



19th October 2023

National Housing and Homelessness Plan
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
Canberra, ACT 2601

Via: HousingandHomelessnessPlan@dss.gov.au

Re: National Housing and Homelessness Plan – Issues Paper

This submission by Regional Development Australia Southern Inland (RDASI) is to provide feedback on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan – Issues Paper.

RDASI is represented by local leaders and staff who are passionate about the communities in the Southern Inland region of New South Wales (NSW). Part of a national network of 52 Regional Development Australia (RDA) Boards across Australia, RDASI's role is to support the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Southern Inland region of NSW, including Wingecarribee, Goulburn Mulwaree, Upper Lachlan, Hilltops, Yass Valley, Queanbeyan-Palerang, and Snowy Monaro. RDASI works with all levels of government, business, and community groups to promote economic and social development in the region by facilitating regional projects, collaboration, communication, and advocacy.

In July 2023, RDASI contributed to a submission by Regional Australia Institute in response to the [Senate Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia](#) commissioned by the Standing Committee on Community Affairs.

As the rental market's supply and demand dynamics play a significant role in shaping housing and homelessness in Australia, we will present findings from this research project as part of RDASI's National Housing and Homelessness Plan – Issues Paper submission.

To ensure our contribution represents the opinion of our community members, RDASI distributed a survey relating to the supply and / or lack of suitable rental properties, as well as a request for information on initiatives that have had a positive impact on the rental market across the region. Residents, aged 18 years and above from across the RDASI region, were asked a series of questions which included multiple predefined answers, with the option for respondents to contribute their own free text answers and comments.

We would like to highlight that we had the greatest response within the shortest amount of time to the above-mentioned housing / rental market survey, 146 responses in 48 hours, when compared with surveys previously distributed to RDASI community members. The topic certainly hit a chord with many in our local communities.

National Housing and Homelessness Plan – Issues Paper

How can governments and community service providers reduce homelessness and/or support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless in Australia?

Setting the scene - factors that contribute to housing supply and homelessness in the RDASI region.

When surveyed as part of RDASI's submission in response to the [Senate Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia](#), residents from the RDASI region voiced their concerns over the inadequate supply and lack of suitable properties, with over 70% of survey respondents claiming to have experienced challenges when applying for rental properties waiting more than 4 months, 10% waiting up to 2 years and over 11% waiting up to 3 years, to secure a property.

Many community members surveyed were displaced while waiting to secure adequate housing. When asked **'During the longest amount of time you have spent looking for and / or applying for a rental property, where did you live?'**, the following responses were captured:

- No place to live, homeless – 3.33%
- In a vehicle with no fit for purpose bed (car, truck) – 8.33%
- In a caravan, camper, or motorhome – 6.67%
- With family and / or friends - moved to and from multiple places over the duration – 23.33%
- With family and / or friends - the whole period spent living in the one place – 31.67%
- In another rental property – 40%
- Other – 15% (some examples below)
 - A summer rental.
 - In a motel.
 - I am still homeless, been looking for 5+ yrs. In tents in the local parks and behind shopping centers.
 - Shed on friends' property.

Survey responses highlighted the following factors that contribute to housing supply issues within the region, and put considerable strain on stock that was once available to residents to either purchase or rent:

- an increase in stock being leased via the **short-term rental market**,
- properties owned by **foreign investors** remaining empty,
- large companies and projects attracting high numbers of **out of region workers**,
- **urban to rural migration** - city dwellers relocating to the country especially during covid,
- **international migration** – migrants and international students putting strain on supply,

These factors can significantly impact homelessness across the region by:

- reducing housing supply and long-term rental availability,
- increasing rental costs and property purchase prices,
- reducing housing stability for vulnerable populations, which can lead to displacement.

