

INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION, USE AND REGULATION OF CARAVAN PARKS  
(AND CAMPING GROUNDS) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION  
from  
Park-home Residents  
Fremantle Village



Introduction

The focus of this submission is the park-home segment of the caravan park and camping ground industry. We, the undersigned, live in park-homes at a mixed facility that also caters for tourists (chalets, caravans and campers). We own our houses and rent the small plot of land on which they sit.

Discussion

We have lived in our park-homes for various lengths of time and enjoy the lifestyle. The problem for many of us, however, is the feeling of insecurity associated with it.

We wonder if this form of housing (in particular for the over-50's) should remain combined with the tourist industry; whether they make a good mix, because tourists are itinerant, and we are not.

Over the past ten or twelve years caravan parks have been hit with ever-increasing costs, such as rates and taxes, and these have been passed on to us. The Councils do not provide services for the rates they receive. Even rubbish removal has to be contracted out by park operators and we must pay our share. The site fee currently charged is about half the single age pension, and the costs continue to rise. Life has become difficult for pensioners.

Since about 1997 park-home residents were either retired or facing retirement when their houses were sold to them. Most would not have considered changing their lifestyles if they'd known they might have to relocate their houses later, when they are older and less able to cope with it.

After many complaints from park-home residents, an attempt was made to give a "fair go" to all parties with new legislation, the *Residential Parks (Long-Stay) Tenants Act 2006*, but it has been unsuccessful – in particular for residents like us who were already living in park-homes at the time it was enacted.

Under the Act residents may be offered either a periodic or a long-stay tenancy. For a large number of existing residents there was no discussion and no choice - it was to be periodic tenancies. (One therefore has to assume these landowners have plans to eventually sell their land.) Our houses were already established on site so we were in no position to negotiate the terms of our tenure. Periodic residents may be given 180 days notice to move, WITHOUT GROUNDS OR COMPENSATION. Most residents who

had bought their houses before the Act was introduced in 2006, do not have sufficient funds to move and relocate their homes, as it would cost tens of thousands of dollars to do so.

The recent financial 'boom' in this State and the resultant sale of caravan parks for redevelopment, has highlighted problems for tourism and park-home residents. There is a shortage of caravan and camping sites State-wide. Park-home residents, many in their 80's, are being forced to move their houses off site because of the sale of their park. As there are no alternative sites available to accommodate these houses, they cannot be sold. The residents are therefore in danger of losing their only asset and having to go into the public system.

Even in operating parks, where residents have had to sign the new periodic tenancy agreements, it is difficult to sell park-homes. The new Act requires full disclosure of information for potential buyers, which is very good, but most become nervous and do not buy when they see tenancy arrangements such as periodic agreements, as they give little security. Residents who must sell or move out for health or personal reasons are distressed because they are trapped. They cannot afford to sell their houses at a 'give-away' price if they do find a buyer. The rent has to be paid, whether the house is occupied or not. Generally, park operators will not allow residents to rent out their homes. Is that a reasonable condition?

We are an ageing population, and affordable housing has become a problem. The State government could provide a solution to the problem by allocating land in various locations that would be used solely for park-homes. It might consider locating park-home villages adjacent to, or near, low and high-care residential facilities, to encourage "ageing in place" with nearby support facilities, should one of a couple need to be placed in care.

Park-home villages could be small and simple, with basic facilities like a meeting room, a shed that could be used as a communal workshop, and possibly a little area for a community garden, or small garden allotments. At each village land could be set aside to accommodate displaced park homes when caravan parks are sold. A variety of companies should be allowed to build and set up new houses, as competition would result in realistic prices. The cost of new park-homes should be in line with the cost of similar transportable houses.

These attractive houses could become part of W.A.'s package of affordable housing for seniors, with residents purchasing the houses, and the government providing the land. Co-ownership between seniors and government would lessen the chance of any park degenerating into a 'shanty' town. Perhaps the Government could use land they do not plan to develop for a long time. Park managers would then be able to offer long-term leases, and the ageing residents would have some certainty in their future.

In spite of the problems referred to, those of us who live in park-homes enjoy living in the small town atmosphere, where we know our neighbours and watch out for them when necessary, while leading independent lives. Independence is very important for most of us.

The park-home lifestyle would be an excellent alternative type of affordable housing. The houses - chosen, sometimes designed, and bought by residents - are very comfortable and easy to maintain.


Recommendations:

1. Government land be made available immediately to re-site park homes from caravan parks, as required. This could be State-owned land that has been set aside for development in the future.
2. The Government should consider including park-home villages (resident-owned houses on government-owned land) in its package of affordable housing for seniors.
3. Park-home residents should be offered long-term agreements, with the ability to buy and sell without penalty.
4. Remove the Termination Without Grounds clause from the *Residential Parks (Long-stay) Tenants Act 2006* for park-homes.
5. Place a cap on the cost of new park-homes to bring them in line with similar transportable or kit houses.
6. An enquiry should be undertaken into the responsibilities and costs of re-locating pre-2006 park homes when evictions occur following sale of a property.

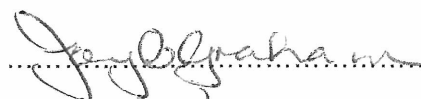
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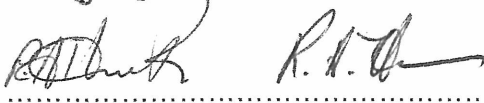
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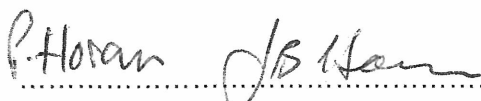
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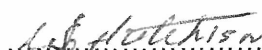
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