

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Remote Housing

Senator: Senator Rachel Siewert

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Question:

What is the Department of Social Security or the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet doing to ensure that Territory Housing is acting on the recommendations of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report into Remote Housing reforms in the NT?

Answer:

The Northern Territory (NT) Government is directly responsible for Property and Tenancy Management (PTM) in remote communities.

The Australian Government monitors PTM reforms in the NT through the Joint Steering Committee for the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing and the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the NT. The NT Government is also required to regularly report on progress through monthly reports and an Annual Status Report.

The June 2012 Ombudsman's report made 13 recommendations corresponding to three key themes: communications, the implementation of adequate IT systems, and accountability arrangements and complaints resolution.

In relation to these recommendations, the NT Government has reported:

- 97 per cent of available remote dwellings have been registered onto the Tenancy Management System (TMS). The TMS is an IT system with a full occupancy, dwelling audit and assessment capability. It produces a range of reports that assist in rental account reconciliation and facilitates visibility of occupancy rates per dwelling. It provides improved data to develop an approach to occupancy issues.
- 99 per cent of rent receipts that had been received since July 2010 but not reconciled have now been reconciled and are being applied to tenants' rent accounts.

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- New property and tenancy contracts designed to improve the efficiency of responding to repairs and maintenance requests commenced on 3 March 2014.
- When signing a tenancy agreement, tenants are provided with a Remote Public Housing Tenancy Rules information sheet, which includes details on their responsibilities as a tenant and the Department of Housing's responsibilities as landlord.
- The Living in a House Program, which aims to build sustainable tenancies through primary prevention and education, early intervention and case management, is being rolled out in a number of NT communities.
- Housing Reference Groups have been formalised through terms of reference and policies.
- Community Housing Officers have the waitlist application form available to them at local offices and, with the rollout of the TMS, the management of waitlists now occurs at community level.
- Information on the complaints, appeals and reimbursement process is published on the NT Government's website and includes a fact sheet outlining the complaints and appeals process with the offer of translator assistance, where required.
- An electronic Asset Management System has been introduced in the NT to record and report on asset condition.