When asked, **‘Please select the (rental) challenges you have experienced’**, the following survey responses were captured:

- Lack of rental availability, e.g., limited housing stock – 86.67%
- Lack of suitable housing, e.g., housing with suitable number of bedrooms – 45%
- Lack of affordable housing options, e.g., housing within the required budget – 86.67%

Participants were given the option to provide a free text answer to these questions and in another section asked if they would like to provide any additional information for consideration. Some of the responses included:

‘There are no houses available to rent all year round only short-term winter or summer holiday rentals’.

‘The unchecked proliferation of short stay rentals is seriously impacting available stock for long term renters. In my area there were 5-10 Airbnb type properties, now there are 60+. Those houses are no longer available to renters’.

‘Real Estate agencies not putting in all applications but selecting a few they like or know’.

‘Snowy 2-0 taking all available rentals’.

‘Previous landlord said they wanted to move back in, so we had to move but they just put the place up for holiday rental’.

‘When we sold our house, it was purchased by people from Sydney who now sporadically Airbnb the property. This does nothing for our small town, our schools, our infrastructure, or our available housing... disappointing’.

‘Real estate agents not offering housing to locals, who have to work and live here but instead offering them to outer area clients, nowhere enough affordable housing in this area let alone anywhere in NSW. The cost of living compared to the income 90% of people receive cannot even come near to being able to survive. No where near enough of community housing to be able to support who cannot afford to live and rent properties. No use moving out of area when fuel costs take up any money you would save on rent’.

‘Many homes within the area that are sold are now used for weekend rentals. This stops anyone who lives or works to get accommodation here. Increase in rentals are above what anyone can afford. I see people living in cars that are full time employed. Large companies within the area are not contributing and leaving the local township to fix the problem’.

‘I lost my job due to no fault of my own, and quickly moved out of a rental during covid lock down so I didn't accrue a rental debt I couldn't pay. Then split living in my car with 2 dogs and friends. 2 years later couldn't afford my own place even with a new job’.

‘It is hard to find property in the regional area for buying or renting. The houses are more expensive than cities and the rent as well. Before moving to the regional area, I thought everything will cost less but found the opposite (petrol, rent and hard-to-find jobs). No help from the council and government’.

‘Low-income earners and Pension/Disability recipients having difficulties finding rentals properties within their income. Centrelink recipients need higher rental subsidies as they don't have much left over for essentials such as food and medical’.

‘We seem to find that companies are renting houses for employees to live in that they bring into the area for work as there is not the workforce available here. This and the rising number of Airbnb properties has meant a decrease in the number of available properties and a huge increase in the price of the properties’.

Actions / Solutions

Effective regulation and policies that balance the interests of all stakeholders are crucial for mitigating negative impacts on housing stability and homelessness.

- **Short-term rental markets**
 - Inadequate regulation of short-term rentals can exacerbate housing issues. Governments need to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the need to protect housing availability and affordability for residents.
- **Foreign investors**
 - Vacancy taxes or incentives to encourage property owners, including foreign investors, to rent out or sell their properties need to be considered / implemented / enforced.
 - Greatly limiting or banning foreign ownership of residential properties.
- **Out of region workers**
 - Affordable housing strategies to mitigate impacts resulting from an influx of out of region workers should be incorporated into project development and program implementation plans, from the initial design stage.
 - Planning approvals and / or government funding for projects or programs should be determined based on the applicant’s inclusion of adequate affording housing solutions that cater for surges in populations brought about by such projects / programs. Dwellings built to accommodate temporary workers could be used for crisis and longer-term, affordable housing stock once the project/program is finished.
 - Training programs designed to upskill regional and rural residents could also assist by reducing the number of skilled workers required from out of region.
- **Urban to rural migration**
 - To assist in reducing the impact of city dwellers moving to rural and regional areas governments, investors, developers, community organisations, and housing providers need to work collaboratively.
 - Strategies that include affordable housing supply and demand considerations, rent control measures, targeted support for vulnerable populations, and community and housing planning that incorporates the needs of existing residents and potential population increases is essential.
- **International migration**
 - Region specific affordable housing planning and strategies need to be incorporated into government migration and visa policy and decision making.
 - Rent to Own – policy to integrate this initiative into new developments may serve to increase affordable supply.

