Shoddy homes to be rebuilt for Aborigines

SEVEN Groote Eylandt residences constructed under the nation's biggest remote Aboriginal housing program will be either demolished or rebuilt due to shoddy workmanship and the use of sub-standard materials.

The extra works on the houses, built by the sacked alliance Earth Connect under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program in March, will cost taxpayers in excess of $1 million.

The Northern Territory Housing Department's executive director of remote services, Andrew Kirkman, told an estimates committee in Darwin this week that "at least a couple of hundred thousand" dollars in remedial work would need to be spent on each of four houses built by Earth Connect at Groote Eylandt.

Initial work undertaken on a further three housing sites would be abandoned and pulled down.

But Mr Kirkman said any demolition at the three sites would be restricted to removing "very minor" preparatory work.

The federal and Northern Territory governments moved to terminate an agreement with Earth Connect in March following complaints about the standard of housing on Groote Eylandt from the local land council.

The revelations about the extent of the problems with the houses come as the Northern Territory government backed away this week from the controversial alliance model being used to roll out $672m in remote housing building and upgrades. Under pressure after a highly critical report into SIHIP by the NT Auditor-General, Chief Minister Paul Henderson and Housing Minister Chris Burns told parliament this week that the alliance model was forced upon the Territory, amid protest, by the Howard government as a condition of a memorandum of understanding signed in 2007.

Dr Burns told parliament former federal indigenous affairs minister Mal Brough had forcefully insisted upon the alliance model.

"It was gun-at-the-head stuff," Dr Burns said.

But Mr Brough told The Australian that despite a "strategic alliance model" being mentioned in the 2007 MOU, he was never in favour of an alliance model and first learned of the alliance model plan in early 2008, after the change of federal government.

"Anyone that is saying that the Howard government foisted the alliance model upon the Territory -- that is a total fabrication," Mr Brough said.

It was also revealed this week that hundreds of houses would be demolished in remote indigenous communities by the time the $672m SIHIP had finished its housing works.

SIHIP is building 750 new houses and undertaking 2500 refurbishments across 16 remote communities.

Mr Kirkman told estimates hearings earlier this week that "at least a couple of hundred houses" across the Northern Territory deemed beyond economic repair would need to be demolished as part of the SIHIP.
Opposition indigenous policy spokesman Adam Giles said he was deeply concerned that overcrowding would worsen in communities that ended up with a net reduction in housing.