

Housing and Country

Wednesday 13 June – Question to the Chief Minister – Yolngu-Led Community Development

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nhulunbuy, I believe you have some questions for this output.

Mr GUYULA: Thank you very much, Chief Minister and staff who are here today. As part of local decision-making, what is the strategy to allocate resources so that elders and leaders of communities can prioritise areas for community development?

Mr GUNNER: That is probably determined by locals in terms of the conversations we have had. We have been trying very carefully not to pick winners—not to elevate communities above communities. We are trying to go at their manner and pace. It goes to the extent to which locals identify themselves as being ready to be involved in the process. It is community-led; that is the original way of putting it.

We also have our regional director network out there, so those communities identify themselves as having those conversations. We coordinate that through the regional network and our local decision-making team. I will ask Andy to comment further.

Mr COWAN: Member for Nhulunbuy, that is correct, as the Chief Minister indicated. The implementation of local decision-making will not happen from our Darwin office; that will happen from our regions. I use the Big Rivers region as an example. Through their regional coordination, they have some sub-working groups with government agencies that are prioritising across a number of communities and areas that have come to government, who want to have a conversation about local decision-making. They work closely with those communities to progress communities' aspirations.

Within the regional offices as well, we have identified through the 2017–18 budget resource—to support communities that are progressing and want to progress the conversation about local decision-making. That is a grant bucket that has supported leadership and governance.

In addition to that, we have the Remote Aboriginal Development Fund which has been used across the Territory to support building leadership and governance capability across the Territory.

Thursday 14 June – Question to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development – Asbestos Housing in Birritjimi and Galupa

Mr GUYULA: Yes. I have one about houses that are almost abandoned or are not being looked after by anyone in the community.

Sorry, good afternoon, minister and the department.

Could you advise me what is happening for the residents of Birritjimi, which is on Wallaby Beach, and Galupa housing on Melville Bay, which was once Rio housing and is where many Yolngu families now reside in asbestos housing? What about the families living in Galupa as well, as there is concern there?

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy. The CE, Mr Chalker, has been involved in lots of negotiations work around this. I will pass to him to provide your answers.

Mr CHALKER: Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy. Those localities create some issues for us because the Northern Territory Government has no lawful authority to access or do any works on those programs—at Birritjimi in particular. An agreement was reached with the Northern Land Council, which is acting on behalf of the TOs in that location—noting the health issues. I visited them last year. We had some engagement with the Australian Government and \$1m was contributed to the Northern Land Council. We are effectively doing the project management for them.

We are working with the relevant people who are residing in those places, assisting them into other accommodation alternatives, whether it is public housing or homelands. As they are leaving those asbestos riddled homes, those homes are being secured so no further tenants can move in.

That is the complexity of our arrangements; we can only lawfully act where we have the authority to do so, and in those locations we do not.

Mr GUYULA: If I remember rightly, those people living in Birritjimi are the Galupa clan. I have been hearing that is their homeland and where they want to stay, especially the one at Galupa. They do not want to move anywhere else. Is there anything the government can do—maybe move them temporarily somewhere else while they demolish and replace Birritjimi?

Mr CHALKER: The history of Birritjimi is that on that site the mine built the accommodation, and they have clearly deteriorated and are posing a significant health issue. There is a strong likelihood that asbestos has contaminated the land around there as well, so to repatriate that piece of land once the places are demolished would be a significant amount of money.

We have not had any formal approach from the Northern Land Council on behalf of the traditional owners in respect of the future development of that, as far as I am aware.

Thursday 14 June – Question to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development – Homelands Housing and Development

Mr GUYULA: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have two questions on Output 1.1.

My electorate are telling me very clearly that many families are wanting to go back to homelands to live and bring up children in a safe, healthy environment. Can you advise what funding is available for the development of homeland towns? You might have said something about this already, but for the record, is any of the funding for housing being provided to homelands?

Without houses in homelands, the government is pushing people into spaces that are not healthy. This pressure will have long-term problems for those families who are no longer residing on their country.

That is one question.

