



HousingMatters
ACTION GROUP INC

HOUSING MATTERS ACTION GROUP INC

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Intergenerational Housing Inequity

On: the extent and nature of intergenerational housing inequity in Australia across housing tenure types

April 2026

1. About this submission

Housing Matters Action Group Inc (HMAG) is a community-led organisation in the Bellingen Shire on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. Since our first Needs Mapping Survey in 2018, we have worked to build a local evidence base on housing pressures, translate that evidence into advocacy, and partner with residents, services, landowners, Council and government to deliver practical housing outcomes. Our 2025 Housing Needs Mapping project — the evidence base for this submission — drew on almost 200 local survey responses, ABS Census data, market analysis, workforce consultations, research to better understand local homelessness and precarious housing sector, and Gumbaynggirr-led yarning.

We welcome the Committee’s focus on intergenerational housing inequity across housing tenure types. In a regional Shire of around 13,300 people, that inequity is not an abstract trend. It is visible in who is buying, who is renting, who is being displaced, and who is sleeping in cars. We offer this submission as a place-based case study — a view from one rural community that reflects patterns we believe are playing out in many others.

2. Our core message

Intergenerational housing inequity in Australia is no longer just a story about young people struggling to buy in the capitals. In regional communities like ours, it is hardening into a structural sorting of the housing system by generation and tenure: older, wealthier buyers are purchasing outright with capital accumulated elsewhere; local working-age households are being funnelled into an unstable, shrinking rental market; and those without either wealth or stable tenure are being pushed into precarious or no housing at all.

Housing in regional Australia is no longer a by-product of economic growth — it is now a precondition for community and economic survival. Addressing this requires action across all tenure types, and a review of tax, planning and investment settings that takes seriously what is happening beyond the capital cities.

3. What we are seeing in the Bellingen Shire, by tenure type

The Committee’s terms of reference ask about inequity across housing tenure types. The evidence from our Shire shows that each tenure is under pressure in a distinct and compounding way.



3.1 Home ownership

The Bellingen Shire is now in the top 20% of NSW areas for cash property purchases. In 2023, 50.4% of residential property purchases were made without a mortgage, at a median price of around \$937,500. Median house prices have risen 36–57% in five years, while the median local household income sits at about \$1,197 per week — roughly a third below the NSW average. Local wages no longer compete. Younger households dependent on mortgages are outbid by buyers drawing on accumulated housing wealth — from higher-priced urban markets or from earlier generations’ property gains. For a local first-home buyer, it now takes an average of 15 years to save a deposit. Ownership is not a safe harbour for those who do cross the threshold: in Dorrigo, poverty rates among mortgage-holding households rose from 6.9% to 25.5% in recent years, and 27% of our mortgage-holding respondents report mortgage stress. Younger buyers are carrying debt of a scale and duration their parents’ generation did not face, on incomes that have not kept pace.

3.2 Private rental

Renters make up approximately 21% of Bellingen Shire households, but comprised 44% of our 2025 survey respondents — a clear signal of where housing stress is concentrated. 61% of renters told us the “Bellingen Shuffle” reflects their experience: repeated short-term moves driven by rent increases, sales, owners reclaiming homes or conversion to short-term rental. 40% reported a lack of secure tenure, 39% are unsure how long they can remain in their current home, and 67% worry about interactions with landlords or agents. 56% of all respondents now spend more than 30% of their income on housing; 56% say housing stress is affecting their mental health; 31% report going without essentials.

“Every time the house we’re renting gets sold we have to start again — packing up, finding somewhere else, and covering the cost of another move.”

— 2025 Needs Mapping Survey respondent

Alongside displacement pressure, renters consistently describe powerlessness in a market shaped by a small number of agents and landlords, low vacancy rates and housing stock of variable quality.

3.3 Social and community housing

Demand far exceeds supply, and eligibility is increasingly restricted to those in acute need. That has shrunk social housing’s historic role as a stabilising tenure for moderate-income working households, and removed a key rung on the ladder for younger people. Tenants in existing social housing in the Shire report tenancy fragility and service gaps. The tenure that should absorb overflow from a failing rental market is instead bottlenecked, and the overflow goes to cars, couches, caravans and homelessness.

3.4 Emerging and alternative tenure

The Community Land Trust (CLT) model remains marginal in Australia despite strong international evidence it retains affordability in perpetuity and significantly lowers the cost of entry. The CLT model is, by design, an intergenerationally fairer form of tenure: equity is held



partly in common, capital gains are constrained, and future generations inherit the affordability rather than the asset price.

