NAVIGATING CHANGE
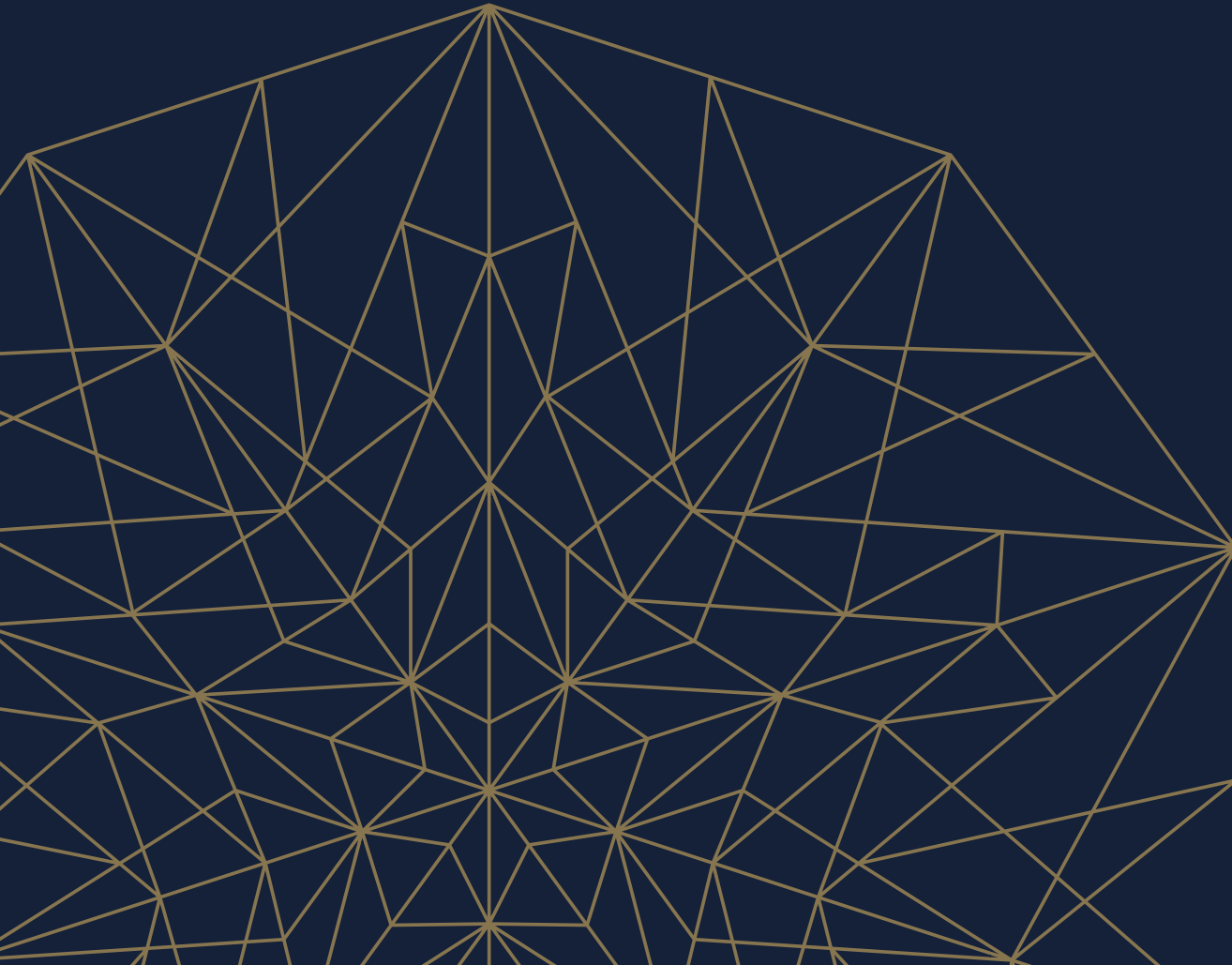## A HISTORY OF COMPASS HOUSING

TONY GILMOUR

30
1985 2015
YEARS

COMPASS HOUSING
YOUR DIRECTION HOME

30
1985
2015
YEARS

NAVIGATING CHANGE

A HISTORY OF COMPASS HOUSING

Dr Tony Gilmour
with Helen Karathomas

Foreword by Paul Johnson
Chair, Compass Housing

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FOREFRONT OF THE SECTOR IN AUSTRALIA.

Paul Johnson, Chair of Compass Housing

FOREWORD

by Paul Johnson

I am honoured to be the current Chair of Compass Housing Services, a remarkable and innovative Community Housing Provider. It is with great pride that I write the foreword for this book which chronicles the path that Compass Housing has followed from humble beginnings 30 years ago to the sector leading position it now holds in the Australian Community Housing sector.

The following quote from the book highlights this position "The breadth and depth of programs such as Compass Connect and the integration of a single vision covering personal development, place making and community development, is ahead of the Australian sector. It even compares favourably with best international practice. "

As the book outlines, the current position of Compass has been built upon the efforts of many significant people who are recognised throughout the book. The path to success has not always been easy but with the commitment of all involved over those 30 years, we have the very successful Compass of today.

This book is an excellent reference document, very well researched and very well presented, it will serve to provide an historical perspective of how the Compass of today came to be, it provides an overview of the community housing sector from its very earliest days in the 1980's and then follows the development and changes to the sector over the next 30 years showing the impact and influence those changes had on the development of Compass.

Another quote from the book says it perfectly "The lessons of Compass's story to date are clear. Growth can provide strength when navigating change. However, the success of a community housing provider is not measured on how many tenancies are managed, but the quality of services provided and the number of lives transformed. On this score, sound foundations have been laid for Compass's next three decades.

I commend this book to you and thank the author Dr. Tony Gilmour who is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Swinburne University and Helen Karathomas who is an urban geographer with a special interest in social housing for their efforts in producing this excellent book covering the first 30 years of the history of Compass, I also want to thank anyone else who contributed to the content of the book and its production in any way.

—

Paul Johnson
Chair - Compass Housing Services

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the many people who have made this project possible. Compass's Board commissioned the book and key guidance has been provided by the 30 Year Celebration Workgroup led by Lyndall Robertshaw. Sandra Calland, Sue Dark and Mark O'Dwyer provided important insights into Compass's past in NSW, and Scott McGregor coordinated data gathering on 4Walls in Queensland.

We had privileged access to documentary records. Particular thanks are due to Lucy Burgmann at the NSW Federation of Housing Associations, Mary Perkins at Shelter NSW and Mark Reader at the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. Useful Council meeting papers from the early 1980s were kindly provided by the City of Newcastle's Legal Services Department. Frances Paterson-Fleider from Churches of Christ Housing and Maree McKenzie from Housing Plus were also able to fill important gaps in knowledge.

Helen Karathomas fulfilled a key role as Research Associate on the project, and I appreciate her detective skills, enthusiasm, support and hard work.

A number of people have been interviewed for this book, and I would like to thank them for sharing facts, insights and in many cases amusing stories. Their names are included at the end of the book. Many people have had, and continue to have, a strong belief in the work Compass undertakes to improve the lives of people, their communities and society.

I would like to dedicate this book to Compass's tenants - past, present and future. Community housing may seem today to be all about development, deal making and debt raising. However my belief, as a former tenant, is that housing organisations must never lose track of the people they serve and support. In navigating change over a tumultuous three decades, Compass can rightly be proud of their work on 'growing a star', genuine tenant involvement and a cutting-edge approach to sustainability. It is this people-centred vision that has made Compass Australia's leading community housing provider.

—

Tony Gilmour

Kiama NSW, 30 September 2015

NAVIGATING CHANGE

TIMELINE

2004
Kelvyn Enright resigns from Newmacq.

2003
Newmacq's registration application is deferred by the Office of Community Housing – signalling a period of troubled times for Newmacq.

2004
MGI Wamstekers Chartered Accountants are appointed Interim Managers of Newmacq during this time of upheaval for the organisation.

2004
Greg Budworth is appointed General Manager.

1985
Newmacq Community Housing Company Ltd is registered as a company.

1997
Kelvyn Enright is appointed as Newmacq's Coordinator, also acting as Company Secretary.

2001
The first owned properties, acquired at Frith Street, Kahibah through Ironbark.

2004
The Tenant Incentive Scheme was introduced – the first of its kind in Australia.

1996
Newmacq becomes regional partner for the Building Better Cities program to manage affordable housing in the Honeysuckle precinct.

2004
Newmacq hosted their first Christmas picnic.

2004
Newmacq moved to larger offices at 485 Hunter Street Newcastle.

1997
Newmacq had a new mission - 'provides social housing in the areas of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie cities through the resources of two NSW State Government housing programs … the Community Tenancy Scheme … [and] the Affordable Housing Rental Program, funded under the former Commonwealth Government's Building Better Cities Program'.

2002
Sandra Calland joins Newmacq as a Director along with former Newcastle MP, Allan Morris. Ms Calland would go on to serve the organisation for the next 13 years.

2004
Staff numbers had increased to 53, and the property portfolio more than tripled from 501 to 1,740.

2005
Tenant Reference Group is formed. Early tenant groups created their own constitution and worked with Newmacq management to suggest improvements to their policies and procedures.

2005
Newmacq is successfully registered by the Office of Community Housing.

2007
Newmacq acquires the Upper Hunter Community Tenancy Scheme, which added 63 tenancies in the towns of Singleton, Scone, Aberdeen and Muswellbrook.

2007
Newmacq becomes Compass Housing Service Co Limited (Compass).

2008
Compass wins NSW Government competitive tender to provide services in Broken Hill.

2008
Compass won $1.3 million under the 'Debt Equity 2' program to build 11 homes in Cessnock, in partnership with Cessnock Council who donated two blocks of land with an estimated value of $300,000.

2008
Compass awarded Affordable Housing Innovation Fund (AHIF): Awarded $600,000 in capital funding.

2008
Compass awarded Newcastle City Councils Building Better Cities Committee: Awarded $660,000 in capital funding. Funding placed towards twenty dwellings acquired in Arvia Apartments Newcastle under Social Housing Growth Fund 1.

2008
This Way Home Project funding proposal was approved. Housing NSW identified a unit complex at 52-56 Bull Street Mayfield that would be suitable for this project. The City of Newcastle through Building Better Cities contributed $2m for the project.

2008
Compass receives recognition in 3 areas at the Excellence Awards for Community Housing: Annual Reporting; Overall Excellence in community housing (High Commendation), and Tenant participation (High Commendation).

2008
Debt Equity Scheme: Compass awarded $1,300,000 in capital funding.

2009
Under the Social housing growth fund, Compass was awarded $17M resulting in an additional 63 units delivered in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Gosford.

2009
National Rental Affordability Scheme Round 2: Compass awarded $5,676,000 in capital funding from State Government plus annual Federal Government incentives.

2009
Compass launches their Total Sustainability Program (later becoming their GROW program) that linked the health and well-being of tenants, community wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

2009
4walls founded through a merger between Brisbane Boarders and the Metropolitan Association Towards Community Housing.

2010
Compass receives Growth Provider status in NSW.

2010
Compass has a chain of 7 offices across much of the vast geography of NSW.

2010
Compass awarded Nation Building Economic Stimulus Program: Awarded $90,256,087 in stock. Compass is to deliver three packages of housing in the Hunter, Newcastle and Gosford regions totalling 787 properties.

2010
Compass acquires 60 tenancies from the Western Plains Housing Scheme in Dubbo.

2010
Compass took over management of a community hub at Tumbi Umbi on the NSW Central Coast, knows as the KBT hub which would later become, 'The Meeting Place'.

2010
National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) Round 4: Awarded $9,550,000 in capital funding from State Government plus annual Federal Government incentives.

2010
Compass receives recognition in the areas of Award for Excellence Service to tenants, from the Excellence Award Community Housing Awards, and Environmental Sustainability from the Hunter Business Chamber Award.

2011
Compass received Title transferred on a total of 571 Nation Building properties worth $110 million.

2011
This Way Home project is opened; a supportive housing model with a number of service providers in partnership, sharing a common purpose to alleviate homelessness.

2011
Compass arranges $50 million facility with Westpac Bank to fund their targets for leveraging new social housing.

2012
Compass Connect launched, based on three core principles of people, place and performance to provide an integrated approach to portfolio management.

2012
Under Compass Connect, the Board of Directors approved a funding program of $200,000 non-recurrent funding aimed at encouraging tenants to lead place making initiatives in their areas.

2012
Compass was awarded $7,371,200 to deliver a specialist housing model for people with a severe or profound disability under the Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund (SAIF).

2012
My Place Property is established as a specialist affordable housing office to undertake the management of their affordable housing portfolio.

2013
Compass receives recognition for Overall Excellence in Community Housing and Excellence in Green Initiatives from NSW Awards for Excellence in Community Housing.

2013
Compass receives recognition in Leadership in Sustainability (for GROW) from Powerhousing Australia.

2013
The KBT hub was named The Meeting Place by the local community and funding awarded under Compass Connect to create a mural by the community to visually represent what the community means to them.

2014
Compass is registered under the new National Regulatory System for Community Housing as a Tier One community housing provider.

2014
Compass merges with 4walls Ltd in Queensland, adding 934 properties to Compass portfolio, representing their national expansion.

2014
Compass received the remaining 457 asset titles valued at $137 million which had been stalled since March 2011.

2014
My Place Property established as a separate legal entity, with its own board and general manager.

2014
Compass announced as delivering the Logan Renewal Initiative in Queensland along with joint-venture partners BlueCHP as 'Logan City Community Housing'.

2011
Compass wins the Hunter Business Chamber Award for Environmental Sustainability for the second year in a row.

2011
Compass established a relationship with STEPS Housing Limited, based in Tasmania. Compass would later take full control of STEPS, and rename Compass Housing Services (Tasmania).

