

*LGAQ Public Inquiry on the Need for a State
Population Policy*

Queensland Shelter Submission

March 2010

Introduction

This document is Queensland Shelter's submission to the Local Government Association of Queensland's Public Inquiry on the Need for a State Population Policy. Q Shelter is a Peak NGO committed to working towards a fairer and more just housing system. We provide an independent voice on housing rights and provide a link between government and the community through consultation, research and policy advice. We are committed to improving housing access for all Queenslanders. Within this, our funding mandate and the social justice framework in which we work puts particular focus on the interests of low and moderate income housing consumers and others who struggle to meet their housing needs in Queensland.

Our members are both individuals and community organisations across the State. Q Shelter currently has a total of 18 active branches that are formed either around a geographical area, or represent specific housing needs. The special interest branches include the Seniors Branch, the Women's Housing Network, and ASHRAM (Agencies Supporting Housing for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants).

Q shelter has prepared this paper to highlight the policy implications of population growth has in respect to housing. To develop this submission Q Shelter attended the forum in Brisbane, consulted with our Affordable Housing Network and scanned research. The views expressed in this submission are those of Q Shelter as an organisation and do not necessarily represent those of the organisations consulted.

Queensland Shelter acknowledges the LGAQ's Issues Paper nominates housing and its connection to affordability and the impacts on infrastructure, decentralisation as areas for consideration. In this submission Q Shelter would like to highlight planning and development of housing, and in particular affordable housing in Queensland as a major issue when planning for growth.

Housing Supply

Housing is an essential part of infrastructure and yet unrecognised within the discourse of growth or planning for Queensland's future. In a recent article by Premier Anna Bligh on the growth summit in 'The Australian', neither housing nor the affordability impacts that population growth has was discussed, nor does *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* reference housing. At present, community interest and public debate regarding housing is lacking except on issues of density, 'unwanted' housing developments or increasing property values.

When discussing population policy and strategies to adequately manage and control the impacts of growth, the current housing situation needs to be considered as well as accounting for the compounding effects of growth. The National Housing Supply Council reported a shortfall of 251,000 affordable rental properties for lower income renters,¹ with Queensland's proportion approximately 62,750 dwellings. This shortage of housing has contributed to a climate of high purchase prices and increasing rents especially in areas experiencing economic growth like the resource towns. Further, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) report stated that 85,021 Queensland households were experiencing housing stress² in 2007/08 and projected that under worst case scenario this figure could reach 154,000 by 2012.³ The addition of large amounts of new households to Queensland has the potential to exacerbate these levels without the proper mechanisms in place. These mechanisms would need to encourage the supply of adequate numbers of dwellings to be developed to address the current shortfall, as well as additional stock for the extra households.

When considering where and how to develop the housing for this growth the following points need to be considered:

- housing needs to be safe, affordable and close to transport and services; and
- there needs to be a mixture of affordable housing within new developments.

To achieve the above areas of infrastructure, planning, employment opportunities have to be in place to ensure that regions across Queensland encourage sustainable growth and reduce the impact upon the environment while maintaining a social mix within the community.

¹ National Housing Supply Council, *State of Supply Report 2008*,
<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/pubs/housing/national_housing_supply/Pages/default.aspx> page 100 at 5 February 2010

² Housing stress is defined as a household paying more than 30% of the household income in housing costs.

³ Ngu Vu, Quoc, 'The effect of rent increases on housing stress in Australia,' *National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling*, presented at the 2nd Australasian Housing Research Conference 2007 Brisbane.

Queensland Shelter recommends that the population policy recognise:

- **housing as essential infrastructure; and**
- **encourage housing supply strategies, including affordable housing to address current and projected undersupply.**

Planning

Planning and development regulations guide and shape the housing that is delivered in Queensland. The South East Queensland Regional Plan (SEQRP) refers to the urban footprint as well as mapping out the areas for growth within the region. To deliver housing under the SEQRP, local councils are now exploring higher density within the urban footprint, while balancing the competing pressures of potential housing, green space and arable land. Former rural and semi rural areas now have large scale developments planned to cater for growth. To manage this development will require planning legislation to be responsive to these changes and encourage innovation and delivery of good housing outcomes across Queensland.

Density

There has been community backlash against some proposed housing developments especially those involving social and affordable housing components. Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) attitudes towards various developments include the Transport Oriented Development at Milton, and proposed social housing developments across Queensland (Mitchelton, Seven Hills and Blue Water in Cairns) demonstrate community attitudes to change within their local landscape. This densification is set to intensify in future years to cater for projected populations, and will require regulations and community attitudes to adjust.

