

**Tuesday, 13 February 2024**

The Hon Stephen Jones MP  
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services  
by email to [Stephen.Jones.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Stephen.Jones.MP@aph.gov.au)



The Hon Matt Thistlethwaite  
Assistant Minister for Defence  
by email to [Matt.Thistlethwaite.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Matt.Thistlethwaite.MP@aph.gov.au)

CC: The Hon Katy Gallagher  
Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service  
by email to [senator.katy.gallagher@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.katy.gallagher@aph.gov.au)

Dear Ministers Jones and Thistlethwaite

## **Repurposing Defence land for public housing**

We are writing to you today regarding your invitation to make a pre-budget submission for the 2024-25 federal budget.

As Australia's largest grassroots urbanism network, the Abundant Housing Network Australia is invested in the success of the Albanese Labor Government's ambitions to deliver more housing supply in desirable, high amenity areas.

We understand that submissions have already closed and we apologise for missing the deadline. We wanted to provide our proposal regardless because we believe it strongly aligns with your Government's desire to take real action to address the housing crisis.

You might be aware of the campaigns by some of our members to see underutilised Defence land in our cities repurposed as demonstration housing precincts — showcasing world-class high-density mixed-use public housing in some of our wealthiest neighbourhoods.

Whether it's Haberfield Defence Site in Sydney, Victoria Barracks in Brisbane or Maribyrnong Defence Explosive Factory in Melbourne, Defence owns hundreds of hectares of inner city land that could be better utilised as housing.

We understand that there are currently policies in place in Finance that make such nation-building projects challenging if not impossible.

The Commonwealth Property Disposal Policy currently requires "*surplus Commonwealth property [to] be sold on the open market at full market value, unless agreed otherwise by the Finance Minister*".

We believe the Commonwealth can afford to be more ambitious with this policy. The administrative bottlenecks are slowing down the disposal of underutilised land in the middle of a housing crisis.

We request that the Commonwealth consider as part of the 2024-25 budget a programme that would see the transfer of underutilised Commonwealth-owned land to state or local governments at no cost, for the purpose of building public and community housing.

We envision this programme to have four key components:

1. amending the Commonwealth Property Disposal Policy to:
  - a. replace the discretionary approval of the Finance Minister with either a lower grade delegation or a clear policy instruction that disposal of public land to other public or community entities for the purpose of building affordable housing is permitted
  - b. prioritise the disposal of Commonwealth assets to other public sector or not-for-profit organisations at no cost or below market rate where there is a clear community benefit from the disposal
2. tasking Finance's clearing house for Commonwealth property to report publicly on underutilised Commonwealth-owned or -leased land — particularly Defence properties — that are within 30 kilometres of a major metropolitan centre, including assessing amenity value-adds like adjoining state or local government land or proximity to public transport, employment hubs, hospitals or higher education
3. transferring ownership of sites identified as both underutilised and having high amenity values to state or local governments at no cost on these conditions:
  - a. that this land be exempt from local planning regulations that limit construction of higher-density housing,
  - b. that the land be held in public or commons ownership in perpetuity, and
  - c. that at least 20% of the dwellings be public or community housing
4. establishing a fund to pay for any remediation or major infrastructure works necessary and to compulsorily acquire adjoining lots where appropriate and to support the viability of any housing project planned for disposed-of land.

We understand that some of this work is already underway within Finance and Defence, however we believe there is a clear public appetite for more ambition and more decisive action to deliver non-market housing.

We look forward to working with your Government to deliver the fastest housing growth possible in places where people want to live.

Yours sincerely

**Travis Jordan** | Abundant Housing Network Australia spokesperson  
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