2012
Grow a Star program is launched, aimed at providing financial assistance for talented and passionate young people to develop their sporting, musical or academic skills.

2012
This Way Home Project is listed as finalist in the NSW Premiers Partnership Awards.

2012
Compass receives recognition for Professional Excellence in Housing – in Leading Practice, from the Australasian Housing Institute.

2013
Compass exits from operating in Tasmania.

2013
Construction is completed of Compass' EnviroBuild project; an environmentally sustainable demonstration project at Canton Beach, Central Coast, NSW.

2013
National Rental Affordability Scheme Round 5 "Shovel Ready" - Awarded $3,829,500.

2015
Compass receives recognition of Excellence in Frontline Services from NSW Awards for Excellence in Community Housing.

2015
Compass receives accreditation under the National Community Housing Standards.

2015
Compass wins Greentree International's Don Bowman Initiative Award.

2015
Compass establishes office in Christchurch, New Zealand.

2015
Compass wins 2015 AHI Leading Housing Development Project Award in NSW.

2015
Compass has established a presence in Christchurch, New Zealand.

THE HIGHER WE CLIMB, THE MORE WE SEE
WHAT CAN BE DONE. THE OLDER WE GET,
THE MORE WE BELIEVE WE CAN DO IT."

Greg Budworth, Group Managing Director

LOCAL VISION: NEWMACQ IN THE 1980s

Their large team of dedicated staff provided much-needed accommodation and support for thousands of disadvantaged people across New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland. Beyond their local communities, Compass's leaders worked with their colleagues in Canada, the United States and Britain to forge a vision for what had become within three decades the favoured way of delivering social housing across most developed countries.

It was not always so. Community housing started as a fragmented cottage industry, forged through the hard graft of local activists meeting in people's houses, pubs and community centres and up and down the country. They were helped by the radical zeal of a few local politicians, state bureaucrats and Commonwealth radicals. Yet, during the early years of the sector, many in Government saw community housing as a threat and the sector faced a number of challenges to its survival.

This chapter looks at the origins of community housing in Australia through a local lens, focussing on the industrial city of Newcastle in NSW and surrounding areas. Here, at grass roots level, the competing aspirations for the sector played-out during the 1980s. The organisation first known as Newmacq Community Housing Company Ltd (Newmacq), would two decades later be better known by the more familiar name, Compass Housing Services Company Ltd (Compass).

COMMUNITY HOUSING'S ORIGINS

Although the term is not always used consistently, community housing is affordable rental accommodation delivered by not-for-profit organisations, subsidised by Government, and provided to lower income households or people with special and complex needs. It is a recognisable part of the housing system in many countries, with the organisations sometimes called 'housing associations' or 'community development corporations'.

Community housing stands in parallel to public housing, which is directly delivered by Government. 'Social housing' generally refers to both public and community housing, and needs relatively heavy public subsidy as households have low incomes. By contrast, 'affordable housing' is aimed at low to moderate income working households, and provides a lower subsidy for rental accommodation and sometimes home purchases.

The Housing Commission

Public housing was not a feature of colonial Australia, nor did it play much of a national role after the formation of the Commonwealth in 1901 with the exception of some housing provision for returned service personnel after the First World War (Troy, 2012). In NSW, by contrast, the state's first Labor Government passed the 1912 Housing Act which led to a number of 'model' public housing projects such as within the garden suburb of Daceyville in Sydney.

Public housing only developed at scale in NSW with the establishment of the Housing Commission in 1941, somewhat later than pioneering precedents in South Australia (1936) and Victoria (1938). From 1945 a process of medium term policy compacts known as the Commonwealth State Housing Agreements established co-funding of public housing. As national politics changed, so did housing policy - Menzies' 1956 Agreement placed more emphasis on home ownership. Between 1956 and 1969, over 30,000 homes were sold by the NSW Housing Commission, more than any other state (Hayward, 1996).

The main activity of the Housing Commission up to the early 1980s was to accommodate working families - single people were not eligible to join the waiting list, unless they were elderly (NLMI, 1983: p.19). Many properties were built close to expanding industrial centres, providing a plentiful supply of labour. Only by the mid-1980s was there a shift to focus on single people, non-working residents, older people and those with a disability.

Box 1: Family values: the Housing Commission in Newcastle

'Eight hundred married couples in Newcastle were in urgent need of flats similar to those being erected in Parkway-ave, Hamilton, the Chairman of the Housing Commission (Mr Gallop) told the Government Commission... 'The Commission intended to build 4000 homes in the Newcastle, Maitland, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie and possibly Port Stephens districts. These would include standard two and three bedroom homes for families. The Commission also planned to build small flats for couples without children and for aged and infirm people ... Mr Gallop said ... the Housing Commission's work was of national importance' (Newcastle Sun, 1948; Newcastle Times, 1998b).

Photo: Housing commission flats, Parkway Avenue.
Source: Newcastle Region Library

Community foundations

Australia's community housing sector has developed more recently than in many countries in Europe and North America, and has been tied closely to three main strands - philanthropy, community activism and government assistance (Gilmour, 2009: p.11).

In other countries such as Britain and the United States, philanthropy has played more of a significant and longstanding role. Tickell (1996), for example, suggested that the start of the English housing association sector was the foundation of the St. Lawrence's Hospital Charity in 1235. This organisation still manages 23 alms houses in Gloucester 'for the benefit of poor persons of good character' (www. housingnet.co.uk). There is some evidence of Australian church and charity groups dating back to the 1930s providing shelters for at-risk groups, and by the 1960s these organisations grew by accessing Commonwealth funds, especially to house older people.

From the late 1960s, community activism increased in Australia. This found expression in the Green Bans of the early 1970s, especially for those in opposition to redeveloping The Rocks, Woolloomooloo and Glebe into freeways and high rise development. Many properties were acquired by Government for such projects, and when the projects were cancelled several properties were taken over by squatters. Elsie Women's Refuge, established in a disused building in Glebe in 1974, became one of NSW's earliest community housing style groups. Some of the early squats became housing cooperatives, such as Ningana in Annandale.

By the late 1970s a number of women's and youth refuges, providing short term accommodation to highly vulnerable groups, began to be funded by the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services (Shelter NSW, 2002). Later, in 1981, the NSW Housing Commission's Emergency Accommodation Unit responded to pressure from activists to make selected unused public housing units available for community groups to manage.

Though there were only a modest number of community housing organisations emerging in NSW in the 1970s, with most focussing on short term housing, there was as a marked growth in the capacity of voluntary organisations and of empowered individuals. National Shelter was founded in 1974 as a housing and homelessness lobby group, followed by Shelter NSW in 1975. Tenant activists played a strong role in criticising the role of both private and public sector landlords, and in time would influence (and in some cases lead) innovations from within the Government (Matka, 1999).

The NSW Community Tenancy Scheme

Community housing only developed as a fully-fledged alternative to public housing with the arrival of serious money from the Commonwealth. Interestingly, this first came under a program which had nothing to do with the promotion of not-for-profit housing alternatives.

The Fraser Commonwealth Government's 1982 Mortgage and Rent Relief Scheme was intended to provide short term financial assistance for renters and mortgage payers experiencing difficulties meeting their housing commitments. Due to flexibility given to the States on how this was administered, NSW Labor Government decided to shape the funding towards their own goals. Rental subsidies were not seen as the responsibility of the State, and could lead to profit-taking by private landlords.

Into the 1980s the NSW Housing Commission remained a traditional public housing agency, largely providing housing for lower income working families. The running of the rental assistance component of the Mortgage and Rent Relief Scheme therefore passed, somewhat by default, to the Department of Youth and Community Services. Through leadership by innovative policy wonks such as Vivienne Milligan, Brian Elton, and Lynden Esdaile who remained influential over subsequent decades, the scheme morphed into something that 'was clearly not originally envisaged' (Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985: p.2). See Box 2.

The Community Tenancy Scheme was approved by NSW Government in October 1982. Instead of subsidising tenants' incomes, it used public funding to increase the supply of affordable housing that would then be rented at reduced costs to eligible tenants. Much of the housing would be head-leased from private landlords during the early years of the scheme, though the project's sponsors had a broader ambition:

'We chose to go for a head-leasing model so that we could hit the ground running. But the vision was that it would be a scheme where organisations could then develop their own housing, and own housing in the traditional European housing association model. That clearly the vision. We would then build on that model by looking for other sources of funds' (Vivienne Milligan and Lynden Esdaile, personal communication).

The approach was seen as 'a logical development for the community sector', and the new not-for-profit housing sector would be 'complementary to that of the public housing authority' (Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985: p.4). It would cater for:

'those people who had traditionally been excluded from, or who had poor access to public housing (for example single people, people of a non-English speaking background, some special needs groups such as chronically homeless people, independent living disabled people and previously institutionalised people' (ibid, p.47)

This goal was achieved. By June 1985, 50% of Community Tenancy Scheme residents were single adults, and 29% were single parents with children. Around 20% of residents had special needs, including a disability, were previously institutionalised or were refugees (ibid, p.48, p.54).

Box 2: Rebels with a cause: Vivienne Milligan and Lynden Esdaile

'The things we got away with were extraordinary. We did exactly as we wanted'

'We were not very fond of the paternalistic, hierarchical, male developer led way that Government was run then. We all decided we were going to change this. We were rebels looking for a cause ... [compared to the Housing Commission] we were alien in every respect, the way we worked, the fact that we were women and senior managers.

[The three senior women behind the Community Tenancy Scheme] all had androgynous names. And all memos came to us as 'Mr' - it was just an assumption' (personal communication).

The new community housing organisations therefore provided much-needed diversity in the social housing sector. In terms of organisational structure, they would allow a different approach to that adopted by the Housing Commission. The aim was to:

'… manage stock at the local level through community based organisations or local government. To involve tenants in the management of individual schemes …. [and] to establish community housing organisations with the potential to operate long term housing programmes' (ibid, p.4).

Tenant involvement was the second (of two) Community Tenancy Scheme guiding principles, an important differentiator as 'tenant participation has not been an active component of public housing policy in NSW' (ibid, p.47). Despite the transfer of the Scheme to the Housing Commission in January 1984, these principles have been maintained and arguably remain today as the template for how community housing organisations operate.

The Commonwealth takes the initiative

Prime Minister Bob Hawke's victory in the March 1983 Commonwealth election led to sweeping changes in a wide range of social and economic policies. Reform came to the Commonwealth State Housing Agreements, the main mechanism through which the States received national funds for housing assistance. The 1984 Agreement for the first time provided assistance under the Local Government and Community Housing Program.

The new Program, initiated in 1984, aimed to help councils, community groups and other non-governmental organisations provide low cost housing. Although the scheme was less generous and far-reaching than some had envisaged - including Newcastle City Council - it established the principle of a portion of Commonwealth funds being tied to community housing projects. Between 1984 and 1992 the Program received about 1.8% of housing funds available. The Local Government and Community Housing Program was transformed into the Community Housing Program in 1993.

As Vivienne Milligan has noted, 'Once other funding programs came in, the Community Tenancy Scheme organisations were well placed. With the Local Government and Community Housing Program, plus capital funding, the NSW community housing organisations were those that got the money. There were very few other organisations getting capital' (Vivienne Milligan, personal communication).

A NEW HOUSING PROVIDER FOR NEWCASTLE

Influenced by Vivienne Milligan at the Department of Youth and Community Services, a geographer by training, the Community Tenancy Scheme had a clear spatial plan. Within 10 administrative regions, locations were carefully selected for new community housing providers to be established. As a result, the 65 new organisations were spread relatively evenly across NSW. To this day the 1985 community housing map remains a key influencer on the spatial pattern of organisations, head offices and housing stock across the State (see the Hunter region map in Box 7).

Accessing CTS funding

Based on an evaluation of housing need, NSW State Government agreed in principle annual funding of $193,000 for three years for a new Community Tenancy Scheme in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Local Government Areas to support 92 households. This was one of four allocations of funding in the Hunter area, and by far the largest.

In February 1983, a public meeting was held in Newcastle, and a Steering Committee was appointed to evaluate the viability and potential organisational structure, and manage a $6000 grant funded consultancy budget. It was common practice for officials from the Department of Youth and Community Services to tap into local networks, such as councils and neighbourhood centres. The Departmental team drove around NSW, staying in cheap motels - 'we nearly killed ourselves' (Vivienne Milligan, personal communication).

The Steering Committee was chaired by Hilary Bradbury to July 1983, then Therese McLean, both acting as paid consultants (see Box 3). Tracey O'Shea from the Newcastle Neighbourhood Centre was a Committee member. Over the next few years these three women gave the critical leadership to found the new housing organisation.

It was agreed that the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Interagency would act as project sponsor and undertake the evaluation. The Interagency had been established in November 1980 to 'improve service delivery and to create effective channels for agency cooperation' between organisations helping disadvantaged groups (NLMI, 1982: p.5).

As noted by the architects of the Community Tenancy Scheme, Newcastle had been:

'… substantially involved in community service development prior to the advent of the [Community Tenancy Scheme]… In this way it differs from other non-metropolitan regions … Extensive community participation is well developed in the region, most councils have community workers or social planners and a number of services complementary to CTS are well established (for example, Tenants' Advice Services, Regional Information Service, Neighbourhood Centres)' (Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985: p.24).

The development of new community housing organisations across NSW varied depending on location and local capacity. The Newcastle area already had an established Interagency covering the council areas of Newcastle City and Lake Macquarie, and there is a good chance that this is why the Sydney-based public officials decided the new housing organisation should cover these two areas. Also, as noted in the consultancy report:

'the geographical boundaries between the two local government areas do not reflect social and economic boundaries - the two areas are interdependent for services, work and housing' (NLMI, 1983: p.14).

