



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

19 October 2021

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (19:09):

Our State is in the midst of a housing crisis and the Wallsend electorate is bearing the brunt. Thanks to the pandemic and the economic downturn, many people have lost their jobs or have seen their working hours cut. Housing costs are soaking up more and more of people's wages at the exact time we need the community to spend more money in local businesses to help rebuild the community. Many Hunter Valley renters are facing eviction or have already been evicted at a time when the regional rental market has a vacancy rate of just 0.3 per cent. Public housing in Wallsend is unable to accommodate the people who rely on it. The public housing system is not keeping up with current and future demand. Emergency homelessness services are at or above capacity, and it is getting worse.

The crisis has been building for a long time, but the combined pressures of COVID-19 and the economy have pushed the housing system to the brink. Yet for years the Government has ignored the warning signs. My office deals daily with people seeking housing assistance. We are bombarded with calls, emails and messages from locals who are struggling to find affordable accommodation due to increased prices and high demand. Some of them are forced to live in their cars; some are forced to live in tents. I know that in Wallsend some live under the bridges on the canal system down from the main street. Meanwhile, the people who are in public housing or who are trying to access public housing are waiting for months or even years to have their issues resolved. Either they need important maintenance work done, which can take months, or they need help with access or a transfer request. In both those situations, people face waits of months or years.

One local woman who stayed in a women's refuge after months of living in her car attended my office. She was living with her son, but he turned violent, threatening to end her life and badly damaging the property they shared. She took out an apprehended violence order against him, but she had to leave that untenable situation. There was nowhere for her to go. She could not afford a private rental, which is not surprising given the competitive market and the limits of the age pension, and she was left languishing on the waiting list for public housing. She is just one of the 1,200 applicants waiting for housing in the Newcastle area.

We are facing an economic and humanitarian crisis in New South Wales, and it is certainly reflected in Newcastle. Added to that is an unemployment rate that is higher than the State average. There needs to be a significant investment in social and affordable housing in the very near future to avoid a return to the tent cities of the Great Depression, and that is the way we are going. Not only will increasing the housing stock help take the pressure off the rental market and keep people from living in their cars or on the streets or under the bridges on the canals in Wallsend; it also makes economic sense. For too long, public housing has been allowed to decay or has been sold off, with inadequate investment in new stock. We need to urgently increase social and affordable housing stock.