High rise developments are not cheap, and land in urban areas is expensive – calling for more innovative architecture and planning mechanisms to deliver affordable housing. Living in these areas with well located transport and services reduces living costs but comes at a high upfront cost of land and building costs, translating into higher rents.

Redevelopment of existing affordable housing (boarding houses, older units etc) can lead to a loss of affordable housing stock forcing low income earners and vulnerable people to move to urban fringe areas in search of lower rents at the expense of current support networks and connections.

Urban Fringe and green field developments

People on low to moderate incomes find themselves living further out of the city as it is cheaper but overall does not promote an affordable lifestyle. Studies have shown that green field developments on the urban fringe areas are not the most cost effective form of housing for the people living in them despite lower initial purchase prices and rents. Added to the environmental cost of car reliance, and rising fuel prices are the ‘hidden’ social costs of social isolation and loss of family time etc spent travelling to access necessary services and employment. Economic hubs and industrial

areas with jobs are not always in place when housing is built, and require people to travel to where they can find work.

Queensland Shelter recommends that the population policy:

- **be linked to and influence planning legislation;**
- **include provision for 15% of all new developments to be affordable housing, one third of which should be social housing;**
- **include mechanisms for the development of affordable housing within areas that are well located to transport and services; and**
- **require social impact assessments be performed for redevelopments of low cost housing areas, with strategies in place to adequately rehouse displaced residents.**

Infrastructure

Queensland has inherited a road based suburban development system but this can be reversed through considered infrastructure planning and investment in public transport. Major infrastructure projects are expensive and take long periods to plan and deliver. Current major road systems and public transport infrastructure plans have areas of potential growth not receiving adequate levels of infrastructure until after the population has increased. Currently there are many areas that are still waiting for essential health services, road upgrades and solutions to other infrastructure issues for existing population in regions. Some regions of South East Queensland do not have any public transport or infrastructure and yet have been earmarked for major development, placing a large amount of financial infrastructure pressure on local councils. This lag with existing infrastructure along with planning for future growth means that the state faces perpetual catch-up mode.

Current infrastructure planning policies are based around nominated years using projected population targets while benchmarks and existing tipping points are based on population levels or a per capita basis, showing a mismatch between systems. Infrastructure needs to be planned and developed to cater for future growth and not be redundant as soon as it is completed. Further this infrastructure planning needs to recognise public transport as an efficient form of investment for mass transport over the development and upgrading of roads, encouraging car reliance.

Social infrastructure is another area to be considered in population planning and providing new developments with adequate access to health, education and other services and not place additional stress on existing community's facilities. Current responses are seen to be in crisis mode with communities facing tipping point before the necessary infrastructure is supplied. This requires a coordinated approach between all stakeholders including the local and state governments along with contributions from the developers.

Queensland Shelter recommends that the population policy and growth strategies recognise and ensure that:

- **infrastructure is planned and developed to cater for existing and future growth;**
- **public transport is recognised as an essential form of infrastructure and in place prior to major redevelopments or coordinated to roll out in an appropriate timeframe to cater for the expanding population;**
- **social infrastructure is planned and resourced similar to ‘hard’ infrastructure using a coordinated approach developed between State and local governments and developers; and**
- **planning is done to a population target like ‘Melbourne 5 million’ to ensure infrastructure keeps pace and in preparation for growth.**

Decentralisation

With some regions in Queensland already receiving large population increases, strategies to encourage decentralisation have been considered by the State government and the local council areas. During recent years rural and regional areas have experienced declining populations with people moving to areas that offer economic opportunities like the major cities and resource communities.

Without proper infrastructure and employment opportunities the future plan of decentralisation will not work. Conversely by planning for growth within reach of urban areas – hospitals and other infrastructure need to be upgraded to cater for this growth otherwise.

Queensland Shelter recommends that the population policy and growth strategies recognise and ensure that:

- **incentives and mechanisms be developed to encourage employment opportunities within rural and regional areas that are earmarked for population increases; and**
- **services and infrastructure within these communities be properly resourced to cater for any projected growth.**

Conclusion

Queensland Shelter believes there is a need for a population policy to manage sustainable growth in Queensland. Within this submission we have drawn attention to the need for an increase in the supply of well located affordable housing. To deliver this requires resourcing and delivery of infrastructure, planning legislation to work in tandem with the population policy and to ensure strategies are in place for decentralisation. Queensland Shelter believes that housing should be recognised as one of the key areas to be considered when planning for Queensland’s growth.