Strong community capacity was perhaps also a reason why a larger regional organisation was suggested for the Newcastle area rather than a series of smaller groups which would have been possible as 'the CTS [Community Tenancy Scheme] budget for the region would

OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS THESE THREE WOMEN GAVE THE CRITICAL LEADERSHIP TO FOUND THE NEW HOUSING ORGANISATION.

have allowed the establishment of several small schemes' (ibid, p.25). As a result, the new organisation would be the fourth largest in NSW with 92 dwellings, behind only those in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs (107), the Illawarra (100) and Parramatta (97).

Vision for a new housing organisation

The September 1983 Consultancy Report noted that a community tenancy scheme for Newcastle and Lake Macquarie was 'both feasible and warranted in the area' (NLMI, 1983: p.1). The recommended model was for it to be administered as a Joint Venture Committee between the two Councils under section 521 of the Local Government Act.

The Joint Venture Committee was seen as an interim step until the Commonwealth established the Community Housing Expansion Program. The Program was seen as likely to allow 'Community Housing Trusts' to receive public funds, borrow public money and develop new housing - similar to the historic approach in Britain to 'council housing' (ibid, p. 13). If the Program did not proceed - which turned out to be the case - the consultancy report recommended an independently incorporated organisation should be formed.

The interim organisation's Management Committee 'should include members from various fields, including Councils, welfare agencies, financial institutions and the building industry' (ibid, p. 2). Longer term, three tenants were envisaged on the Committee out of a total of 14 members and they would form the core of the Tenant Selection Advisory Committee. In a sign of the less politically correct writing style of the time, two Management Committee members would be 'aged, handicapped, aborigines, ethnics' (ibid, p. 3).

The 1983 consultancy report made an astute observation of the ways the sector could progress over the following decades. These tensions, between the two pathways, continued to play-out over the following three decades:

'CTS [Community Tenancy Scheme] is open to broad interpretation. It may be seen in its narrowest sense as a means of establishing organisations to act as agents of government to house a specific number of households in a certain number of houses. On the other hand, it may be viewed as a "stepping stone" to the establishment of a much broader and self-sufficient base for developing a third sector in housing, i.e. neither private or public. In the light of the opportunity provided by CTS to build a strong community focus in the housing area ... it is recommended that Newcastle and Lake Macquarie adopt the broader view of CTS' (ibid, p.12).

In contrast to the housing supply aims of the designers of the Community Tenancy Scheme, it was thought that 'single persons in Newcastle-Lake Macquarie do not present in as large a number as do young people on the North Coast and Inner City Sydney' (ibid, p.19). Greater demand was thought to be from families where the main earner had lost their job due to the economic downturn, and older women and caravan park residents who faced precarious tenure security. The Housing Commission waiting list for Newcastle and Lake Macquarie was rising sharply, up from 1,849 in 1978-79 to 3,209 in 1982-83 (NSW Government, 1984).

Council's role in housing

In October 1983, Newcastle City Council recommended forming a 'Minding Committee' to help establish the new housing organisation during the period that delicate negotiations continued between the two councils on governance structures for the new housing organisation (City of Newcastle, 1983a). This group - later known as the Interim Committee - continued the work of the earlier Steering Committee and had several continuing members. The lead representative from Newcastle City Council was Alderman Alma Tate (see Box 4).

The role of councils such as the City of Newcastle in supporting affordable housing in general, and community housing in particular, is often overlooked. Although since the 1978 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement it had been possible for State Governments to fund local governments for housing development, NSW had not followed this approach. Council's first Residential Housing Policy for Newcastle was published in 1982 (City of Newcastle, 1984a). In August 1983 Council appointed a Community Housing Officer, one of only four such roles in NSW (Newcastle Herald, 1983a). In an editorial, the local newspaper was supportive:

> *'At a time of high unemployment, high interest rates and a recession in the building industry the time has never been better for the council to become involved in low-cost housing' (Newcastle Herald, 1983b).*

One of the reasons the City of Newcastle was keen on the Joint Venture Committee with Lake Macquarie Council was the wider housing activities that it could promote. In addition to administering the Community Tenancy Scheme, the Committee could develop tenants' associations, form cooperatives and receive future housing funding targeted at councils. It could also undertake research and policy analysis, raising community awareness of the need for affordable housing (City of Newcastle, 1983a).

Newcastle Lake Macquarie Community Housing Trust

Community Tenancy Scheme funding for the 1983-84 financial year was held on trust by the City of Newcastle Council, to be released in February 1984. In the meantime the Interim Committee reviewed options for organisation structures. Their conclusion in January 1984 was that movement towards a council Joint Venture Committee had become so protracted that it was not a viable option, as the June 1984 deadline might be missed and funding lost (City of Newcastle, 1984b).

It was proposed that an incorporated cooperative be established by June 1984, but in the meantime the organisation would exist as an unincorporated Housing Trust managed by the Interim Committee. The Newcastle Permanent Building Society would safeguard the grant funding, collect rent through its branches, and provide office space in their old offices at 450 Hunter Street (see Box 5). O'Shea noted that 'although the Councils are no longer being asked to form a Section 521 Committee, the commitment and support of local government is crucial to the success of this scheme' (ibid, p.3).

It remains unclear exactly when the new housing organisation started in business, though it is likely to have been during the first few months of 1984. Known as the Newcastle Lake Macquarie Community Housing Trust, it adopted the name recommended in the initial consultancy report in September 1983 (NLMI, 1983). The Trust remained an unincorporated association during this period and did not pursue the cooperative option (ASIC, 1985c). Community housing providers of this type were not uncommon at the time, with 40% of the 58 Community Tenancy Schemes established by July 1985 being unincorporated (data from Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985).

Therese McLean was one of a number of local supporters who worked as volunteers in the Trust during 1984-85. Given the organisation had not been formed as a separate legal entity, staff could not be directly employed. Firms such as Therese's allowed staff a certain number of hours away from their main job each week (Therese McLean, personal communication).

Box 5: A new office: close to the benefactors

485 Hunter Street Premises 2008

In 1984 the interim organisation moved into the Newcastle Permanent Building Society's former premises on the second floor of 450 Hunter Street, Newcastle. The Society was initial custodian of the organisation's grant funding, and remained their banker for two decades. However, they still charged rent for the office - $4,486 in 1985-86 (ASIC, 1986).

Conveniently, given the support provided by Council, the offices were a one minute walk to Newcastle Town Hall.

Newmacq moved office locations several times again, though retained a presence in the civic core of Newcastle. In 1995 head office moved to 451-459 Hunter Street, then in 2004 to 485 Hunter Street. Still today this premises remains a Compass branch and head office moved to 44 Beaumont Street in Hamilton in 2008.

NEWMACQ IS BORN

On 12 February 1985 Newmacq Community Housing Company Ltd was registered as a company limited by guarantee by the National Companies and Securities Commission - see Box 6 (ASIC, 1985a). The business of the Newcastle Lake Macquarie Community Housing Trust was transferred to the new company, and the name shortened to the less than intuitive acronym of 'Newmacq'. The move to a new company structure appears to have been long and complicated - the main company documents were signed on 27 September 1984, some five months before they were formally lodged.

THE BUSINESS OF THE NEWCASTLE LAKE MACQUARIE COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE NEW COMPANY, AND THE NAME SHORTENED TO THE LESS THAN INTUITIVE ACRONYM OF 'NEWMACQ'.

Governance in the early years

Companies limited by guarantee have 'members', each subscribing a nominal amount of capital ($2 for Newmacq), with their liability limited to the amount they have subscribed. The strong community support for Newmacq is shown by their impressive list of 102 founding members, most of whom lived in Newcastle rather than Lake Macquarie. The names include Don Bowman MP, the Reverend William Brown, the Reverend Jim Gallagher, current and future directors, tenants and future staff members such as Louise Wilde and Margaret Lawrence (ASIC, 1985b).

Newmacq's founding directors were all from the local Newcastle area - Merewether, Hamilton and Islington. The key director, who submitted the official forms and presumably led company formation, was Hilary Bradbury. Hilary, with a background in social work, was Chairperson of the Steering Committee in 1983 - a position that potentially developed based on her role as a director of the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Interagency. Other founding directors were community worker Tracey O'Shea and property manager Therese McLean (both of whom had been on the Steering Committee), as well as town planner Coralie Kelly and office clerk Kathryn Larkey.

Founding Company Secretary was Chris Dodds who had experience as a community worker at Jenny's Place women's refuge (1978-1984), and Newcastle Neighbourhood Centre (1984-1993). Later he became a Director and then President of the Australian Council of Social Service.

Chris Dodds is an example of the benefits gained by the newly established community housing organisations from a generation of empowered and experienced local activists. Groups such as the Newcastle Neighbourhood Centre, whose predecessor had been established through Whitlam Government funding, continued a decade later to help establish community organisations such as Newmacq when funding opportunities emerged. According to Dodds, Newmacq 'was just another community group we helped' (personal communication).

The founding directors were appointed only until the date of the inaugural Annual General Meeting on 17 April 1985. At this stage the founders were re-elected, and joined by Alderman Alma Tate - who had also been a leading light on the Interim Committee - along with company director Margaret Gomas, civil engineer Colin Neal and John Chiplin who was Regional Manager of the Newcastle Permanent Building Society The professional directors were joined by three others - one retired and two undertaking 'home duties' (ASIC, 1985d).

In November 1985, the 'founding mothers' of Newmacq - Hilary Bradbury, Tracie O'Shea, Coralie Kelly and Alma Tate - resigned from the Board to make way for new talent (ASIC, 1985e). Chris Dodds resigned as Company Secretary a year later. Alma Tate was modest in how she described her role in supporting the organisation:

> *'They just wanted a leader, but … they had all the ideas. We had a wonderful time in the early years. Then they took over the organisation - I knew they could do it (personal communication).*

For the next few years the regular pattern of the Board was for an annual change of up to a third of the directors, and for increasing tenant board representation. By June 1986 for example, six of the eight directors - including the President and Vice President - were tenants (ASIC, 1986).

Box 6: Foundation day: 12 February 1985

CHRIS DODDS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE STRENGTHS GAINED BY THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS FROM A GENERATION OF EMPOWERED AND EXPERIENCED LOCAL ACTIVISTS.

Newmacq's business model in the mid-1980s

The initial 1983 consultancy report had recommended a staffing structure of three people: a director paid $23,000, a Tenants Coordinator paid $18,000 and an Office Manager paid $12,000 (NLMI, 1983: p.38). The audited accounts from 1984-85 to 1987-88 confirm expenditure on staff costs around this level, and it is likely just three staff were employed.

One of the first staff members was Therese Maclean, former Chairperson of the Steering Committee that prepared the consultancy report in 1983 on the viability of establishing a Community Tenancy Scheme. Another was Louise Wilde, a former employee of Therese when she worked for a private real estate agent, who found her move to community housing being like 'leaving the dark side' (personal communication). Louise later moved from staff to become a Newmacq director, then joined the Newcastle Tenants Advice and Housing Referral Service.

> DURING THIS PERIOD NEWMACQ WAS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING ESTABLISH LONGER TERM HOUSING OPTIONS FOR WOMEN, ESPECIALLY THOSE ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

Newmacq managed up to 92 tenancies during the mid-1980s, as fixed under the Community Tenancy Scheme contract. It probably took longer than anticipated to acquire the full quota of properties, and by June 1985 there was a healthy cash balance of $140,000 invested with the Newcastle Permanent Building Society and Commonwealth Bank. As this had been built up due to delivery of below target housing outcomes, in the year to June 1986 some $65,000 was refunded to the NSW Housing Commission and used to buy a property at Waratah, Newcastle (ASIC, 1986). Ownership of the property was by the Commission, not Newmacq.

Most Newmacq properties appear to have been head-leased from private landlords in this period, with annual expenditure of over a quarter of a million dollars by 1986-87. The organisation was heavily dependent on public grants, which contributed 65% of income - a figure far in excess of tenant rental receipts. Surpluses were made except in 1985-86 when grant funding was returned to Government.

During this period Newmacq was also instrumental in helping establish longer term housing options for women, especially those escaping domestic violence. A coordinator worked from the Newmacq offices in Newcastle, then Newmacq acted as mentor to the Women's Housing Company that is now a major organisation based in Sydney (Therese McLean, personal communication).

