 per cent Indigenous employment target set for the construction phase.
- Access for Indigenous people from remote communities to affordable accommodation in regional centres to support employment, education and training opportunities and access support services in those locations.
- Facilitating home ownership, economic development and commercial investment opportunities for Indigenous people in remote communities.
- The development of clearer roles, responsibilities and funding arrangements for the municipal services and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure and essential services in remote areas.

A further $400M, funded as part of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory, was provided specifically for housing programs in NT. This appears to have been targeted to reform Indigenous Community Housing Organisations operating in regional and urban areas, to ensure those organisations meet the same standards expected of organisations operating in the mainstream community housing system.

Under NPARIH, the NT Government has been responsible for both the capital works program and the ongoing management of the houses. Tenure reform underpinned the new housing arrangements, the tenure arrangements pertaining to most communities are:

- Traditional Owners (or in the case of Town Camps the holders of the perpetual Crown Lease) enter a long term lease of their community to the Executive Director of Township Leasing (EDTL – a statutory authority established to hold the leases on behalf of the Commonwealth government), or directly with the Northern Territory Government.
- Where leases are held by the EDTL there is a subsequent agreement to a sub-lease with the NT Government for the purposes of undertaking capital works (new housing and upgrades) and providing housing management and municipal services.
- The NT Government through the Department of Housing (DHsg) makes arrangement for the construction or refurbishment of dwellings and for the provision of tenancy and maintenance services.
- All capital works were undertaken by external contractors through alliance partnerships.
- Since 2013 all tenancy and property management has been undertaken through 2-5 year service level agreements with external contractors.