Mr McCARTHY: Thank you, Member for Nhulunbuy, for the question. It is a great opportunity to talk about homelands, and you outlined succinctly the benefits of homelands for traditional owners and Indigenous families. We have a budget of around \$43.5m to service homelands. That is for municipal and essential services, jobs programs, homelands extra programs around housing maintenance, and grants programs. The problem is around the land tenure.

As you have heard already, just briefly with a solution we have worked hard for Nauiyu—homelands essentially are Aboriginal land and therefore the assets are owned by the Aboriginal traditional owners of those lands.

There is also an interesting historical perspective where the Commonwealth Government, who started the infrastructure developments on homelands, chose in the previous administration to create an agreement and walk away from homelands. So the Northern Territory is on its own. We have had to do some careful planning and programming to continue servicing existing homelands.

We need to look at how we can deliver your objective into the future. The Department of Housing and Community Development, as we spoke about briefly in parliament, are conducting a review. It is well-timed and much-needed. We are conducting a review into homelands, and that will be a logical question about how homelands can look at the development of new housing.

From Barkly to Nhulunbuy, be aware though, when we start to look at this, we also need to consider all the other appropriate services around growing our family strong—our health, which is our clinics and our education, and the other support services that are needed. It is not just about housing; it is about the whole community development aspect.

That is where we are at and a very brief summary of the challenges. If anybody would like to elaborate further from a more technical perspective—I think Mr McInnes is jumping to the mic.

Mr McINNES: Thank you, minister. Member for Nhulunbuy, it is a good question. As the minister has pointed out, we are conducting a review of the homelands program. That is not just about the delivery of existing programs into homelands, but also the homelands policy that was produced back in 2013 and was updated, somewhat, in 2015.

It is very timely because we do understand the pressures and the nuances between delivery of housing into remote communities and the more frequent requests that we have had about developing new houses on homelands. With that in mind and with those more frequent requests that we are getting, we are conducting a review. That review will also look into a co-contribution scheme around developing new housing on homelands.

The existing policy really is around a shared responsibility around homelands and an expectation that residents will put some effort—providing some sort of contribution to new housing. That is something we are working on. We will do that with key stakeholders, so it will be a full consultation process in developing the new policy.

One of the tricky things with developing housing on homelands, as I am sure you aware, is not just the wraparound services or access to services as the minister has pointed out, but also the need for or lack of infrastructure in homelands. Many homelands do not have the right access to the essential services required to support additional housing. So it is something that we do struggle with, even just with our existing programs and the existing houses that are on homelands.

Mr GUYULA: But the trigger is there. The people are really willing to go back home after being in communities since 2007 or 2010. They realise that it is more free and families can comfortably go back home. They would rather be back home there after finding out that in crowded towns there has been petrol sniffing, some young people that get into—being in Gove area, teenager boys and girls are likely to get into drinking grog. Most of them have found out that families want to take their children back home and some children are wanting to go back home.

They have been telling me that they would rather be out here because there are too many problems and trouble in town. That is why I can understand what your point of view is, and this is what the people are wanting to do, to somehow get some sort of support to go back home.

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Nhulunbuy, I will ask for your help in this because as we conduct this review, one of the things I am looking at is—I come from an area where there are very small homelands. Many are abandoned but they are very small entities, and as Mr McInnes said, they do not have supporting infrastructure. When you move into country like yours, you see quite large, well-established homelands.

So let us look at what we have in terms of a more sustainable model with supporting infrastructure that we can present to government to say it is a simple classification issue of a homeland to a community receiving the normal government support. We could probably start to look at some of those bigger places and add this to the policy discussion. Then it becomes the processes of government, where I, with the department, will be able to put that together into a clear and concise story—a good, strong position—and take it to Cabinet for consideration.

I would be really interested in your advice around what you think you could be those development areas as opposed to just the broader statement that would be giving a lot of false hope to people in homelands. So, the bigger places with supporting infrastructure—let us continue that conversation.

Mr GUYULA: Yes, because I am just wondering—I am running around or being in the middle of what people are telling me. One day I want to take you out there again and actually hear from the people what they are saying. We can work things out and maybe find a solution, find a way.