Box 7: Regional Community Tenancy Schemes
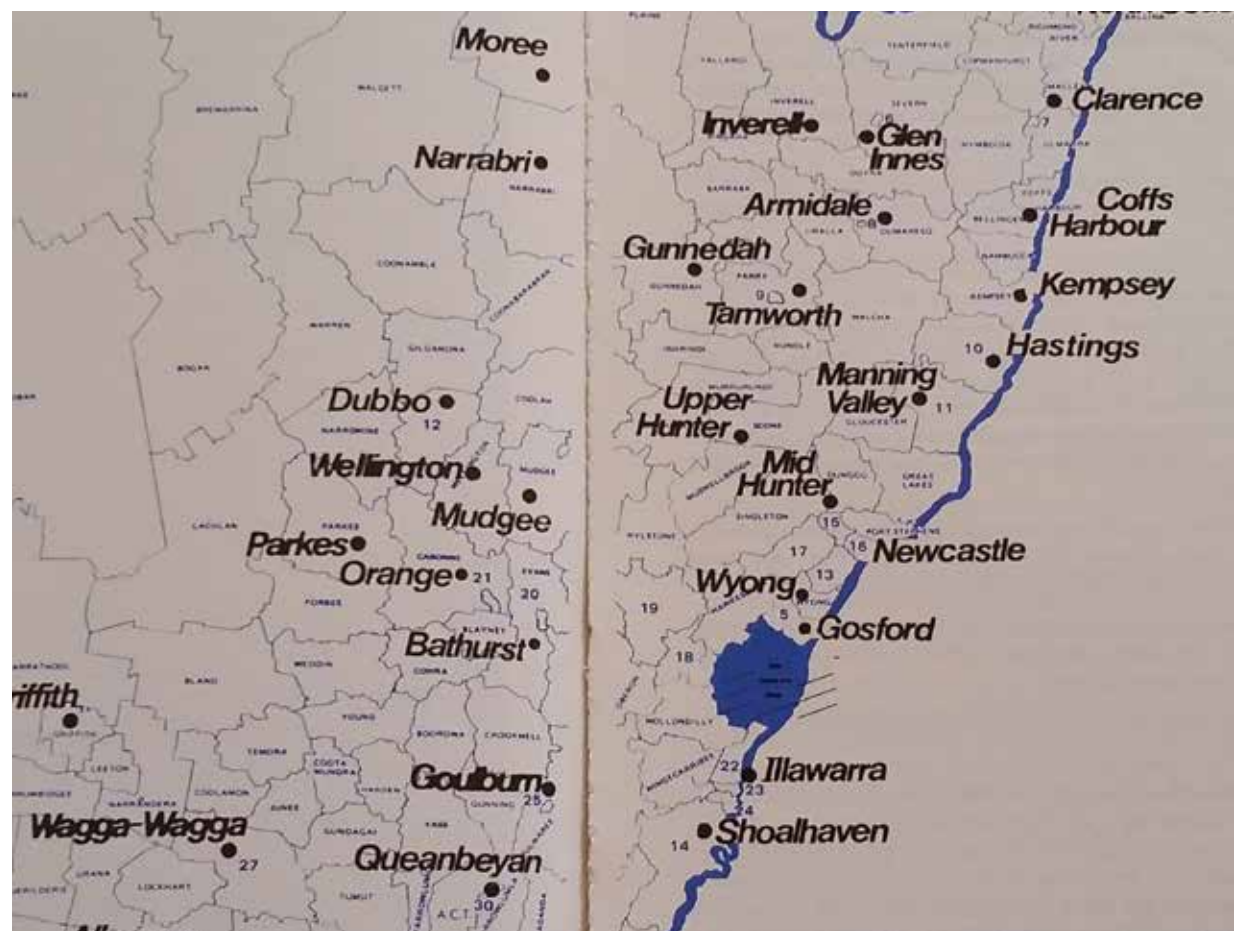
Source: Milligan and Housing Commission of NSW (1985)

Newmacq in the region

Box 7 shows the location of community housing providers in the area north of Sydney that had been established by 1985. For the first decade of the sector in NSW, most remained in their originally designated area and mergers were rare.

As shown in Table 1, Newmacq was by far the largest community housing provider in the Hunter region in 1985, around three times the size of the others. Over time, many of the smaller local Hunter region organisations lost their independence - including two that joined Compass.

Of the twelve original Community Tenancy Schemes shown in Box 7, there are now only four community housing providers - Compass, Pacific Link, Community Housing Limited and Homes North. This is a good example of the process of gradual mergers between many of the original Schemes, and an indication that in general they merged with other organisations around the same area.

Table 1: Community housing providers north of Sydney, 1985

REGION	COUNCIL AREAS	CTS NAME	HOUSEHOLDS	FUTURE TRENDS
Hunter	Newcastle, Lake Macquarie	Newmacq Community Housing Ltd	92	Changed name to Compass in 2007
	Murrurundi, Muswellbrook, Scone, Singleton, Merriwa	Upper Hunter Community Tenancy Scheme	35	Joined Newmacq in 2006
	Gloucester, Great Lakes, Taree	Manning Community Housing Co-op Ltd	30	Merged to form Mid North Coast in 1996, then from 2009 part of Community Housing Limited
	Cessnock, Dungog, Maitland, Port Stephens	Mid Hunter Community Housing Association Ltd	34	Merged in 1996 to form Pacific Link Housing
North East Metropolitan	Gosford	Gosford/Woy Woy Rental Housing Association	43	
	Wyong	Wyong Shire Rental Housing Corporation Ltd	47	Joined Compass in 2010
New England	Armidale and surrounds	Armidale Community Tenancy Scheme	21	Merged in 1998 to form Homes North Community Housing
	Gunnedah	Gunnedah Community Tenancy Association	15	
	Tamworth and surrounds	Tamworth District Housing Association Ltd	35	Merged with Homes North in 2007
North Coast	Kempsey	Macleay Community Tenancy Scheme	21	Merged to form Mid North Coast in 1996, then from 2009 part of Community Housing Limited
	Hastings	Hastings and Camden Haven Community Tenancy Scheme	21	
	Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Nambucca	Coffs Harbour Community Tenancy Scheme	21	

Source: Data sourced from Milligan and Housing Commission of NSW (1985), Farrar (2014) and website search.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

NSW's community housing sector can be firmly dated back to 1983-84. During this period there was both a quirky interpretation of Commonwealth funding intended for quite different purposes and, under the Whitlam Government, a shift to solid regular support for the growing sector. NSW stands out as unusual by Australian standards for having the Community Tenancy Scheme, and as a publicly run program, which left an indelible mark on the future shape of the sector through its ordered geographical approach.

Although the seeds of Community Tenancy Scheme funding were sowed far and wide in NSW, they fell on particularly fertile soil in Newcastle. The city region had arguably the strongest coalition in any regional area between a progressive, interventionist council and a band of empowered community activists. Many who provided leadership, from both council and community, as well as in the state bureaucracy, were women. They have left a strong legacy both through their work at Newmacq/Compass, and the many successes they have achieved in the wider community, policy and academic fields over the last three decades.

Newmacq was forged in steel, though built on shaky foundations. As the fourth largest Community Tenancy Scheme in NSW it had a degree of scale, and could rely on favourable links to the council and community. It also could take some benefit from being distant from Sydney, occasionally falling below the radar. However, as with all such community housing groups, it could only survive with significant and regular grant funding and this would require commitment from both State and Commonwealth.
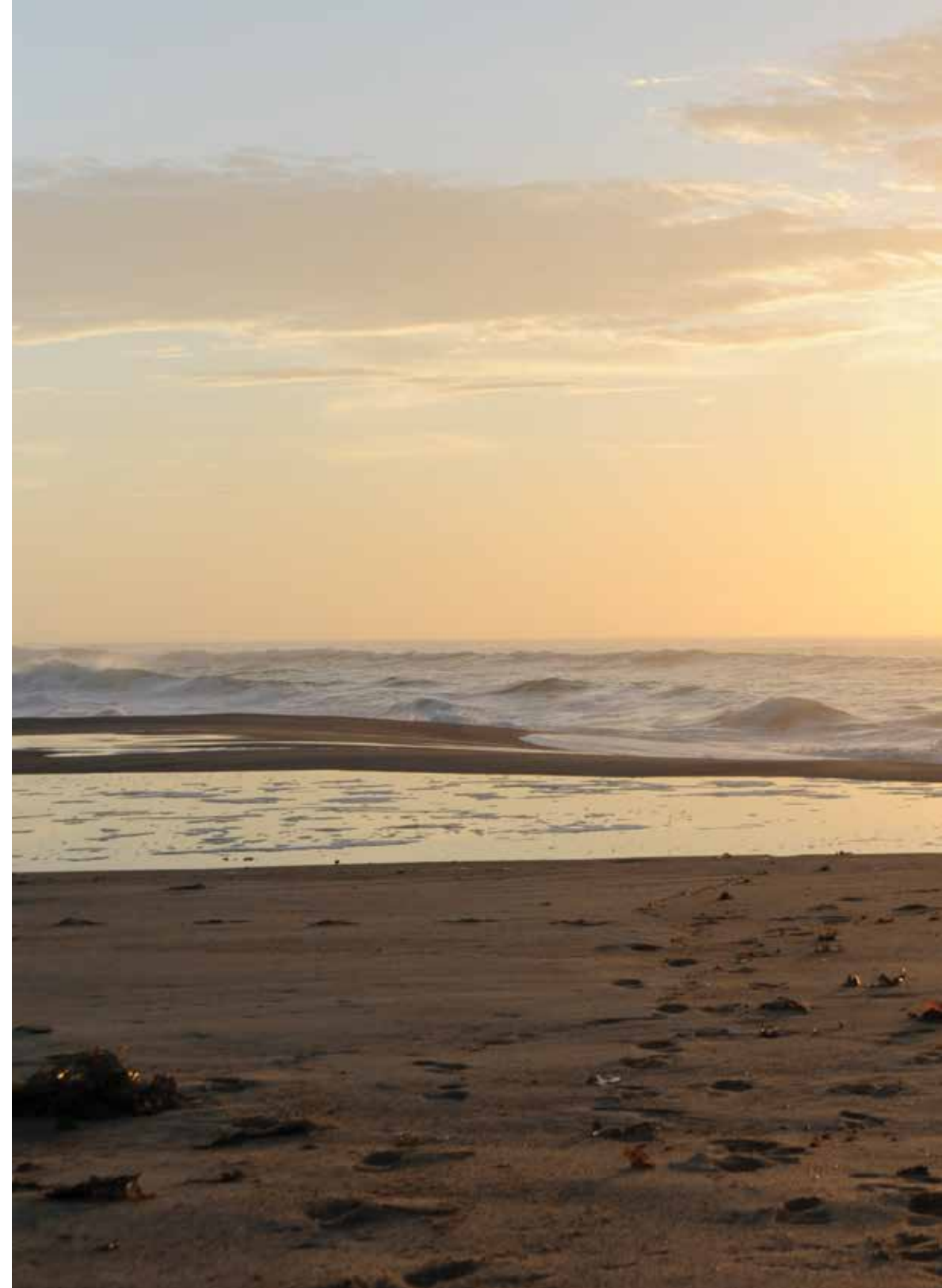
THE POLITICS OF HOUSING: NEWMACQ 1988-1996

Looking around the developed world, there is no general pattern as to whether community housing is the favoured approach to social housing by the political left, right or centre. For example, while several early initiatives in Britain and the United States were from the progressive side of politics, there is now a general consensus that not-for-profit housing is an established part of the housing system. In contemporary Australasia, tenancy management outsourcing to the community housing sector has been pushed by the right in New Zealand and Queensland, and by the left in Tasmania and South Australia.

In Australia during the 1980s, the water was muddier. Commonwealth Labor helped promote the building of community capacity under Whitlam (1972-1975), then the Hawke Government from 1983 built community housing funding into the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. However, for many State bureaucrats and politicians the Housing Commission was an achievement Labor should be proud of, and diverting resources to hard-to-control community groups may tarnish the legacy.

In March 1988, only weeks after the bunting had been taken down for the celebrations on Sydney Harbour of two centuries of white settlement, 12 years of NSW Labor rule came to an end. Under Coalition Premiers Nick Greiner (1988-1992) and John Fahey (1992-1995), community housing would be thrown into turmoil.

COMMUNITY HOUSING UNDER ATTACK

Under the previous Labor Government the Community Tenancy Scheme has been put under the control of the Housing Commission in January 1984. Then, in January 1986, the NSW Housing Commission changed to become the Department of Housing, with six independent members and the Chief Executive, the Department would be more under the control of the Housing Minister.

Appointed in 1988, the new State Coalition Housing Minister, Joe Schipp, supported a more traditional role for the Department of Housing. Staff employed in the Community Programs Unit were reduced from 50 to 21, and Shelter NSW, the Tenants Advice and Referral Service and the Tenants Union were defunded (Matka, 1999: p.9). Schipp's concerns were said to be that community housing duplicated the work of the Housing Commission, that it was not cost effective, and tenants may be able to 'queue jump' (PACTS, 1988: p.2).

With many fearing the Community Tenancy Scheme was in the firing line, three months of picketing was organised outside the Minister's office. In September 1988 a group representing the interests of Scheme members made a submission to the Minister, noting:

'CTS [Community Tenancy Scheme] represents a considerable housing sector which is largely, and increasingly controlled by the tenants themselves. CTS has encouraged a self-help attitude among tenants, and this has been enthusiastically picked up by many tenants (ibid., p.2) ... CTS is developing into a tenant managed housing sector ... This is the single most important aspect of the Community Tenancy Scheme' (p.3).

'It is the policy of many CTS schemes to employ tenants wherever possible ... The employment of tenants on a paid or voluntary basis benefits the scheme as well as the tenant' (p.12).

'CTS could form the basis of a non-profit housing sector which can use funds from the private sector to provide secure housing to low and moderate income earners independent of government budgetary decisions' (p.2).

The lobbying document produced in 1988 shows both the continuity and the change with the sector nearly three decades later. On the one hand, there is a far greater emphasis on the direct empowerment of staff and tenants in the early days, with the vision of a 'tenant managed sector'. On the other hand, the vision is already in place for a more independent and commercially orientated sector. Much of the tension between these themes emerged from the late 1990s onwards, and are still an issue in the sector today.

Fortunately, for whatever reason, the sector survived the attack by the Housing Minister in 1988. Perhaps Vivienne Milligan's map made the difference. By spreading Community Tenancy Schemes far and wide across the state, in every major town, the beast became difficult to dislodge. Newmacq was deeply embedded in the region, working closely with community groups and two councils. Local MPs were lobbied, not just in big cities like Newcastle with strong Labor loyalties, but in country areas where Coalition parties were strong.

> COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS WERE FORCED TO BECOME MORE BUSINESSLIKE AND EFFICIENT, AND OVER THE NEXT DECADE THERE WOULD BE PRESSURE FOR CONSOLIDATION IN THE SECTOR.

