

**OPENING REMARKS – Minister Uibo**

- Chair, I would like to acknowledge the Larrakia people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we are gathered today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and recognise First Nations people here with us today.
- It gives me great pleasure to speak of my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Essential Services and Housing and Homelands.
- Chair, I would like to introduce the members of the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics who appear with me today and will assist me to respond to your questions:
  - Mr Ken Davies, Chief Executive Officer;
  - Mr Brent Warren, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Housing;
  - Ms Kim Charles, Chief Financial Officer; and
  - Mr Dwayne McInnes, General Manager Housing Program Office, DIPL
- The Territory Labor Government knows that safe, secure housing is the cornerstone of better futures for people in our communities and that is why we are taking a long-term approach to strengthen housing outcomes for Territorians.
- This approach aligns with the Australian Government’s significant housing reform agenda, which aims to improve housing outcomes across the spectrum.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NT  
TABLED DOCUMENTS

Committee: *Estimates*

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Estimates - June 2023

Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities

Tabled By: *Uibo*

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Signed: *Uibo*

- Key national initiatives involve: tackling housing supply and affordability; improving funding and investment mechanisms; and ensuring that national housing and homelessness policy is evidence based and strategic.
- The Northern Territory is working collaboratively with all jurisdictions and taking opportunities to highlight our unique socio-economic circumstances and needs. We are seeking to inform and influence each initiative so that the Territory benefits from the national reforms.

## **Urban Housing**

- I would like to begin by detailing our Urban Housing budget.
- Our 2023-24 Budget provides \$102 million in operating funding to provide eligible Territorians access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing and promote tenant and community safety through social and affordable housing programs and tenancy support services.
- This budget significantly advances our Government's agenda to support the development of the Community Housing Sector in the Territory in line with the 10-year Community Housing Growth Strategy launched in April 2022.
- Over time we plan to transfer up to 40 per cent of our urban public housing to the sector, and expect to see improved tenant outcomes, neighbourhood amenity and asset management as a result.

- The Government has committed \$26 million operational funding and \$14 million capital funding over 2022-23 and 2023-24 to fast-track the growth of the sector, including the transfer of 1,000 urban public housing dwellings, commencing with 500 in Darwin and Palmerston, which are currently out to tender.
- The imminent completion of John Stokes Square marks a key milestone in the Strategy's pipeline and will provide 78 households with secure, fit-for-purpose social housing. Venture Housing have been awarded long-term asset and tenancy management of the new dwellings, and the first tenants moved in from January 2023.
- In December 2022, Venture Housing became the first local Community Housing Provider to achieve Tier 1 status with the National Regulatory Scheme for Community Housing — demonstrating the success of the Strategy in supporting sector growth.
- This Government is committed to redeveloping the Shiers Street housing complex in The Narrows, Darwin, in partnership with the community housing sector and have committed \$14 million to Stage 1 redevelopment works which will see the site demolished.
- We are working to secure Australian Government funding to provide new, fit-for-purpose housing, improve liveability for residents, help revitalise surrounding neighbourhoods and create contemporary urban precincts that contribute positively to their neighbourhood. There is strong support from the local community for redevelopment of this complex.

- The increased cost of the private housing market is growing the demand for urban public housing, and we are responding in a number of ways.
  - Construction of an additional 21 social housing dwellings is planned for Greater Darwin, Katherine and Tennant Creek.
  - Construction of four new Specialist Disability Accommodation homes will be completed between May and October 2023, and agreements have been signed for an additional two Specialist Disability Accommodation dwellings.
  - The Department is partnering with Venture Housing to increase the supply of affordable rentals for eligible key workers through the purchase and lease of 33 dwellings in the Greater Darwin region.
  - The Northern Territory Government has invested \$2 million to partner with Venture Housing for construction of eight dwellings in Katherine, adding to the supply of affordable rentals available for eligible key workers.
  - In Tennant Creek, the Department has provided Venture Housing with \$3 million to deliver an initiative for eligible key workers across the Territory to access affordable rental properties through a rental subsidy scheme.
  - The Northern Territory and Australian Government are investing \$2.4 million to partner with Venture Housing Company, under the Barkly Regional Deal, to construct up to 11 dwellings for affordable housing in Tennant Creek.