There is incarceration and there are people frustrated about being told to go here and there and they would rather be supported in going back home. I feel a lot better; I was running around the homelands since last month, along the countryside and homelands, and this is what I found out. Even kids are saying, 'We want to go to school here'. We are worried about those children stuck in town who would rather be coming back home. There are lots of issues regarding people going back home, and housing is one of them.

Mr WOOD: Can I comment on that? There are different types of homelands. One of the homelands that the Member for Daly will know is Emu Point. I know Emu Point mainly from the people who live there. I was basically brought up with some of them at Daly River. I have raised this with the previous government; once upon a time at Daly River you would see many houses built out of sand from the river. They turned it into bricks and built their own houses out of materials from that community. Emu Point has a limited number of houses because it is regarded as an outstation, but it has a school and an airstrip, yet it has overcrowding.

I am interested to hear what the government thinks about giving people the ability—giving them pride in their community, giving them a job and getting around some of these issues of waiting for government money to build houses. We need to give them the right infrastructure, that is, maybe a truck, a brickmaking machine or a saw mill, like they do at Nhulunbuy. Give them the option to build their own houses in these outstations instead of waiting for the government to come along. I am not blaming the government, because it is difficult as there is an issue regarding money.

People can try to do something themselves to put a shelter over their head and reduce overcrowding—Emu Point is a classic—and give people something to do. When I was there they worked for half a day on CDEP, and the other half of the day they might be smoking ganja or doing something that was not very useful.

Mr CHALKER: That does not happen anymore.

Mr WOOD: You fixed it?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have a question for the minister?

Mr WOOD: Yes, sorry. I had to have a preamble. Minister, is there an option for allowing those communities that are not in the waiting list for houses because they are outstations, of doing something themselves with your help?

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Nelson, that was a good preamble and a good question. I will address that first of all with the government's local decision-making processes and policy. We are serious about local decision-making. This department has been very much a leader in that field. You heard in my opening remarks about the 72 consultations we conducted in regard to program delivery.

Emu Point resonates in a number of respects, as I have visited there in a previous capacity as a minister. That is what I was talking to the Member for Nhulunbuy about; if we look at the homelands policy and review about these places being reclassified in terms of communities, then it is a whole different resource package that is available. We need to talk to the people about what they want. We need to then look at the structures and how we can improve it.

Getting to the point of people building out of local materials and creating housing, that is an interesting point. In a homeland you would have a lot less restraints if you went down that pathway. Our policy is based on creating economies. It is also premised on innovative housing design. We are building public assets. We are building to a code, and we have the parameters around the built form as well as essential services and so forth. I encourage Emu Point to be part of this review—to take the step to look at it being established and classified as a community. Then it becomes part of our programs, and through strong local decision-making we can start to talk about innovative housing design that would suit their community.

In regard to the jobs outcome you talked about, that is exactly what this policy is about. It is about engaging local people in every layer of the housing sector. I have put out to this committee one of my challenges—public housing is not the only housing. The other challenge is that the dialogue, the discourse, the narrative, has to change from only being about building new houses. It is about tenancy management and good cyclical repairs and maintenance. It is about Room to Breathe, which is a very good option for the Emu Point overcrowding situation. It is about customising existing infrastructure, building off existing serviced land and is also about the new builds.

For Emu Point—and if you look at the wider Daly area—creating an economy where Aboriginal people are involved in every layer of that housing sector—in our policy a five-plus-five plan is five years to get that under control, to get people skilled and trained and to get those economies operating. The second five years is about an asset transfer where it becomes a true community housing model.

Whether it is a house built out of local materials or innovative built form that we are using as a public asset, let it take shape based on local decision-making. With innovative built form, the Room

to Breathe model is really resonating in the bush. People are interpreting this very complex concept, in terms of construction, through good local decision-making.

Let us look at the serviced lot, at 600 square metres of land that can be very unproductive if it is cluttered with disused vehicles or bulk rubbish—and let us innovate in that serviced lot to create outdoor living areas and extra bedrooms. Let us start revising the traditional thinking of having a bathroom and toilet in the middle of a three bedroom house when there are nine people living in that dwelling. Let us look at independent pods integrated in the house for the elders so they are part of that family but have a private space and lock up space.

