

RCCIWA Online Roundtable with the Hon John Carey MLA Minister for Housing; Lands; Homelessness; Local Government Monday August 8th 4pm to 5pm

Background

This roundtable came about as we had invited Minister Carey, at the request of our members to come along to our RCCIWA Members Forum in June and he was unavailable. Our members are keen to hear from Minister Carey on a number of issues pertaining to his portfolios. We will send through specific questions from our members a week prior. We are so pleased he is making himself available for us.

For all regional business communities there are five critical areas of concern in common:

- Access to workers – skilled and non-skilled, there are simply not enough people in Regional WA
- Critical Housing shortage – throughout regional WA there is simply not enough housing, and short-term accommodation and hotels are being taken up by workforce employees
- Childcare – this is a multi-faceted issue; however, we know we have a latent workforce that cannot work to capacity as there is not enough childcare places in any regional locations, and in some towns, there is none.
- Ongoing Impacts of COVID 19 – currently the impacts of people contracting COVID 19 are forcing businesses to close whilst they are in isolation or closing as they do not have enough staff to open.
- Reliable access to broadband and telecommunications is still a long standing, ongoing issue

General Issues and questions common to many of our members

Housing

A critical shortage of housing is affecting all regional business communities, making it extremely difficult to attract much needed employees as they have nowhere to live. Question around this portfolio will be along the lines of:

- GROH Housing – there is not enough GROH housing for the employees, so they are accessing private rentals which adds further shortages to available housing. Can we have an update on the GROH housing maintenance program – there seems to be many GROH houses vacant whilst they await repair? We also have concerns about the policies around GROH housing – in that the houses are not being used to their full capacity (a 4 bedroom house with 1 person in it) and that there is not a collective pool of GROH housing in each Regional location. We think that by health, education, police (etc) all pooling their available GROH housing there will be more stock available.
- Social Housing – there is still a large number of social housing properties that are uninhabitable, waiting on repair and maintenance. Can we please have an update on the maintenance program and an insight into the numbers available by regional and what the wait lists are like. Having a stronger supply of social housing will free up the private rental market.
- What are some short-term housing solutions that we can assist with?

Lands

- Many of our regions feel hamstrung and frustrated by the lack of land available for residential and commercial development. Can the Minister please talk to what steps the Government are taking to release more land and what are the main barriers that we need to overcome to help reduce the pressure in regard to the critical shortage of housing throughout Regional WA?

Local Government

There are a few issues in relation to his Local Government Portfolio

- In many regional towns the LGA is the largest employer and source of work and contracts. What can be done to improve the opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to access more work and tender opportunities with their LGA.
- Can The Minister give us an update of the new LG Act reforms – timings, what the changes aim to deliver etc
- Local building and town planning policies often undermine any policies in place to create affordable housing and increase the supply of housing overall. What can be done to make the LGA requirements more flexible and outcomes focussed? And how can RCCIWA members assist with this?

Direct Questions from RCCIWA Members

Ian Gibb President Nannup CCI

- **Local Government;** Is it the intention for the Government to introduce the new Local Government Act for the next local government elections ?
- **Housing;** I have heard that the State Government is going to expect developers to contribute to worker accommodation when constructing developments in the regions. Is this correct and can you advise what that will look like ?
- **Housing and Local Government** I understand that Government has a view that Local Government is one impediment to worker accommodation when considering Caravan parks could be a part of the solution. Is there any part the Minister for local Government can play in this problem ?

Gaby Major Manager Fitzgerald Business Network

- Is there a database of every local government's strategic plan goals or objectives? Particularly something that could be easily filtered into metro/regional priorities. It would tell a lot about common goals and strategic areas of focus that could then show needs for solution development from the private sector and government investment.

Clare Smith CEO East Kimberley CCI

- There is a severe shortage of housing in the East Kimberley region, particularly Kununurra. The housing that is available on the private rental market is often sub-par and overpriced, which has a huge impact on a business's ability to attract and retain staff. Businesses are further disadvantaged because they cannot access GROH housing and are competing for workers against Government based organisations that can offer housing as part of their employee package.
- There is also a large amount of housing stock that has been left in a state of dilapidation and is in urgent need of repair or replacement. The EKCCI has been trying to access an analysis of all housing available in Kununurra so we can at least understand the exact situation and then use this to lobby the Government for solutions. To date we have been unable to access this information anywhere. Can you shed any light on this and how we can progress this analysis?

Tanya Dodd CEO Karratha & Districts CCI

- What immediate actions is being taken to provide for Seniors Housing or Aged Care facilities in Karratha?
- In the Pilbara region, there are no backpacker hostels. Is there a possibility to look at that option to allow for backpackers to stay at affordable rates, in towns where they could become part of seasonal workforce? - Hospitality, Tourism etc.
- The Pilbara is struggling with housing shortages. It also experiences dramatic changes in housing demand during mining booms, then has quiet times, which increases risk for private property developers. How can we overcome these chronic housing shortages in this area to best support the local communities?

Greg Milner Vice President Dunsborough-Yallingup CCI

- On behalf of the chamber (DYCCI) , I'd like The Minister to address the stamp duty issue, ie is our State government looking to reform stamp duty as in NSW? Are we likely to see relief from the ever-increasing tax take that is making it so difficult for many people to purchase a home, given the steep property price rises in the last two years? If no reforms to stamp duty are under review, what else can the State Government put in place to encourage regional purchases of residential properties?