Despite surviving the political threat, the rules of the game were changed for Community Tenancy Schemes. Funding remained steady, while numbers of tenancies under management increased: Newmacq's funded staff hours reduced from 92 to 70 per week, while tenancies rose from 92 to 128 (Newmacq, 1989a). Rent setting was raised from 20% to 25% of tenant household income. Community housing organisations were forced to become more businesslike and efficient, and over the next decade there would be pressure for consolidation in the sector.

Reforming the Department of Housing

Three years later, a new threat emerged. This time it was from the NSW public housing bureaucracy, never a great supporter of community housing in the early days. An internal report in 1992 recommended that the Department should take-back 500 'capital' properties owned by Government and managed by the community sector. This would leave Community Tenancy Schemes with the more modest role of running properties head-leased from private landlords, and providing short term accommodation for people on the waiting list (Matka, 1999: p.14).

Again, this time due to lobbying not street protests, the threat to community housing was defeated. However, the respective roles of public and community housing remained contested. Critics from the right saw Community Tenancy Schemes as costly, and hot-beds of radicalism. By contrast, some on the left saw community housing as the first step towards the privatisation of social housing.

Next it was the Department of Housing that came under attack. The NSW Ombudsman had launched an investigation in 1991 into their handling of the Local Government and Community Housing Program. Given how the sector has felt in subsequent decades about Government decision making - or lack of - the report was prescient in noting 'a mystifying bureaucratic maze has abstracted the approval and funding [of community based housing initiatives], in some cases for years' (NSW Ombudsman, 1993: p.1).

New approaches to the community housing sector

In parallel to the NSW Ombudsman, planning consultant John Mant undertook a review for Government of the Department of Housing in which he noted that 'public housing has become purely a welfare function' (Mant, 1992: p.6). His radical call for a level playing field in funds allocation between public and community housing has still not been realised. However, his influential report led to a major shift with community housing being seen for the first time as an alternative social housing provider to the Department.

The Commonwealth was also becoming more supportive of the sector. In January 1993 the Community Housing Program was established to 'create an expanded, more viable community housing sector which is capable of meeting specific client needs' (NSW Department of Housing, 1993: p.36). The new approach incorporated the earlier Local Government and Community Housing Program, established 1984.

In August 1993 the NSW sector had their first specific policy document, the Community Housing Strategic State Plan as required under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (Brian Elton & Associates, 1994). Brian Elton had been one of the driving forces behind establishing the Community Tenancy Scheme in 1983, and was back as a consultant in 1994 advocating for a growth strategy that could see the NSW sector expand from 3,695 homes in June 1993 to 7,100 over five years. In an early call for greater professionalisation, the report called for:

'performance against "benchmark" standards of service; greater administrative efficiency in housing service delivery … Just as the housing administration is undergoing rapid change in order to re-align itself with contemporary business practice, and importantly, to ensure a customer focus to its operations, there will be a requirement that the community housing sector will be similarly restructured.

The key growth proposals contained in the draft strategy are … to focus expansion of community housing on the development of housing associations; to target growth around a selected number of housing associations in metropolitan areas … the pursue a financial viability threshold of 200 properties for larger housing associations; and to encourage amalgamations between associations' (ibid, p.6).

New approaches to community housing developed from within Government. In 1994 a Ministry of Housing, Planning and Urban Affairs was established, to provide what Mant had been advocating - policy advice that was independent of the main social housing provider. Supporting this change were long term supporters of the sector including Vivienne Milligan who by 1995 was Director of the Office of Housing Policy.

In a letter sent to Newmacq on 11 April 1995, just one week after the election of Bob Carr as the first Labor Premier in seven years, Milligan announced that community tenants in 'capital' properties could enjoy long term housing security, and consultations would start 'regarding the development of an integrated eligibility and allocation system for public and community housing' (Office of Housing Policy, 1995: p.1). This proposed seismic shift in the delivery of social housing in NSW was based on an announcement by the former Coalition Housing Minister, and would be implemented under Labor.

A run of Labor administrations between 1995 and 2011 provided policy certainty which, along with generous funding, started what may now be seen as the golden era of NSW Community Housing.

A SNAPSHOT OF NEWMACQ
IN THE EARLY 1990S

Newmacq's role had become firmly established by 1990 as 'providing housing to low income earners in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie area of New South Wales' (ASIC, 1990: p.1). However, there were few opportunities to grow during this period and meet the lengthening waiting list. The Coalition State Government remained unsupportive, and funding constrained.

Newmacq's quota of 92 tenancies under management had been set when the structure of the Community Tenancy Scheme was established in 1983. It remained at that level until 1990 when the Housing Minister Joe Schipp, who had challenged the future of the community housing sector just two years earlier, decided the NSW sector could increase from 2,257 properties to 3,148. All community housing providers increased by the same rate, and Newmacq's quota was re-set at 128 homes (Newmacq, 1989a). It would remain at this level until 1997.

Community Tenancy Scheme business model

Unlike today, where community housing organisations operate as social enterprises with a fair degree of say over their strategy and finances, the model in the 1990s was highly constrained. Community Tenancy Scheme organisations submitted annual budgets to Government, were told how much funding and properties they were entitled to, then monitored the following year on what they had achieved.

Control of housing providers was through contract - the Funding Agreement - rather than the contemporary approach of a semi-independent Regulator checking on governance and procedures. If the terms of the contract were met, Community Tenancy Scheme organisations could largely run their business as they saw fit within the constraints of limited funding. With over 45 schemes to manage in this period, across a large geographical area, the Department of Housing had little choice but to run an administrative approach.

The annual Funding Agreements required quarterly returns to be sent to the Department, including information on tenant numbers, arrears and overall finances. There were rules about insurance, conflicts of interest and which institution's funds could be deposited. Asset disposals over $1,500 or maintenance expenditure over $3,000 had to be approved in advance by the Department (NSW Department of Housing, 1994b). Therefore, although organisations were not 'regulated' in a contemporary sense, they were micro-managed through contract. Then there was the final sanction:

'Where the Ministry and the Department have serious concerns as to possible alleged misuse and/or misappropriation of funding, the Ministry may recall the funding provided … In the event of any breach or threatened or apprehended breach of any term of this Agreement the Ministry may … take whatever action is otherwise necessary or expedient' (ibid, p.7).

Newmacq in 1994

The earliest surviving Operating Budget provides a fascinating insight into the organisation's first ten years into the Community Tenancy Scheme (NSW Department of Housing, 1994a). Interestingly, all properties were in the Newcastle local government area and none in Lake Macquarie, suggesting the business did not live up to its 'Newmacq' name. The original consultants' report had suggested setting a minimum quota of 30% of homes to be in Lake Macquarie, a point not built into the organisation's founding documents (NLMI, 1983: p.7).

For the funding year 1994-95 Newmacq were approved to manage a total of 128 properties, 33 'capital' (owned by the Department of Housing) and 95 'leasehold' (head-leased from private landlords). This number remained unchanged from the previous year, despite a desperate need for additional properties. It was reported that Newmacq received 1,560 housing enquiries during 1993-94, and had 465 households on the waiting list as at June 1994 (NSW Department of Housing, 1994a).

Of the 128 properties leased from private landlords in 1994-95, 28% were separate houses, 5% attached houses and 67% units. Nearly all the units were one and two bedroom, while the houses were either three or four bedroom. This mirrored the differentiation between property types shown in the Housing Commission's Newcastle flats plans in the 1940s, as shown in Chapter One, where families with children had houses and others had to live in a unit.

There is an indication in the 1994-95 Funding Agreement that the office arrangement at 450 Hunter Street agreed by the Newcastle Permanent Building Society was not as generous as might have been expected from a mutually owned landlord. 'Previous rent was considered very expensive for Newcastle CBD location and will not be repeated in the new location' (ibid, p.12). In 1995 Newmacq moved to offices across the road from their original base, at Suite 5, 451-459 Hunter Street. This both saved money, and provided direct street access.

With Newmacq acting as a tenancy management organisation, and having no asset holdings, growth could only come from an increase in Government grants. Of total income in 1989-90, just over one third came from rent with the remainder from grants (ASIC, 1990). Newmacq often delivered a surplus, though made losses in four of the first ten years of trading.

By 1993-94 cumulative retained profits stood at $212,000 - around double the figure when the business was originally capitalised a decade earlier. In their 1994-95 grant application Newmacq recommended part of the surplus was used to purchase 'capital' properties, presumably to be owned by the Department (NSW Department of Housing, 1994a: p.19). This was not acted on, and the surplus remained in Newmacq's books providing a further indication of how little control the Community Tenancy Schemes had over their fate.

Governance

A snapshot of the Board in 1990 gives a flavour of approaches to governance. Of the 12 directors, 9 were tenant representatives (ibid.). Most Newmacq tenants were elected to the Board for a two year term, suggesting a good number of the organisation's tenants from their 120 rental properties might at some time serve as Directors. In most years the 'President' (Chairperson of the Board), and Vice President were tenants. Therefore, although Newmacq was constituted as a company limited by guarantee, it seems to have been run along similar lines to a housing cooperative.

The 1990 Newmacq Board also contained a number of professional people. These included Britt Armstrong - a student nurse who was a former employee, and Colin Neal - a senior manager of the State Railway Authority of NSW. Therese McLean, one of Newmacq's founders, describes Colin as 'probably the most profound community leader from a non-traditional background. Without his Treasury expertise over many years, I doubt the financials would have been successful ... we were able to do so much more with the grant money' (personal communication).

Peter Vale, the Regional Manager of the Newcastle Permanent Building Society, was also a director. Peter could keep close eye on his customer - Newmacq banked with the Society throughout this period. There were no formal links to the City of Newcastle Council, and no councillors or council staff have ever served on the Newmacq board. Alma Tate, mentioned in Chapter One, only served after she left council.

The Newmacq Board contained a diverse group of people. In 1989, for example, only three of the eleven directors had been born in the Newcastle area - the others were from Sydney, Victoria, Uruguay and Yugoslavia (ASIC, 1989). This perhaps reflects the migration to the Newcastle area at the time that coal and steel were booming.

As noted by Wendy McKenzie, a staff member at the time, the Board were powerful and had input into a number of operational issues including tenant selection. Most directors were tenants, and even some staff members. Though not intended by the Sydney officials who had helped establish the Community Tenancy Scheme, evidence from Newmacq suggest that the model had at times become a low-key community services approach rather than the more professionalised 'housing association' model found in Britain and the Netherlands.

Box 8: Newmacq Christmas party, 1989

Staff member Wendy McKenzie pictured left, and directors Wendy Bowie centre and Rada Dimovska on the right. A notice on the wall declares 'welcome to the funny farm'.

Source: Wendy McKenzie. Further details from Newmacq (1989a)

People and process

Although in the 1990s Newmacq did not produce annual reports describing their activities in detail, their ASIC accounts provide a few gems. The small offices on the second floor of 450 Hunter Street, Newcastle, were made more comfortable for staff with a Rinnai Multicooker, bought for $195 in 1990 (ASIC, 1990). This was followed by major investment in new technology - $2,000 computer equipment, and a $1,150 fax machine in 1992 (ASIC, 1992).

By 1993-94 Newmacq had splashed out on the latest must-have gadget, a mobile phone for $830 (ASIC, 1994). Staff befitted from $1,484 on travel cost reimbursement. Expenditure that same year was a little less on tenants - the entire annual spending on tenant training and participation was $84. However, even this figure was higher than 1993 when nothing was spent.

The 1991-92 annual accounts provide greater detail on staff and tenants. There were three members of staff, led by Margaret Lawrence who had joined in March 1986 and was paid $551.68 per week. She was joined by two part-time staff - Diane Evans on $333.06 per week and Rada Dimovska paid $255.51 per week.

Although three staff were employed, they were not all full time. In 1994-95 the staff worked respectively 32, 21 and 17 hours per week ranked by their seniority (NSW Department of Housing, 1994a). The total workforce is therefore equivalent to just two full time employees, or around one worker per 60 tenancies under management. With so few people employed, it seems likely their focus was on running the business day-to-day with little time for strategic vision.

Wendy McKenzie remembers the approach to staff management as informal and egalitarian, more like a collective (see Box 9). In a photograph supplied by Wendy McKenzie, there is a noticeboard on the wall that gives a flavour for how the organisation was run:

'Tenant control means tenants having the majority over non-tenants on the board. Tenants having real power. Tenants knowing what is happening in the scheme. Tenants having control.

... ACHIEVED. Tenant takeover of Boards at the Annual General Meeting.

... Tenants should be RESOURCED and ENCOURAGED to apply for Housing Officer jobs'.

In this environment, control systems might not have worked well. In 1991-2 there were 34 current tenants in arrears, mainly over unpaid rent, and a further 42 former tenants in owing rent and 20 owing for repairs (ASIC, 1992). At this date there were only 132 current tenants (Farrar, 2014). This provided some support for the critics within the Department of Housing who viewed some community housing providers during this period as being inefficient.

Box 9: Newmacq in the 1990s: a radical collective

Single parent Wendy Mackenzie started volunteering at Newmacq at the end of 1988 as part of a student placement from the Hunter Institute. She subsequently became a 'Tenant Worker' between October 1989 and November 1990. Wendy rented a Newmacq property and worked nine hours a week in the office.

Tenant selection was by the Board, most of whom were themselves tenants. However, Wendy remembers them being 'stricter than the staff' when enforcing tenant obligations.

The approach to running the organisation was radical. 'It was quiet a weird set-up, a collective looking back on it. There was no boss, which was pretty popular in the refuges at the time ... I remember there was one woman who would sit there and say 'I don't feel like working. And she didn't. I don't know how we pulled together - I think it was the board that made it work'.