- Negotiations are proceeding with community housing providers in Central Australia and Darwin regarding opportunities for small scale transfers and redevelopments.
- In addition, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics has released a tender for six dwellings in Katherine to commence construction in Quarter 3, 2023
- On 28 March 2023 tenders were released for new public housing in the Barkly region for the construction of 37 new residential homes and upgrading of 22 homes.
- In Tennant Creek, 10 new dwellings will be constructed in two new unit complexes, as part of the capital works program.

### **Affordable Housing**

- Chair, the Territory Government is committed to ensuring people across the Territory can access affordable housing, and supports people to enter the private rental market through the Affordable Housing Head Leasing Program, the Bond Assistance Loan Scheme and the Rent Choice Program.
- The Affordable Housing Head Leasing Scheme makes 395 dwellings available to low to moderate income earners in key service industries across Greater Darwin, Alice Springs and Tennant, charging 70 per cent of market rent.
- The Bond Assistance Loan Scheme offers interest-free loans to low income clients to help pay a bond and up to two weeks rent in advance. 322 new Bond Assistance Loan Scheme applications

were received up to 31 March 2023, resulting in 165 households being assisted into private rental housing.

- Further to this, the Rent Choice Program provides rental subsidies to eligible households for up to 12 months. As at 31 March 2023, 278 households were accessing the program.

## **Remote Housing**

- Residents in our remote areas are front and centre when it comes to housing.
- The Territory Labor Government are committed to continuously improving the lives of Territorians in remote areas and tackling overcrowding through the construction of additional and replacement houses and extensions.
- Our Government has demonstrated commitment through the \$1.1 billion Remote Housing Investment Package 'Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes.'
- In addition, the Australian Government's commitment of \$550 million through the National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory has resulted in 578 new homes being completed (HomeBuild and Government Employee Housing) and 469 homes upgraded as at 28 February 2023.
- From 1 September 2016 to 28 February 2023, 1,002 new homes and 1,678 home upgrades have been completed across all remote housing programs.
- As at 28 February 2023, 1,127 bedrooms have been constructed.

- In the Room to Breathe Program, 396 homes have been upgraded, providing 346 additional bedrooms and 607 additional living spaces. Work on modifications to a further 204 is underway (as at 28 February 2023).
- More than \$128 million has been invested this financial year, up from \$120 million in the original budget, due to additional one-off funding to implement the Remote Rent Framework
- The 2023-24 Budget includes \$136 million in operational funding for remote housing, which provides tenancy support and healthy living programs to improve outcomes for our remote tenants. The increase in 2023-24 Budget is due additional funding from the Commonwealth Remote Housing Agreement.
- Our Government's investment in remote housing creates employment, engagement and partnership opportunities for our local communities. We remain committed to dialogue and planning processes that enable this.
- As at 31 March 2023, we were managing 5,544 remote public housing dwellings across the Territory, including in Alice Springs Town Camps and Tennant Creek Community Living Areas.
- This is an increase of 116 dwellings since 30 June 2022.
- From 6 February 2023, all remote public housing dwellings transitioned to the new Remote Rental Framework. This is a simplified, consistent model that is easier for clients to understand and easier to administer.

- Under the new framework, there is a flat rate rent charge of \$70 per bedroom, per week to a maximum rate of \$280 per week for a 4 bedroom or more house.
- A Safety Net is built into the Framework to ensure tenants will not experience rental stress. Rental stress is when the rent is more than 25 per cent of the total assessable household income.

## **Town Camps and Homelands**

- Now on to town camps and homelands.
- Homelands give life and meaning to large areas of the country.
- As a Government, we seek to proactively support Aboriginal people to live on their ancestral lands and are developing a new homelands policy to support this commitment.
- We continue to invest in Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver housing, municipal and essential services across town camps and homelands.
- The 2023-24 Budget continues to support town camps and homelands through \$122 million to provide municipal and essential services and housing maintenance to homelands and outstations.
- In October 2022, the Australian Government committed \$100 million over two years for homelands housing and infrastructure upgrades which is being delivered in two parts.
  - 2022-23 Rapid Response totalling \$25 million for urgent works.
  - 2023-24 Comprehensive Response across the Northern Territory totalling \$75 million.

