

## ABORIGINAL HOUSING OFFICE

**The NSW State election on March 2011 will set the direction for the State over the next four years. The NSW Federation of Housing Associations is calling on all Parties and candidates to commit to implementing a number of directions that will be essential to address the lack of affordable housing in NSW and to meet the housing needs of low and moderate income households.**

### Background – Aboriginal Housing Office

The Aboriginal Housing Office is a statutory body established in 1998 and governed by an all Aboriginal Board, who are selected on a merit basis<sup>1</sup>. NSW has a proud record among other states of having maintained this type of separate government decision-making and administrative agency for Indigenous housing<sup>2</sup>.

The AHO plans and administers the policies, program and asset base for Aboriginal housing in NSW. This includes resource allocation, sector-wide policy, strategic planning, and monitoring outcomes and performance in the Aboriginal housing sector<sup>3</sup>. AHO is also responsible funding and regulation of Aboriginal community housing providers and advises the state government on housing policies for Indigenous households.

The functions of AHO are guided by the principles of self-determination and self management for Aboriginal people. In addition, the AHO has an important role in facilitating and improving employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people within the Aboriginal housing sector.

### AHO information<sup>4</sup>

- As of June 2010, AHO owns 4,551 homes which are mostly managed by Housing NSW under a service level agreement.
- Total revenue for the year of \$123 million comprised mainly of State and Government funding in relation to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership (RIHNP) as well as rental income generated from its client base.
- Total expenditure for the year was \$89.3 million of which the major expenses were repairs and maintenance of AHO properties (\$31.3 million), repairs and maintenance of community properties (\$15.8 million), property expenses other than responsive maintenance (\$12.6 million), personnel services of \$7.6million and other expenses \$22.2 million.
- The Capital Program for the year was \$30.8 million.
- Total assets at 30 June 2010 were marginally above \$1 billion.

### Aboriginal housing sector issues<sup>5</sup>

- NSW has the largest number (148,178) and proportion (almost 30 percent) of Aboriginal people in Australia and the Aboriginal population is growing at a much faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population.
- Around 33 percent of Aboriginal people live in social housing. By comparison, only around 6 percent of the general population live in social housing.
- There are 202 Aboriginal Community housing providers as at June 2009.

- There are a small number of larger providers and many providers managing fewer than 15 properties. For example, there are 28 providers managing between one and four properties, 55 providers manage only 5 to 14 properties and only one provider managing more than 85 properties.
- Providers with less than 20 properties will always find it more difficult to achieve financial viability, regardless of how effectively they manage their properties.

## Initiatives undertaken to strengthen the Aboriginal housing sector<sup>6</sup>

In 2009/10, the AHO:

- began implementing the Build and Grow Aboriginal Community Housing Strategy which aims to support the development of a financially viable and more independent Aboriginal community housing sector
- introduced a new performance based registration system for Aboriginal Community Housing Providers, called the Provider Assessment and Registration System (PARS),
- spent \$1.2 million on preliminary work underpinning development of the Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership (RIHNP)
- carried out capital works valued at \$11.8 million under the National Building Economic Stimulus Plan to be completed in 2010/11
- acquired 41 new homes and began development of 39 homes
- spent \$17 million on RIHNP works including \$10.9 million on new supply and \$6 million on employment related accommodation.

## What the Federation is calling for

The Federation strongly believes that under any government, AHO as it currently exists is essential to ensuring a sustainable Aboriginal housing sector. We therefore call on all parties to commit to ensuring that AHO remains a statutory authority under the *NSW Aboriginal Housing Act 1998*.

The Federation supports the view that no other government agency has a better working relationship with the Aboriginal community than AHO. AHO plays a critical role in advising non-Aboriginal agencies (government and non-government) about the cultural needs, sensitivities and aspirations of Aboriginal people in housing.

The strength of AHO's position in leading the reforms to develop a sustainable and financially viable Aboriginal housing sector lies in its strong working relationships within the Aboriginal community, its effective presence in both metropolitan and regional NSW, as well as its strong understanding of what's happening in the Aboriginal community.

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*The NSW Federation of Housing Associations (the Federation) is the industry peak body for housing associations in NSW. The Federation's mission is to support the development of a not-for-profit rental housing sector that compares to any around the world, and makes a difference to the lives of lower income and disadvantaged households across the state.*

*Housing associations are not-for-profit community housing providers whose principal business is managing and developing long term housing for low and moderate income households.*

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal Housing Act 1998

<sup>2</sup> Milligan, V., Phillips, R., Easthope H., & Memmott, P. (2010) *Service directions and issues in social housing for Indigenous households in urban and regional areas* AHURI Positioning Paper No. 130

<sup>3</sup> AHO Website <http://www.aho.nsw.gov.au/>;

<sup>4</sup> Department of Human Services *Annual Report 2009-10*, correspondence with AHO 18/2/2011

<sup>5</sup> Human Services NSW Aboriginal Housing Office (2010) *The build and grow Aboriginal community housing strategy*, correspondence with AHO 18/2/2011

<sup>6</sup> Department of Human Services *Annual Report 2009-10*