In the late 1980s Newmacq 'was very community based, and tenant orientated ... They had a lot of volunteers, it was encouraged to hang around the office and have a tea or coffee. It was pretty informal'.

Source: Wendy McKenzie, personal communication.

BUILDING BETTER CITIES

In 1991 politics intervened in Newmacq's development, this time in a positive way. The Hawke Commonwealth Government, in cooperation with the States, launched an ambitious new program to improve the quality of urban living. 'Building Better Cities' received national funding of over $800 million between 1991 and 1996, with projects in 26 areas based on a competitive tender (Neilson, 2008). Behind the plan was Brian Howe MP, Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services, supported by Allan Morris - MP for Newcastle (see Box 10). It was one of those rare times when the Commonwealth intervened in urban policy, and the timing was good for both Newcastle and Newmacq.

Of the $278 million allocated to NSW under Building Better Cities, the two key projects were high density affordable housing at Ultimo-Pyrmont in central Sydney and the redevelopment of the Honeysuckle area of industrial Newcastle. The thin strip of land adjacent to Newcastle harbour and stretching from the main railway station to Throsby Creek at Wickham, was transferred to the Honeysuckle Development Corporation in 1992 (HDC, 2012).

SCHEMES SUCH AS HONEYSUCKLE COULD BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES TO DELIVER HIGH QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND UP-SCALE HOUSING.

The political drive for Honeysuckle was to boost the local economy given the faltering heavy industrial sector, and attract white collar service sector businesses and government departments to relocate from Sydney (Stevenson, 1998). Schemes such as Honeysuckle could breathe new life into disadvantaged communities to deliver high quality infrastructure and up-scale housing. However, care was needed to prevent gentrification through lower income residents being forced to move from areas where they had often lived for generations.

Affordable homes initiatives

It was to be the community housing sector which would provide new affordable housing in regenerated dockland settings. Governments were looking for community partners under Building Better Cities, though many of the existing housing providers were small and lacked skills. For the Ultimo-Pyrmont project, NSW Government established a new not-for-profit organisation - City West Housing in 1994. It would become the leading affordable developer of the period, delivering 365 modest-rental homes by 2005 (Milligan et al., 2004). Fortunately Newmacq's regional profile was strong enough in the mid-1990s that they became the Building Better Cities partner for Honeysuckle, although only as tenancy manager.

In 1996 State Government and Newcastle City Council signed a funding agreement to 'demonstrate and maintain innovative approaches to the development of urban housing in Inner Newcastle'. The program aimed to 'foster co-operation between government and private and community housing sectors', and ensure 'a proportion of developments provide affordable housing opportunities for the 'economy' end of the rental and/or home buyer markets' (City of Newcastle, 2009).

In 1996 the Commonwealth provided Newcastle City Council with $23.5 million to support affordable housing. The largest part of the funding, $12.5 million, was used to develop an initial 85 two and three bedroomed affordable rental properties managed by Newmacq across six inner-city Newcastle suburbs. Only some were located in expensive waterfront locations, though all aimed to blend-in well with surrounding owner-occupied properties so that passers-by could not tell who owned or who rented.

The affordable housing was deliberately designed to be a new housing product. Allan Morris, a promoter of the Building Better Cities program, and later Newmacq Chairperson, noted:

'These properties were not provided to the Department of Housing but originally to the Department of Planning in an attempt to develop a method of providing affordable rental properties for people engaged in the workforce but who were on low incomes. They were deliberately and quite specifically not to be included into normal departmental stock nor were they to be tenant specific in terms of particular groupings' (Newmacq, 2004a: p.4).

Affordable housing was aimed at households with annual incomes between $20,000 and $50,000, of which 70% must come from employment. Eligible tenants paid a discounted market rent, though up to a maximum of 27% household income. Unfortunately unlike with City West, asset title never transferred to Newmacq, which limited their growth options and the ability to move away from just being tenancy managers.

Box 10: Making Newcastle a better city

(Left to right) Newcastle MP Allan Morris, Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe, Newcastle Lord Mayor John McNaughtton and Honeysuckle Chairperson David Le Marchant - photo taken in the early 1990s.

Alan Morris, a computer programmer by training, served as Alderman on Newcastle City Council from 1974 to 1983. During this period Council passed their first housing strategy, and helped established Newmacq. He was Commonwealth MP for Newcastle from 1983 to 1991, helping the development of Building Better Cities. The next year after leaving Parliament he joined the Newmacq Board (see Chapter 3).

Photo Credit - Hunter Development Corporation

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The period from 1988-1996 saw fundamental shifts in the role of community housing in NSW. Although the significant challenge to the sector by Housing Minister Joe Schipp was repelled, community housing now had to operate in a more businesslike way. Funding was tightened, and detailed controls were imposed through Government funding contracts.

Like many in the sector in this period, staff and directors of Newmacq appeared to see the organisation as a type of tenant cooperative. There were few changes to their business model and scale of operation, and no leadership drive for new business ventures. Although the Building Better Cities program would have a longer term impact, no properties were received until later in the 1990s. It was fortunate that MP Allan Morris had secured funding for Newcastle, and knew Newmacq from his days at the City Council.

The 1988 debates on the future of community housing in NSW had shown two inter-related strands of thinking. One focused more on tenant empowerment, with organisations positioned as a hybrid form of cooperatives, the other emphasised growth and efficiency and was based on the European housing association model. Brian Elton's 1994 report pointed to a leaner, more commercial and at-scale sector where the successful community housing providers received most funding.

While Newmacq were firmly in the cooperative mode, it was the housing association model that became dominant. This led to troubled times at Newmacq, as will be seen in the next chapter, and eventually challenged the organisation's survival.

"

THE BUILDING BETTER CITIES PROGRAM WAS VERY TIMELY FOR NEWCASTLE. THE PROVISION OF OVER $20 MILLION ALLOWED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OVER 100 RESIDENCES IN AN EMBRYONIC AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM. NEWMACQ(COMPASS) WAS AT THE FOREFRONT OF NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND NEWCASTLE RESIDENTS GAINED A NEW AND EXTREMELY IMPORTANT ACCESS ROUTE TO AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION. IT ALSO MEANT THAT NEWMACQ WAS THE ONLY SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDER IN AUSTRALIA OFFERING BOTH SOCIAL HOUSING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND THUS OBTAINING THE BENEFIT OF THE BALANCING OF POLICIES AND PROCESSES WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE TWO STRANDS. THIS PROVIDED AN EXCELLENT BASE FOR THE LONGER TERM DEVELOPMENT OF COMPASS.

Allan Morris

NEWMACQ AT THE CROSSROADS: 1997-2004

The mid 1990s had seen significant shifts in favour of the community housing sector. Provision of long term housing was back on the agenda, and both NSW parties accepted community housing as being an established - if somewhat modest - part of the social housing system. Newmacq, which was to benefit significantly from the Building Better Cities program would face a number of new opportunities. Did the organisation seize the moment?

COMMUNITY HOUSING STEPS UP A GEAR

Under the Carr NSW Labor Government, elected in April 1995, the community housing sector was forecast to grow rapidly. In 1996 the state's third Community Housing Strategy proposed the sector increase properties under management from 5,271 in mid-1995 to 13,326 by June 1999 (DUAP, 1996). In 1996 the Office of Community Housing was established, under the Department of Urban and Affairs and Urban Planning, separate from public housing, to:

'... foster community housing as an alternative provider system [and] the avoidance of the conflicts of interest inherent in the Department of Housing administering the sector' (ibid, p.i).

Which branch of Government coordinates community housing has been a longstanding issue in NSW, as in other states, and the debate continues to the present day. The separation of the Office of Community Housing lasted only three years, and in April 1999 it became part of the Department of Housing (NSW Department of Housing, 1993).

In the early days, the Office of Community Housing had a regional presence, a key factor in building capacity and encouraging networking. The two person Hunter office was opened in Newcastle in 1997, covering a region from Foster in the north to the Central Coast in the south. Their role included 'advocating on regional community housing issues at a State level' (OCH, 1998b).

By 1998, community housing tenants enjoyed the same rights as those in public housing, with those in 'leasehold' properties finally being granted security of tenure, a right given to community housing tenants in 'capital' properties in 1995 (Nutting, 1998). By 2002 there was a voluntary common application for community housing, a starting point in the eventual move towards a common social housing waiting list.

However, the new vision for the community housing was of a segmented sector, with most additional resources concentrated on expanding what were now termed 'housing associations' - organisations funded under the Community Tenancy Scheme. Housing cooperatives and church groups were to take a back seat. Of the housing associations:

'It is intended to resource growth associations as the major components of the expansion of community housing. Up to 20 associations will be approved to grow to a minimum size of 200 dwellings over a four year period' (DUAP, 1996: p.5).

The suite of 1996 policy initiatives put in place much of the basic architecture of community housing delivery that remained in place in NSW until Labor lost power in 2011. Although some changes took time to implement, the 1996 Community Housing Strategy marked a major change. By 2000 Newmacq considered the 'competitive tendering process ... presents greater competition for properties and funding between existing and emerging housing providers' (Newmacq, 2000: p.6).

Emerging trends

Despite fears when the NSW Parliament launched an Inquiry into Community Housing in 2001 the final Report, finally published in 2003, found 'the evidence to this inquiry was overwhelmingly supportive of community housing, and this Report has focused on the many positive aspects of community housing provision' (NSW Parliament, 2003: p.xi). The Report was significant for the future role it contemplated for community housing in the future in raising private finance. As Shelter NSW noted:

'The current trend is for governments to withdraw from social expenditure and to narrow their areas of responsibility … In this climate, the only alternative to government subsidy is to raise private finance. This is one of the key reasons why the housing debate has moved so decisively towards the use of private capital to fuel social housing expansion (Shelter NSW, 2002: p.26).

The Report also foresaw that before private finance could be raised, regulatory controls would need to be tightened and there should be greater asset ownership. Both of these issues would become central themes for the sector during the first decade of the new millennium. In the meantime, the approach was to be through accreditation.

In exchange for additional growth funding, the 2006 Community Housing Strategy called for a new accreditation system to be introduced to ensure minimum standards of management and service delivery. The original accreditation standards, issued in 1998, were developed through a NSW project funded by the Commonwealth via the National Community Housing Forum. Between 1996 and 2006 - when it was defunded - the Forum acted as a clearing house for innovative ideas on developing a strategic vision for the sector. As a national body, it also helped break down the differences between approaches in different states.

NEWMACQ IN THE LATE 1990S

By June 1997 Newmacq had a new mission. Gone was the aim of 'providing housing to low income earners'. Instead Newmacq 'provides social housing in the areas of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie cities through the resources of two NSW State Government housing programs … the Community Tenancy Scheme … [and] the Affordable Housing Rental Program, funded under the former Commonwealth Government's Building Better Cities Program' (ASIC, 1997).

New leader, new style

In September 1997 Kelvyn Enright was appointed as Newmacq's Coordinator, also acting as Company Secretary. Born in New Zealand, Enright was by training a town planner and helped establish a new planning faculty in this area at the University of Canberra. Prior to joining Newmacq, he was founder and Chief Executive of Ainslie Village, an organisation providing low income housing for homeless men in Canberra.

There had always been a more senior member of staff at Newmacq, though their role remained largely administrative and few brought senior executive experience. Kelvyn Enright brought a new approach in both substance and style - one of his earliest moves was to build separate offices 'to simply provide the senior staff with a degree of visual and aural privacy' (Newmacq, 1998: p.4). There was also a new logo. In an interesting use of 'management speak', Enright hinted that the collectivist organisational culture needed to shift: 'we are still carrying a significant heritage from the past and much of this has to be redirected (ibid, p.7).

Like his successor Greg Budworth, Kelvyn Enright became involved with a series of roles beyond Newmacq. From the start he 'put some effort into networking both with a variety of peer organisations but also peak organisations in our sector' (Newmacq, 1998: p.4). Enright served as Secretary of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations from 1999 to 2001, then was President for the next two years to November 2003 (NSWFHA, 2003).

The organisation became noticeably more professional during 1997-98: computers arrived, tenant newsletters were typed not hand written, a company car leased and an annual report produced. Organisational culture change was even more pronounced at board level:

'The nature and style of reporting the staff activities to the Board of Directors has been brought closer in line with current corporate practice … The most pleasing development during the year has been the expressions of interest from at least five professional people in the community … and from some an indication of interest in standing for the Board … If this eventuates it will significantly strengthen the Board and bring us more towards the current standards for community service, limited by guarantee companies' (Newmacq, 1998: pp.4-5).

In 1990, nine of the twelve directors were tenants. Ten years later there was only one tenant out of eight directors (ASIC, 2000). By the turn of the Millennium, Newmacq's board was dominated by professionals - an architect, an economist, an accountant, a builder and a former general manager of a not-for-profit organisation.

Although there was a change in style at Newmacq, some people questioned whether deep organisational change had really taken place. Adam Farrar worked at the Federation when Kelvyn Enright was President and thought he was big on vision, but not always details, and did not have a good management style (personal communication). There also remained a strong connection between staff and tenants. As board member and herself a social housing tenant Sandra Calland noted, 'If something happened, if someone got a broken window, the staff would go and help them and clean it up. They know their tenants and it was a mateship type basis' (personal communication).

> BY THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM, NEWMACQ'S BOARD WAS DOMINATED BY PROFESSIONALS - AN ARCHITECT, AN ECONOMIST, AN ACCOUNTANT, A BUILDER AND A FORMER GENERAL MANAGER OF A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION.

In 1997 Newmacq used a simple, hand drawn logo using the full company name (above).

