5th April 2015  To contact Gerry: 8999 6713(bh)   8983 1237(ah)  0428 698 037(mobile)

GOVERNMENTS NEED TO ACT

Dear Editor NT News re your article on the 15 Mile and other Indigenous communities NT News April 4th.

While the article raises some important questions about poor housing it is not a balanced view. There is a statement that no new houses have been built at the 15 Mile community over the last 10 years. That is not correct. Twelve houses were built in 2008. (see attached photos) A steel house was also built at the end of 2008. (see attached photo). In 2010 a media centre, a mini basketball court and shaded playground were built (see attached photo). A new bus stop and shelter was built on the Stuart Highway also in 2010 (see attached photo) and a regular public bus connection followed. At the end of 2013 a new all-weather road was constructed from Howard Springs Road to the 15 Mile community (photo attached).

The houses that are in desperate need of either an upgrade or replacing are the original steel frame houses (see photos). Yes, there is overcrowding but like other similar communities sometimes this is caused by an influx of people moving in from other communities and will continue to, which doesn’t help the problem.

But there are some fundamental issues that need to be first addressed something I have asked the NT Government to investigate. In 2013 I raised the following motion in Parliament:

(1) that the government review the future development of the One Mile Dam, Knuckey Lagoon, 15 Mile and Aboriginal communities within the Darwin, region and

(2) that the review include:
   (a) any future development plans
   (b) existing and future land leasing arrangements
   (c) home ownership, and
   (d) governance including local government

(3) that the review should include views of residents, Aboriginal Development Foundation, relevant housing bodies, and all other relevant government agencies and non-government organisations.

The Government decided on two reviews, one through the Department of Community Services and one through the department of Lands and Planning. Nothing has been heard of those reviews since.
Larrakia Nation tried to take over the leases but the people did not want them to be running the show.

The future of these communities has to be sorted. What is the future? Can anyone live in these communities? Should people be able to buy or build their own houses?

Presently Aboriginal Development Foundation owns the leases whilst Yilli Rreung Housing maintains the houses and is required to provide ‘municipal services’. There lies a fundamental problem that no Government seems able to sort out but it needs sorting. Who has control over the day to day running of the community?

Should the local council provide the municipal services and the houses be rated as now happens on remote communities? Are residents made responsible for the upkeep of their houses and its surrounds – some certainly do but others don’t? Who owns the car wrecks that dot the community – surely the owners should take responsibility and not hope Yilli Rreung will have to use its valuable funding to remove them?

There are social problems in these communities much of which can be blamed on alcohol. Getting a job shouldn’t be a problem living close to Darwin and Palmerston with regular bus services passing.

Overcrowding is an issue that can be easily seen and yes it can be fixed by building more houses or refurbishing existing ones, but it’s not that simple and until the long term residents are part of the solution and they have a say in their future and until the Government listens to what they have to say, then building more houses will be a way of avoiding dealing with deeper problems. It’s seems Governments will talk a lot amongst themselves but nothing seems to change on the ground.

The Chief Minister has now reinvented the Department of Indigenous Affairs. He recently announced an audit on town communities in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. He needs to take a similar lead role in communities in Darwin, Palmerston and the rural area.

Residents of 15 Mile and Knuckey Lagoon Communities want a say in their future, they want a voice and they want a Government that is willing to help them achieve a bright and positive future, not a future that always seems lost in the Government too hard basket.