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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

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Urgent Need for Action on Aboriginal Housing

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council has described the current housing situation in Aboriginal communities as a “time bomb of festering social unrest.”

The Council's Chairperson Bev Manton says the Federal and State Government need to rapidly accelerate the provision of funding for housing and infrastructure in Aboriginal communities across the State to help ease the suffering of Aboriginal families.

“Both Government's are dithering while our people are suffering,” Ms Manton said today.

“This suffering can make people desperate causing them to act desperately,” she added.

“I'm appalled that the Boards of Local Aboriginal Land Councils are being forced to evict tenants from dilapidated sub-standard housing to comply with Government policy decrees.

“In some cases the Boards must make decisions about evicting members from their own communities and families.

“This causes a lot of ill feelings within the community, arising in intergenerational conflict.”

Ms Manton said the Commonwealth Government had all but deserted Aboriginal housing in NSW despite its public rhetoric.

“It views the Aboriginal housing sector in its current form as inefficient and unviable and is clearly focused on diverting financial resources for the maintenance and support of current housing stock, and the provision of additional stock, to remote communities in Northern Australia instead of throughout Australia,” she added.

Ms Manton said it may surprise people to learn that Local Aboriginal Land Councils in NSW had budgeted for over \$9 million in rent in the 2006-07 financial year and received close to \$8 million in rental income.

“That's an 86% collection rate - with no government assistance,” she added.

“Therefore, many LALC's in NSW do an extraordinary job of managing housing. It is not easy to endorse the eviction of tenants when the tenant is a family member or friend.

“The situation is a disgrace.

“The NSWALC fully supports LALC Boards in the pursuit of good property management and making the hard decisions regarding evictions.”

Ms Manton said she noted this week’s announcement by the Commonwealth Government that the Council of Australian government had agreed to renegotiate the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing.

Ms Manton said the statement amounted to “mere words,” in the absence of work gangs on the ground doing something about the desperate need in NSW communities.

There was a crying need for a clear commitment and statement from both the Commonwealth and State Government on what bricks and mortar would be delivered in Aboriginal communities in NSW as a result of the National Partnership.

Social tensions within Aboriginal communities would only continue to heighten in the face of continued Government inaction.

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