By 2001, a new logo had been chosen and a clearer by-line (above). The logo may well have been chosen from an early software package, and is the same as the one currently used by Homes North Community Housing.

The growth agenda

After a period of tenancy numbers under management remaining steady at 128 between 1990 and 1996, Newmacq entered a period of rapid growth (see Figure 1). This would be the one of the two main expansion periods for the organisation, the second starting in the late 2000s. In other periods, the business saw very little business growth.

Figure 1: Newmacq's take-off 1995-2001
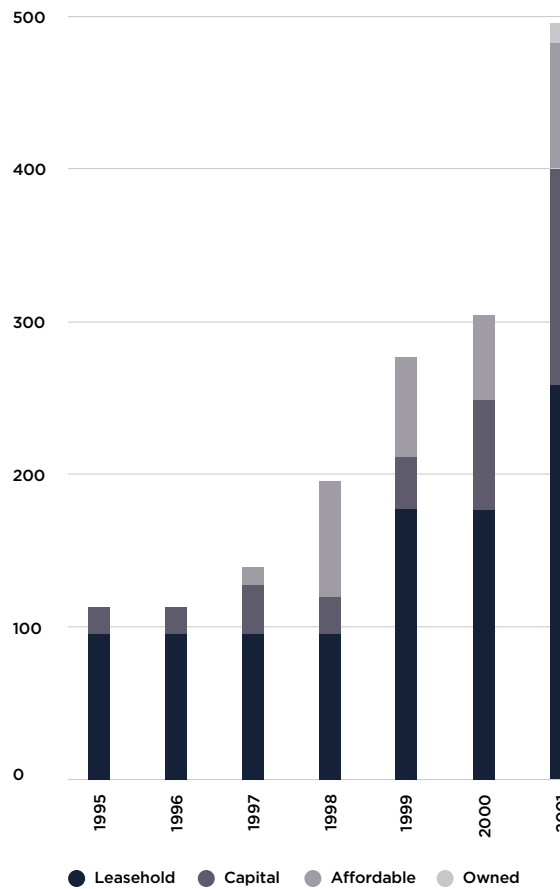
Source: ASIC returns and annual reports for Newmacq. 'Leasehold' are rented from private landlords; 'capital' are properties purchased by then leased from State Government; 'affordable' are funded under the Building Better Cities program'; 'owned' are purchased by Newmacq and rented as affordable dwellings (see notes below on Ironbark).

Newmacq become regional partner for the Building Better Cities program to manage affordable housing in the Honeysuckle precinct. Numbers of 'leasehold' properties were funded to increase from 95 to 172 in 1998-99. In the following year there was a growth in 'capital' properties, from 39 to 74, with a focus on providing additional accommodation in the Lake Macquarie area (Newmacq, 2000).

Government's priorities were clear, as Housing Minister Craig Knowles noted in a letter to Newmacq's Chairperson, Graham Gordon:

'These funds will provide housing opportunities for people seeking social housing and the allocation underlines my strong support for the expansion of the community housing sector through a partnership between Government and community based organisations' (Knowles, 1998).

Further growth came when Newmacq was successful in an 'expressions of interest' tender under the 1999-2000 Community Housing Program. As suggested in the 1996 Community Housing Strategy, contracts were going to be increasingly awarded to growth organisations through a process of competitive tendering. By 2001, Newmacq was claiming to manage 'around 500 properties' (NSWFHA, 2001: p.21). Timing was good given Newmacq's troubled next few years. Property numbers did not rise significantly above this figure until 2006-07.

There were a number of staff changes in the late 1990s, and a break from the team of three staff that had been in place since 1992 with Margaret Lawrence as Coordinator, and Rada Dimovska and Diane Evans as property managers (OCH, 1997). In 1998 Margaret Lawrence was replaced by Kelvyn Enright, Diane Lawrence left, and staff numbers increased from three part-time staff to four full-time employees (OCH, 1998a).

Box 12: Millennium Newmacq

Newmacq's 2000-01 business plan provides a rare glimpse of the organisation in January 2000 (Newmacq, 2000):

- Housing provided in two local government areas: Newcastle (80%); Lake Macquarie (20%).

- A good mix of tenure types.

55% Leasehold

21% Affordable

24% Capital
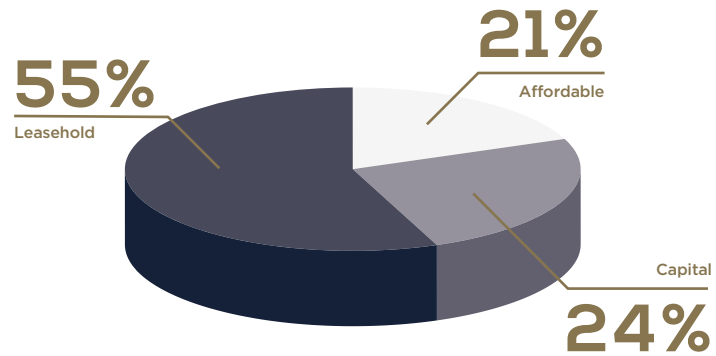
- A wide mix, but generally smaller properties than provided through public housing. Demand for housing, based on the waiting list, is in line with the current property mix.

29% 3+ Bed

32% 1 Bed

39% 2 Bed
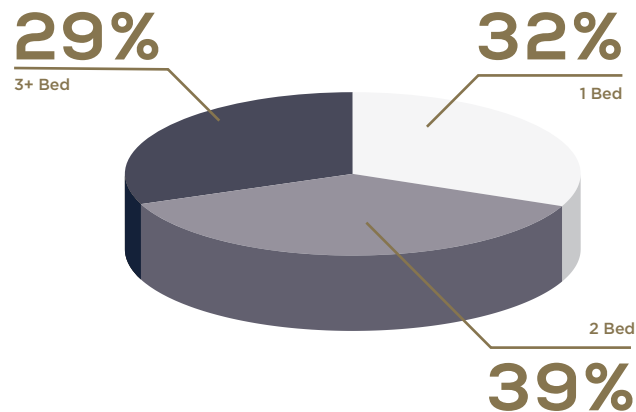
The affordable housing business

The affordable homes delivered under the Better Building Cities program first became available in 1996-7, rising to 65 dwellings by 1997-98 and to 89 in 2000-01. In 1998 the split was one third affordable housing and two thirds social housing, a proportion that would not be reached again by Newmacq and has never been equalled by any other mainstream NSW community housing provider.

As can be seen from newspaper advertisements in 1998, attracting suitable affordable housing tenants needed a new approach (Box 13). The adverts were often placed in the private rental section of local newspapers, and emphasised the quality and attractiveness of the properties. However, they were only available to 'interested wage earners'.

Newmacq's affordable housing was aimed at people employed with incomes up to $30,000 a year, and these people paid a maximum of 27% of their income on rent as established under the Building Better Cities guidelines. This is a different model than the one adopted in recent years where affordable rents are set at a discount to market rent. Tenants living in Newmacq's social housing would need to be on a lower income to qualify, and pay only 25% of household income on rent (Newcastle Herald, 1999).

The affordable properties developed in and around central Newcastle were designed not to stand out, as Honeysuckle Development's General Manager commented 'the beauty is that you won't be able to tell the difference' (Croxton, 2001). There were, however, some grumbles. Newmacq had to buy curtains for some affordable rental units in Linwood after neighbours complained tenants had hung sheets across their windows (Kirkwood, 2004).

Box 13: Finding affordable housing tenants

Source: Newcastle Times (1998a; b)

Ironbark and the move towards property ownership

Despite the best intentions of many of the original architects of the Community Tenancy Scheme, social housing assets by and large remained owned by State Government. Community housing was seen more of tenancy management than an asset business. As a result, housing providers remained closely tied to annual public grants and had few opportunities to increase their housing portfolios other than by merger.

Newmacq's balance sheet at June 1998 was typical of NSW community housing providers, with just over $400,000 as a cash deposit at the bank of which $287,000 was reserved for future property maintenance liabilities (ASIC, 1998). They owned no assets, and would likely not be allowed by Government to raise bank loans to start acquiring a property portfolio.

Although State public funding for community housing was increasing gradually, it could not keep pace with demand. Newmacq's waiting list tripled to 900 households in the year to June 1998 'despite serious culling' (Newmacq, 1998). The election of a Coalition Commonwealth Government under John Howard in March 1996 suggested there would be no real increase in national funding for social housing, therefore, according to Enright:

'… we therefore need to urgently move to establish sources of non-government funds and establish alternative procedures in order to continue to provide appropriate social housing in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas' (ibid, p.6).

Enterprising Kelvyn Enright devised a way of bypassing Government restrictions, using what would today be described as 'off balance sheet finance'. On 4 April 1999 Ironbark Housing Company Limited (Ironbark) was established 'to provide and maintain best practice low-cost or economy housing … for those in need or under threat' (ASIC, 1999: p.2). The Ironbark board comprised of Enright, the Newmacq office manager, and two other Newmacq directors.

Newmacq provided a small loan to Ironbark, but the company was not consolidated into the 'Newmacq group'. In early 2001 Ironbark acquired a property at 33 Frith Street, Kahibah valued at $311,000 and financed by a bank loan of $289,000 - see Box 14 (ASIC, 2001). The fibro 1960s property contained six one bedroom and one two bedroom units (WMS, 2000).

Box 14: The first owned property, acquired 2001

Although in years to come Newmacq/Compass would build an impressive property portfolio, the first fibro cottages were unprepossessing. Due to their poor condition and cramped living space, the new management team at Compass sold the units in the late 2000s. The properties are still standing.

ALTHOUGH STATE PUBLIC FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING WAS INCREASING GRADUALLY, IT COULD NOT KEEP PACE WITH DEMAND. NEWMACQ'S WAITING LIST TRIPLED TO 900 HOUSEHOLDS IN THE YEAR TO JUNE 1998 'DESPITE SERIOUS CULLING'

Merger mania?

By the late 1990s Government took positive steps to encourage consolidation in the community housing sector. Guidelines on amalgamation funding were included in the Office of Community Housing's 1996-97 budgets, though in a pencilled comment made on the original submitted document it was noted 'does not apply to Newmacq' (OCH, 1997: p.16).

Many of the original Community Tenancy Schemes had been set at a modest scale, the smallest having a minimum of only 21 tenancies. This was the typical size of organisations established in regional location such as the North Coast, New England and Western regions of NSW (Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985). With the push by the Office of Community Housing for greater scale and efficiency, most early mergers took place in the regions (Matka, 1997).

> BY THE LATE 1990S GOVERNMENT TOOK POSITIVE STEPS TO ENCOURAGE CONSOLIDATION IN THE COMMUNITY HOUSING SECTOR.

Community Tenancy Schemes were progressively established in NSW, reaching a peak of 61 organisations by the early 1990s (NSW Department of Housing, 1993). Two of the early regional mergers that took place in 1996 were in areas close to where Newmacq operated, with Gosford/Woy Woy merging with Mid Hunter to form Pacific Link, and Manning with Kempsey, Hastings and Coffs Harbour to form Mid North Coast (see Table 1). By the end of 1997 the number of NSW community housing providers had fallen to 47, a drop of nearly a quarter.

Mergers were one factor changing the ranking of organisations in the NSW community housing sector. Table 2 highlights that, despite Newmacq's impressive growth in tenancies managed the late 1990s shown in Figure 1, they fell behind other larger organisations in the sector.

Table 2: Larger NSW community housing providers, 1992-2006

	JUNE 1992	JULY 2003	JULY 2006
Providers	62	43	39
Tenancies	3,160	11,095	13,075
No. 1	Newmacq (132)	St George (887)	St George (1,282)
No. 2	ESRHA (128)	Hume (758)	Hume (1,010)
No. 3	Illawarra (126)	Pacific Link (700)	Pacific Link (810)
No. 4	Upper Hunter (72)	Argyle (574)	Cumberland (798)
No. 5	North Coast (70)	Wentworth (561)	Wentworth (670)
No. 6	Tamworth (69)	Women's Housing (536)	Argyle (653)
No. 7	Blue Mountains (67)	Newmacq (506)	SWISH (600)
No. 8	Fairfield (66)	Housing Trust (491)	Women's Housing (586)
No. 9	Liverpool (61)	Mid North Coast (468)	Housing Trust (583)
No. 10	Burwood (60)	SWISH (466)	Western Suburbs (543)
No. 11	Wagga Wagga (60)	North Coast (377)	Mid North Coast (520)
No. 12	Griffith (60)	Western Suburbs (371)	Newmacq (469)

Source: (Farrar, 2014). Numbers of tenancies managed in brackets. Notes: (1) Illawarra became known as the Housing Trust (2) Western Suburbs and Cumberland merged to form what is now Evolve Housing (3) SWISH is now Bridge Housing

From being the largest community housing provider in NSW in 1992, Newmacq fell to number twelve in 2006. Properties managed in the sector increased by 314% between 1992 and 2006, while Newmacq grew at only 255% - far slower than the 2,414% increase seen by St George Community Housing.

Of the organisations over-taking Newmacq in the NSW rankings, by 2003 the top five - St George, Hume, Pacific Link, Argyle and Wentworth - undertook a significant merger. With St George and Women's Housing, growth through increased grants was the main driver. State policy was increasingly favouring higher capacity community housing organisations operating in metropolitan Sydney. The proportion of the top 12 providers mainly operating in the Sydney basin increased from 33% in 1992 to 58% in 2003 and 67% in 2006.