## **Government Employee Housing**

- Government Employee Housing provides housing for government employees to be able to deliver services on the ground to local residents. As at 31 March 2023, the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities manages over 1,870 Government Employee Housing dwellings across the Northern Territory, including 1,416 Government owned dwellings and 454 private head leased dwellings.
- Our Government has demonstrated our commitment to expanding our service footprint. To support this, we are investing \$47 million in the Government Employee Housing Program to secure administrative efficiencies for Government, improve dwelling allocations to meet the service delivery needs of all agencies, and enable the full cost of delivering Government Employee Housing to be reflected in agency budgets.

## **Homelessness**

- I would now like to talk about homelessness, which continues to be a significant challenge in the Territory. Our rate of homelessness is 12 times the national rate and the homeless population is 87 per cent Aboriginal.
- This statistic is alarming, however, recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data revealed that the number of people experiencing homelessness in the Northern Territory has decreased since the previous census.

- The 2023-24 budget allocates \$37.8 million for programs that deliver place-based housing and homelessness solutions to address these needs, including a \$31 million investment in our 19 non-government partners that provide targeted tenancy support and homelessness services across Northern Territory urban centres.
- This Government recognises that suitable and affordable short-term visitor accommodation options in urban and regional centres reduces overcrowding in public housing when visitors come to urban centres for medical treatment and accessing other services. It also reduces anti-social behaviour of overcrowded housing.
- The Department has engaged AHL and Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation to manage the Visitor Park facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin respectively. The use of Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations enables these facilities to be managed in a culturally appropriate way for the overwhelming majority of the clientele.
- The 2023-24 Budget allocates \$1.4 million for our peak body partners Aboriginal Housing NT and NT Shelter for housing and homelessness advocacy across urban and remote locations and to support capacity development with community housing providers.

## Indigenous Essential Services

- The Indigenous Essential Services Program delivers power, sewerage and water services to around 38,000 clients in 72 remote communities and 79 outstations across the Territory.
- In 2022-23, this totalled \$134 million for annual operational services, comprising of \$88 million in grant funding and an estimated \$46 million in retail income.
- The services are delivered through Indigenous Essential Services Pty Ltd, a not for profit subsidiary of the Power and Water Corporation.
- We know that safe water, sanitation and hygiene at home should not be a privilege of only those who are rich or live in urban centres.
- This is why the Territory Government is investing \$13.5 million over three years in remote Aboriginal communities to reduce leakage, develop new water supplies, reduce risk of water-borne disease and reduce water stress.
- This funding follows significant water supply investments to support the delivery of housing through the Remote Housing Investment Package.
- The Territory Water Plan highlights 16 priority actions that aim to deliver water security for all Territorians now and into the future.
- The Territory Government is also increasing solar power generation, with a target of 70 per cent in remote communities.
- The Remote Power System Strategy will displace diesel and increase use of renewable energy in remote communities. The

design and construction contract for a solar project in Wurrumiyanga with budget of \$6 million was awarded in February 2023.

## **NT Home Ownership**

- NT Home Ownership is a Government Business Division operated by the CEO Executive Officer (Housing). The 2023-24 Budget includes \$9.8 million in operating budget which funds the administrative costs of the contracted loan provider People's Choice and interest expenses on loans utilised to provide eligible applicants with financial support with their deposit for a home loan.
- NT Home Ownership is responsible for the management of home ownership assistance products to increase home ownership opportunities for Territorians.
- As at 31 March 2023, there are 1,164 current loans in the NT Home Ownership portfolio with a total value of those loans being \$105.1 million.
- The home ownership initiative, HomeBuild Access, was launched in January 2013 and is still provided today. This program provides Low Deposit loans to people for house and land packages valued up to \$475,000 for up to two bedrooms, and \$550,000 for three or more bedrooms.

- In closing, the Territory Government's vision is a home for all Territorians, housing that enables social and economic wellbeing and strong communities.
- Access to safe and affordable housing is an important enabler of individual, family and community health and wellbeing. It provides a foundation that enables people to develop their capabilities and maintain a sense of safety, belonging and social connectedness.
- The Territory Labor Government have made significant investment across the sector and I commend the people leading this work for their unwavering commitment to supporting the Territory's most vulnerable citizens.
- Thank you, I will now take questions from the Committee.