

Sunday, March 30, 2008

Re: Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia.

Dear Sir or Madam:

We thank you for providing us the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia, our comments are stated below.

Housing affordability is a complex mixture of issues, including developers holding back land to artificially inflate prices (see attached pg ii), a tax system that rewards investors rather than supports first time home owners, easy money from banks and probably the biggest contributor our unsustainable population growth.

We **NOTE** the fundamental cause of housing affordability problems is the Australian Governments pursuit of unsustainable population growth, which is the key cause of the degradation of our environment, public infrastructure and social systems.

It is **NOTED** that to date State and Federal Governments have continually failed to acknowledge and address the issue of Australia's carrying capacity. Available performance indicators clearly show that Australia's human carrying capacity has likely been exceeded. The declining health of our waterways, declining biodiversity, salinity, failing infrastructure, declining GPI, crowded roads, cities and waterways, over fishing, loss of valuable farmland and loss of native vegetation are just some of the indicators showing our population is unsustainable. Perhaps the lack of acknowledgement of this fact by Governments is best explained as an example of the Tolstoy Syndrome. *"I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabrics of their life".*<sup>[1]</sup>

We strongly **RECOMMEND** that any initiative/s undertaken to address housing affordability must be aligned to Ecological Sustainable Development (ESD) principles. Particularly, all development must meet the GOAL of Ecological Sustainable Development,<sup>[2]</sup> that is, that all development improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, **in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends**

However, we **NOTE** the Queensland Government has introduced draconian legislation, *Urban Land Development Authority Act 2007 (the Act)*, passed on 11 September 2007, which has the ability to override all environmental legislation and ignore community concerns and values. It should be **UNDERSTOOD** that the 2008 local government elections in Queensland sent a very clear message that Queenslanders are tired of the policy of 'Develop at any cost' and don't appreciate the close relationship between politicians and developers, the latter appear to be the main beneficiaries of housing affordability legislation.

By way of example we will highlight how State Government, Local Government and developers are using the issue of 'housing affordability' to drive even iconic species to extinction.

The koala population in the Koala Coast from the 2005-06 survey is estimated at 4611 animals. Based on the estimate of 6246 koalas

(Dique *et al.* 2004) from the 1996-99 surveys, this represents a 26% decline in abundance of the regional koala population. The estimated population declined in the Redlands Shire by 27%, Logan City by 26% and Brisbane City by 21%. Urban expansion is the chief cause of this decline.

Source:

[http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p02181aa.pdf/Report\\_on\\_Koala\\_Coast\\_koala\\_surveys\\_20052006.pdf](http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/publications/p02181aa.pdf/Report_on_Koala_Coast_koala_surveys_20052006.pdf)

The recent Redland Shire Council '2007 Koala Summit' showed the Koala Coast koalas to be in real trouble, researchers

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showing they had crashed below the danger line of 5,000 animals meaning they are rapidly heading towards extinction. It was estimated that by 2020 the urban Koala Coast koala population would be extinct and by 2043 so would the rural koala population.

[http://www.redland.qld.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/F2DBD313-7FF6-481B-BBBC-F329CA69F656/0/KoalaFutures\\_Discussion\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.redland.qld.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/F2DBD313-7FF6-481B-BBBC-F329CA69F656/0/KoalaFutures_Discussion_Paper.pdf)

It was only in 2004 that the koala was listed as Vulnerable in South East Queensland. However, the loss of bushland continues unabated and now distinct koala populations like the Koala Coast koalas are moving rapidly towards extinction.

It should be **NOTED** that koala habitat is legally (*Nature Conservation (Koala) Conservation Plan 2006*) defined as,

- (a) a woodland where koalas currently live; or
- (b) a partially or completely cleared area that is used by koalas to cross from 1 woodland where koalas currently live to another woodland where koalas currently live; or
- (c) a woodland where koalas do not currently live, if the woodland—
  - (i) primarily consists of koala habitat trees; and
  - (ii) is reasonably suitable to sustain koalas.

Regardless of the environmental legislation the Redland Shire Council (2004 – 2008 administration) with support from developers and elements within State Government were in the process of trying to open more koala habitat for development via various legal planning documents, such as the *Local Growth Management Strategy* (LGMS) and using planning studies, such as the *Southern Redland Bay Investigation Area Planning Study*. One of their arguments used to justify urban expansion is 'housing affordability.' How the new Redland Shire Council administration performs is yet to be seen.

Further, pro residential development lobbyists promote growth in areas that are grossly inappropriate. One organization stated the following in an online document about housing affordability,

*"Suburbs suffering some of the worst effects of rent stress are Macleay Island, Pomona and Clear Island Waters. These suburbs have more than 1 in 2 rental households in stress. .... "We need to address what is a fundamental shortage in supply. Governments need to commit to greater investment in infrastructure necessary to support residential development..."*

Macleay Island has already seen a significant loss of native vegetation and being located in the middle of the Moreton Bay Marine Park and within the Moreton Bay RAMSAR site, it is totally inappropriate to promote increased housing development upon the same. Urbanisation being recognized as the biggest contributor of silt and nutrient load into Moreton Bay, ahead of rural land use when similar sized areas are considered. Further, urbanization on Macleay Island would place substantial pressure on limited transport infrastructure; the only means on and off Macleay Island is boat. The financial costs of providing increased infrastructure in such areas and cleaning up Moreton Bay is estimated to cost 100's of millions of tax payers dollars, clearly there is no benefit to the community in encouraging urban growth in environmentally sensitive areas.

Clearly, addressing Housing Affordability must be balanced with other community concerns and this is achieved via adopting ESD principles.

We would **SUGGEST** that the development industry beats up the Housing Affordability issue to the detriment of environmental and community values.

While politicians, through ignorance, support for endless growth or alignment with the development industry, fail to address the fundamental root cause of the problem, unsustainable population growth.

Yours sincerely

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