McADAM CALLS FOR ‘MARSHALL PLAN’ TO MEET BUSH HOUSING CRISIS

The rapidly growing crisis in Indigenous housing in the Northern Territory and other remote areas of the nation requires an urgent national response, Housing Minister Elliot McAdam told the Territory Legislative Assembly today.

“To be brutally honest—we are going backwards in Indigenous housing in the Territory,” Mr McAdam said.

“At the current rate of construction it will take us 33 years to build the 4000 new houses required to meet current need—at a current cost of at least $1 billion.

“At that rate, with the population doubling in 25 years and the level of household formation increasing by 25 per cent in the next ten years, in the year 2039 we will still face a 33 year backlog.

“We’re barely keeping up with the birth rate.

“The mathematics are defeating us—it is too big a job for the Territory.

“We have the nation’s smallest tax base and the largest need—and it is a need that has been gathering pace for the best part of 35 years.

“I’m calling on the Federal government to take this crisis seriously, and stop fiddling around the edges and condemning future generations to the ill health and misery that current overcrowding and homelessness is sentencing our people to.

“It needs a national effort supported by all Australians—a kind of Marshall Plan for the bush which will simultaneously boost training, employment and regional enterprises through economic development.”

Mr McAdam said that current resources being expended at a national level were being dwarfed by the problem.

“On our estimates, we would be looking at $180 million annually over ten years to catch up in the Territory—and significantly more nationally,” said Mr McAdam.

“It is fanciful to suggest the Territory can meet this from our current tax base, including GST revenue.

“What I have dubbed a Marshall Plan for the bush will require a national effort, and will take some time to build up to the kinds of levels of construction, repair and maintenance regime necessary to overcome this blight.

“It will not be easy: much of our effort in ramping up construction will have to be simultaneously matched by intense efforts in building local and regional capacity to manage housing stock.

“The two efforts must go hand in hand.”
Mr McAdam outlined in Parliament the catastrophic effects of the current housing situation on health, citing Menzies research that clearly demonstrates massive links between poor housing chronic disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Territory.

“Aboriginal health and housing are inseparable issues—and the longer we delay tackling the problem, the greater the ultimate costs will be, in human and financial terms,” said Mr McAdam.

“We should, effectively, look at the cost of meeting Indigenous homelessness and unmet housing need as part of the national debt.

“As I outlined in parliament today, it is a part of the national debt we are failing to pay off.

“That’s why we need a national effort.”

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