The Tiwi women taught me about their lock up spaces; it is not about their groceries but their fishing gear. That is some of the most powerful protein they deliver to their children. When we look at that concept, we have a broad range of skill development to train unskilled workers to bring them in to start to skill them to then maintain and develop the housing.

I am nearly to the point where we can articulate the outdoor living area for an Aboriginal family. They are telling us all this and now we have to translate it to an engineering perspective. My dream is to have the use of local materials in this. I really am pushing this. At the moment, industry cannot really accept it. They are strategic in their thinking and clinical in their delivery.

Your concept is what I want to fuse into what essentially becomes the outdoor living area for the large extended family. This supports cooking, rest and recreation, sleeping for certain months of the year, a large family dynamic and the social aspects of that.

Local materials can be very much a part of this. Local materials represents a labour-intensive approach and skill development. We are on the same page but we are going to have to fuse this in, and there are some significant steps we will have to take.

Thursday 14 June – Question to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development – Staff Housing in Remote Areas

Mr GUYULA: I have one more question. Many developing Aboriginal organisations and businesses may initially employ specialist staff from outside communities. There is a great housing shortage for these purposes. Can you advise if there are any plans to alleviate this pressure?

Mr McCARTHY: Member for Nhulunbuy, are we talking about a permanent presence or the contractors that are coming into remote communities? Permanent workforce or the contracting transient workforce?

Mr GUYULA: Contracting permanent residents who have special skills that can work on these things. An old man at Garrthalala has built the homelands around Old Man Dhungala and Yirrkala. He is sitting there, wanting to help support with materials. There will be people wanting to learn how to

build and create bush timber and material into housing, and people could start to build homes and things like that in the communities. How can we get support? People might come in to do a bit of help around there but the Yolngu on the ground would carry out the work on that stuff.

Mr McCARTHY: This is the conversation we were just having to some respect. It is about skilled development, essentially, and good local decision-making. We are getting some great feedback, and a general sort of summary is that finally a government is listening. We have had some good results in

terms of not only land servicing and where we should put service lots, where we can put them in acknowledging all the cultural nuances of the community—it is also about the housing, about the built form, the design, the construction. We are listening and people are advising us.

That is the policy. Now, how do we make that work in your context, supporting the old man who has experience in this? We have programs and we need input from local people, but most importantly we need people that will engage in these programs. Let us establish the workforce. Let us get the people that want to be involved in this, and then let us grow the opportunity, as I said to the Member for Nelson.

In a Room to Breathe example—this is in a community context—the customisation of a house has unlimited potential if we start to use local material and start to manufacture materials. People that want to make blocks make mud bricks. People that want to basically refine timbers—these industries can be a part of it. These industries are what we are growing towards.

At the moment, we are 11 months in to a 10-year program. We have done a lot of work in that 11 months, and mostly in the negotiation, the planning, the discussion, the consultation, then the wider work around the land servicing, the cadastral work around subdivisions. We now are going to start moving into very much more of the construction phase. You will see that this year and you will see that in corresponding years. Now is the time to get those ideas into the policy about how we utilise local labour, utilise local materials and local resources, and we fuse that into this program.

The Room to Breathe—once again, I keep talking about this—is probably the best area to start, because the built form that the housing is very much structured and in such need that we need to start progressing this. We do not have, I suppose, the ability to do this overnight, to start to look at the more local approach. To go back to the Member for Nelson's era—we have the ability to make sure we can do this over the next 10 years.

We look forward to working with you, and we look forward to communities challenging us with ways to work. I will summarise that once again, I will ask for your help. You know what I need? I need an outdoor living area that has local materials that will be good for dust suppression. It will minimise

dust. There will be appropriate shade, built form, accredited shade, using local materials. We need good paving. We need landscaping. We need to create cooking areas that are healthy cooking areas to support the family. We need to have areas where people can rest and socialise in a family context.

This can be a lot of local material. This can be a lot of local labour. This customises an existing dwelling. This is where we can start this journey. When we prove to the engineers that these local materials are suitable for the permanent construction in the housing sector, then we can start to look at the drawings and the engineering perspectives to go forward.

It is really revisiting the past, but it is about making sure we engage local people in every aspect of this because if we do not, in 10 years' time nothing much will have changed.

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