Worked example: the Waterfall Way Community Land Trust (WWCLT)

HMAG incubated the Waterfall Way Community Land Trust (WWCLT) — a locally adapted shared-equity CLT model delivering permanently affordable housing. The model retains community control of land and applies resale price restrictions to keep homes affordable in perpetuity, enabling moderate-income households — including essential workers and younger people — to access secure, non-speculative home ownership. WWCLT is now incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and is in active negotiation with local government to progress its first project on surplus public land. The key constraint is not demand or model readiness, but finance and policy settings that do not yet support perpetual affordability — a systemic barrier across the CLT sector.

4. The cohorts most exposed are not who the national debate assumes

The Bellingen Shire is Gumbaynggirr country. Our 2025 work has been informed by Gumbaynggirr-led yarning and by conversations with community, Elders and Local Aboriginal Land Councils about housing aspirations. Intergenerational housing inequity has a distinctive and compounded character for First Nations households, rooted in dispossession and in the historic exclusion of earlier generations from property-based wealth-building. Any national policy response must explicitly include self-determined Aboriginal-led housing pathways.

Essential workers are bearing the brunt of the post-COVID mismatch between local wages and local house prices. As in-migration and cash buyers drove Shire prices up 36–57% in five years, local incomes, already roughly a third below the NSW average, did not follow. A healthcare worker, teacher or other key worker earning a local wage can no longer afford to buy locally, and increasingly cannot secure a rental either. The same jobs that once delivered secure housing to an older generation of key workers no longer do so for the younger workers doing the work today, with direct consequences for service delivery, recruitment and retention. The inability to house the next generation of workforce is the inability to sustain the community that depends on them.

5. Why regional housing markets fail differently

Regional markets do not fail in the same way as metropolitan ones, and national policy designed around metropolitan dynamics misses the actual constraints. Beyond system-wide drivers of inequity — tax settings that reward asset accumulation, declining investment in social and affordable housing, and financial frameworks that advantage existing capital — regional markets face distinct barriers that compound intergenerational inequality.

High per-dwelling infrastructure costs, limited scale to distribute them, and weak feasibility in small markets mean many projects do not proceed. The gap between construction costs and



end values restricts access to finance, contributing to “stalled markets” with little new supply. At the same time, there is a persistent mismatch between available housing (predominantly detached dwellings) and demand for smaller, more suitable homes.

The result is that younger households and moderate-income workers are increasingly priced out or displaced. Housing availability is now shaping — and constraining — economic activity in regional areas, rather than responding to it. Even where demand is strong, supply does not respond without enabling infrastructure, targeted capital, and supportive planning settings.

6. What we have built from local evidence

HMAG’s experience shows that serious, evidence-based community work can translate into tangible housing outcomes, even in a small Shire. Initiatives we have led or supported include Watson Place (23 affordable units for women over 55 at risk of homelessness); Homes for Health (connecting local homeowners offering affordable accommodation to local healthcare workers); the Housing Needs Mapping project (2018, 2023, 2025); and the Waterfall Way Community Land Trust Ltd.

None of this work can by itself compensate for national settings that structurally favour capital over local wages, investors over owner-occupiers, and older cohorts with accumulated housing wealth over younger and future generations. National policy reform must meet community effort halfway.

7. Recommendations

HMAG respectfully recommends that the Committee’s final report consider the following, organised as structural reforms and enabling investments.

Structural reforms

1. Review the taxation, investment and superannuation settings — including the capital gains tax discount, negative gearing and the concessional treatment of primary residences at transfer — that have systematically advantaged older generations’ accumulation of housing wealth at the expense of younger and future generations’ access to housing.
2. Legislate stronger, nationally-consistent renter protections, including meaningful limits on no-grounds evictions, longer minimum lease terms, and rent-rise controls — to end the “Bellingen Shuffle” and comparable cycles of forced moves that transfer instability down the generational ladder.
3. Regulate short-term rental accommodation so that dwellings used primarily for holiday letting do not continue to displace long-term renters and local workers, especially in regional markets where a small number of conversions materially shrinks supply.

Enabling investments

4. Expand and rebalance the national social and affordable housing pipeline, with a regionally-weighted allocation formula that recognises places like the Bellingen Shire where acute local need is masked by small population numbers, and with dedicated



enabling-infrastructure (headworks) funding for regional projects that will not otherwise proceed.

5. Support the emergent Community Land Trust sector through reliable capital funding, finance arrangements that recognise long-term affordability covenants, legal and planning reform. These models are intergenerationally fair by design and ready to scale if system settings allow.
6. Resource self-determined Aboriginal and First Nations housing pathways, led by Local Aboriginal Land Councils and community organisations, as a distinct stream within national housing policy.

8. In closing

Housing Matters Action Group is ready to support the Committee's work with further evidence, case material and local voices from the Bellingen Shire. Our experience is that the current system is quietly redistributing housing security away from working-age, renting and lower-income Australians and towards those already holding housing wealth. That redistribution is not inevitable. It is the product of policy, and it can be remade by policy.

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