Survey participants were asked **‘Do you know of any initiatives that have increased the (rental) supply within your Local Government Area?’** and

‘Please provide any additional information you would like considered’.

The following (among other) free text responses were captured:

‘Schools building accommodation to attract and retain staff. Friends converting sheds and garages into accommodation. Airbnb’s considering longer rentals. People giving up Airbnb or short-term rentals. People moving back to cities’.

‘I am a principle of a real-estate company in Jindabyne, most buyers in this market generally holiday lease property as this gives them the opportunity to utilize the property themselves generally over the winter ski season. If a zoning restricted short term holiday usage it would help residential buyers and longer-term tenants - more incentives to supply homes for residential tenancies would also help’.

‘Public housing stock needs to be increased. Regulations need to allow and encourage more other rental initiatives including boarding houses. There is also a need for tax incentives for homeowners to take on boarders, as a huge percentage of our housing stock is nearly empty’.

The solution is very simple in that Councils have to have requirements that are profitable for developers to construct small houses’.

‘...

- 1. Stop further foreign ownership which is pushing availability and prices out of control creating a lack of housing affordability.*
- 2. If properties remain empty (apart from when major renovations are taking place), landlords/owners should be charged a non-tax-deductible levy if the property remains empty for any period of time.*
- 3. Foreign migration has to be stopped whilst there is such a shortage of housing. If these are students, the campus has to provide adequate accommodation on-site.*
- 4. People who live in public housing should be assessed for eligibility periodically i.e., a single person living in a family home should be relocated to a unit.*
- 5. Public housing tenants with income should be assessed and be paying appropriate rent and/or moved out of subsidised public housing.*
- 6. Project work needs to have temporary accommodation provided like demountables as was provided in the 50's for big projects so the available rentals are not taken by workers’.*

‘Perhaps if landlords were not so restricted on what they could right off on their tax, more investors may join the market therefore lessening the issue of supply and demand’.

‘Speed up approvals for new dwellings, consider dual occupancy and granny flats improve public transport so people have options if they can’t afford to live in town’.

‘There should be mini villages allowed on farmers land for single women in small dwellings. Especially With cats’.

‘Many property owners are wanting to develop dual occupancy and farmers need more secure income as most rural properties are actually trading in the red or on the single income of spouse. Farmers could often build, except Local councils are taking upward of \$60,000 to approve a development’.

In Summary

RDA Southern Inland works across a region encompassing 44,639 square kilometres, including seven local government areas in the south-east of NSW, home to over 210,000 Australians. Our mission is to support the development of this part of regional Australia, acting as a conduit between residents, business owners and government agencies, providing a connection point for growth, prosperity, and liveability. We drive jobs, investment, and innovation through collaboration, communication, advocacy, and the facilitation of regional projects. We strive to disseminate information and resources to our community members and provide unbiased support.

As highlighted via the feedback provided by the RDASI community, housing and homelessness is of great concern, with several factors contributing to the lack of affordable housing across the region, namely:

- An increase in short-term rentals.
- Empty properties owned by foreign investors.
- Influx of population due to:
 - out of region workers and / or migrants employed due to local skills shortages,
 - urban to rural migration,

Effective regulation and policies that balance the interests of all stakeholders; residents, governments, investors, developers, community organisations, and housing providers are crucial for mitigating negative impacts on housing stability and homelessness.

With macro-economic strategies increasing inflation, interest rates and overall cost of living, the housing and homelessness crisis is only going to further exacerbate without a quick and decisive response. RDASI implores the government to act in the best interests of everyday Australian's and take action to mitigate the impacts as detailed above and we remain ready to implement initiatives within our region to assist.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback via this regionally targeted submission, on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan – Issues Paper and look forward to seeing the outcomes as soon as possible.

Kind regards,