Newmacq's relatively slow growth probably came from the conservative approach of their management team. In evidence Kelvyn Enright gave in person to the Senate Inquiry into community housing in 2002, his more limited view of the future of the sector is evident:

> 'If you look at the United Kingdom experience ... you will see that you need to be pretty wary when you start to push organisations to more than 1,000 properties. The big ones in the United Kingdom have monumental difficulties

> ''...I see the locational focus - perhaps it is [my background] as a town planner - as far more significant for the quality of our work. The big message that came from the United Kingdom is ... "do not get out of your area". The organisations that have got out of the area are the ones that have lost focus' (NSW Parliament, 2002: p.39; p.53).

While some community housing providers in both Australia and Britain have stayed within their original geography, many have not. In the main this has been driven by the need to achieve scale economies so that a broader range of property and community services can be delivered. Few now believe 1,000 properties is an upper limit on organisational size.

TROUBLED TIMES FOR NEWMACQ

Community housing providers are not immune from the kind of organisational problems faced by the corporate sector. Chief Executives can make the wrong decision, staff turn dishonest, boards become dysfunctional and development projects lose money. The difference between the corporate and community sector is that organisations such as Newmacq help people in need of support and with nowhere else to live. Community housing's strength is not that the organisations are infallible, more that there is support in place so storms can be weathered.

While Newmacq had begun to fall behind the growth rate of many in the sector by the early 2000s, the organisation remained solvent and traded profitably after the 2000-2001 financial year. Surpluses were made of over $200,000 in both 2001-02 and 2002-03, dipping to $40,773 in 2002-2003, then up to $223,200 in 2003-04 (ASIC, 2002b; 2004). These were good returns given Newmacq's annual income was around $3 million.

Meeting the standard

November 2001 marked the start of a series of board changes. Longstanding Chairperson Graham Gordon resigned, after serving on the board since 1992. His departure marked the final end of the 'old guard' who had steered Newmacq during the more collectivist period of the 1990s. Incoming directors included stalwart Sandra Calland - who would serve the organisation for the next 13 years - and former Newcastle MP Allan Morris who became Chairperson on 26 March 2002.

Morris's role is crucial to the Newmacq story. As discussed in Chapter One, he had been a Newcastle City Councillor in the early 1980s when Council adopted their first housing policy and helped establish Newmacq, then in Chapter Two he re-emerged in the 1990s as a strong promoter of the Building Better Cities program which particularly benefitted Newmacq. Kelvyn Enright therefore secured a distinct coup for Newmacq when he brought Morris onto the board, fulfilling his vision of a professional, high profile board.

The timing could not have been better for Newmacq, or worse for Enright. During 2002 the organisation embarked on the accreditation process required by the Office of Community Housing, and delivered through their in-house Standards and Accreditation Unit. This was led by Unis Goh, Director of Performance Management. After an initial self-evaluation form was completed by Newmacq, it soon became clear that their internal controls and procedures were well below what was expected of a 'growth housing association'.

Consideration was given by Government as to whether Newmacq should be closed down, though Unis Goh's saw it as the only provider in the region operating at scale, and thought the best course of action would be to rescue the organisation. This was despite the fact that 'no one liked Newmacq at the time' (personal communication). Unis Goh approached Allan Morris, working with him and Sandra Calland who both saw the need for the change.

Box 15: Happier times: leaders' gathering, 2000

Kelvyn Enright, Federation President 2001-03; Patrick Yeung - St George and later Community Housing Limited; Deborah Georgiou - now CEO of Women's Housing and Mohammed Ibrahim - St George.

Source: NSWFHA (2000: p.9)

A last chance for reform

With a depth of governance experience, Allan Morris as Chairperson started the process of reform. The first target was Ironbark. During a recent review of Newmacq by the Office of Housing, concerns were raised about conflicts of interest of Ironbark board members, under-charging by Newmacq for tenancy management services and the need for a clearer contractual relationship between the two organisations: 'the board of Newmacq resolved, from its side, to clarify and ambiguities in the relationship' (Enright, 2002).

It was decided to bring Ironbark 'on balance sheet' from June 2002 (ASIC, 2002a). Although hardly through the most auspicious circumstances, the 'Newmacq group' therefore became one of the first NSW housing providers to have assets on their balance sheet that had been funded through private finance.

Other matters did not progress so well. Allan Morris resigned as Chairperson later in the year when he saw the depth of the problems, only to be persuaded by Unis Goh to re-stand in the role in November 2002 and steer Newmacq back on course. The formal accreditation evaluation process by the Office of Community Housing began in early 2003, with tenants contacted 'to find out what Newmacq does well and what it does not do well' (Croton, 2003). The work was to no avail, and Newmacq's accreditation application was classed as 'deferred', a polite way of saying it had been rejected.

Newmacq's last chance was to develop an Improvement Plan. Writing in September 2003, Enright set-out many steps that were being taken to reform the organisation. Practical steps were taken, such as writing a new procedures manual, as well as a new philosophy by 'developing a better focus, a better way of governing the company and better relations upstream with the bureaucracy' (Newmacq, 2003: p.1).

Reading between the lines of the generally upbeat note from Kelvyn Enright to staff, it is clear not all was going to plan. There remained problems with conflicts of interest declarations, there was a 'serious error' with rents paid, the finance manual needed 'a vast amount of work' and the business plan had 'two major faults'. One employee resigned after they 'admitted to a number of significant offences', and another resigned in view of a complaint raised against another staff member (ibid.).

Box 16: Ironbark Housing: barking up the wrong tree?

PRACTICAL STEPS WERE TAKEN, SUCH AS WRITING A NEW PROCEDURES MANUAL, AS WELL AS A NEW PHILOSOPHY BY 'DEVELOPING A BETTER FOCUS, A BETTER WAY OF GOVERNING THE COMPANY'

NEWMACQ'S ACCREDITATION APPLICATION WAS CLASSED AS 'DEFERRED', A POLITE WAY OF SAYING IT HAD BEEN REJECTED.

Writing in 2004, Enright's successor Greg Budworth identified Newmacq's problems as poor IT systems, weak financial reporting and 'substantive matters in all programs ... including arrears, vacancies, rental income, contract arrangements, regular income reviews and maintenance'. Furthermore there was the need for a 'systemic reporting nexus between management and board', the board had 'gaps in some professional skills', the planned maintenance system was flawed and Newmacq had a 'loss of legal influence and connection' with their Ironbark subsidiary (Newmacq, 2004a: p.6). In other words, there were problems with virtually all the core activities of a community housing provider.

Changing the guard

During this period of internal reorganisation, Kelvyn Enright remained at the helm as Chief Executive. He was still Company Secretary as at late January 2004 (ASIC, 2004). However, it seemed that by this time the Newmacq directors 'became increasingly less confident of the capacity of the organisation to comply with accreditation requirements' (Newmacq, 2004a).

In April 2004 MGI Wamstekers Chartered Accountants were appointed Interim Managers. A new corporate structure was adopted for Newmacq, and all management positions declared vacant. Kelvyn Enright and Robin Croton abruptly left the organisation, along with one other senior team member.

THREE MONTHS LATER, ON 1 JULY 2004, GREG BUDWORTH WAS APPOINTED GENERAL MANAGER.

With no formal intervention powers, the Office of Community Housing helped Newmacq's journey behind the scenes. The Newmacq board, under Allan Morris's firm leadership, steered through the necessary changes. Administrative control passed to the Federation of Community Housing (later known as the NSW Federation of Housing Associations). From 2002 the Federation 'provided intensive assistance to a number of housing associations, identified by the Office of Community Housing, across a wide range of governance and management areas' (NSWFHA, 2003: p.10).

The move to a new management team was a remarkably smooth transition. It was made clear in the tenant newsletter that 'there will be no changes to the operations of Newmacq, or the services provided to tenants during the Interim Management period' (Newmacq, 2004b). Three months later, on 1 July 2004, Greg Budworth was appointed General Manager.

Sandra Calland, longstanding board member

Box 17: Newmacq's problems: insider views

Allan Morris, Chairperson 2002-06

'It was obvious they [Newmacq] were having difficulties … Their charter was just to help people, not to help people in a cost effective way. They were good people - there wasn't a bad person in the place'.

'Kelvyn [Enright] was very helpful and very obliging. So he worked very closely with all the agencies [who nominated tenants], but that basically meant they walked all over him'.

Sandra Calland, Director 2002-14

'Accreditation was what brought everything to a head in my mind … I couldn't align anything they wanted with accreditation with what we were actually doing'.

Vivienne Milligan, Office of Community Housing

'I really think with Newmacq that it didn't have a sense of what it was there for … It wasn't at all clear how they allocated housing, for example'.

Source: Personal interviews

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The troubles at Newmacq during 2003-04 do not make happy reading. However, they are not the only organisation in the community housing sector that has faced challenges, and at one level their problems were relatively straightforward. There is no evidence of bad business decisions or law breaking activity and Newmacq continued to trade profitably during most years.

Under Kelvyn Enright, the process of professionalisation was started. Many of the changes form the basis of the way the organisation operates to this day. The problem that the accreditation process revealed was that the changes were only skin deep. Beneath the veneer of contemporary business plans and corporate logos lay work practices that did not meet the expectations of Government in the twenty first century.

Despite the challenges, when problems emerged a groundswell of support ensured the Newmacq legacy continued. The Newcastle community remained behind the enterprise, most particularly their veteran MP Allan Morris and tenant advocates such as Sandra Calland. In Sydney, Unis Goh at the Office of Community Housing and Adam Farrar at the peak body provided a remarkable level of support given they were working in unchartered waters. Over the next four years the NSW regulatory system would be transformed, reducing the chances of problems remaining undetected and putting in place more formal systems for intervention. However, in more regulated times, the greatest strength of community housing remains the number of strong supporters coming to the rescue in times of trouble.

THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY HOUSING REMAINS THE NUMBER OF STRONG SUPPORTERS COMING TO THE RESCUE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.

PHOENIX RISING: COMPASS 2004-2010

The organisation we now know as Compass has grown at a pace and in strategic directions that would have seemed unimaginable during the dark days of 2004 when the management had been removed and the organisation was controlled by a firm of accountants and staff seconded from the NSW Federation of Housing Associations. Although the changes since are substantial, much continuity remains. The professionalisation started from 1997 continued, though was taken further and deeper under the new management.

Running a community housing business over the last decade has become more complicated than at any time in the sector's history. Policy and funding opportunities have changed rapidly, and there has been an uneven working of changing political ideologies at State and Commonwealth levels. In an era when new opportunities are awarded through competitive tendering, larger and more commercially minded organisations are growing fastest. Once the internal issues were resolved, it was to be an era offering tremendous opportunities to Newmacq's new management team.

BY 2014, 40% OF AUSTRALIA'S COMMUNITY HOUSING WAS BASED IN NSW, AS WERE MOST OF THE LARGEST COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS .

COMMUNITY HOUSING'S 'GOLDEN AGE'

The NSW community housing sector experienced another period of continued growth, at least until recently. From just 6,113 homes in June 2004, the sector had increased fourfold to 26,022 in June 2013, using the Productivity Commission's count. By 2014, 40% of Australia's community housing was based in NSW, as were most of the largest community housing providers (Productivity Commission, 2015).

However, as shown in Figure 2, there was little change in the total amount of social housing. Property numbers in the NSW social sector rose from 130,848 in 2004 to 137,238 in 2013. This sounds like a useful increase, though is largely be accounted for by the 6,300 properties built through the Social Housing Initiative of the Nation Building economic stimulus. Other changes over the decade in NSW largely involved what has been described as a 'moving the deckchairs strategy, with transfers from public housing to community housing (Shelter NSW, 2002: p.5).

Figure 2: NSW social housing, 2004-2014
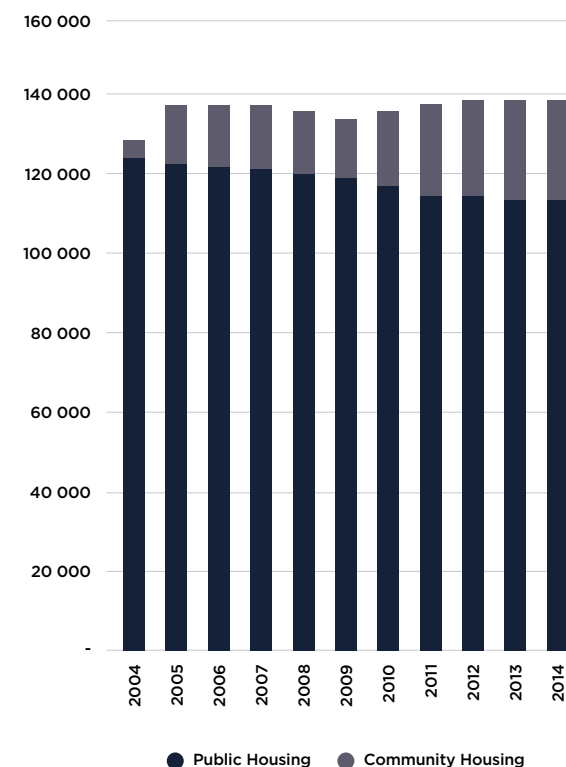
● Public Housing   ● Community Housing

Source: Productivity Commission (2015)

New times, new strategies

Little had moved on the policy front since the far-reaching 1996 Community Housing Strategy. This changed in the mid-2000s. In 2005 the Reshaping Public Housing policy acknowledged due to the lower proportion of working families in public housing, and 'as a result of Federal Government cuts, there are real limits to the number of additional homes that can be made available in the public housing system' (NSW Department of Housing, 2005: p.1). The answer was 'tough love', from the State Labor Government, including ending public housing for life for new tenants and further targeting housing to high needs groups.

With public housing in a holding pattern, it was to be community housing that would come to the rescue. The April 2007 consultation paper on a new community housing strategy positioned it as a sector that is 'diverse, responsive, viable, sustainable, and capable of growing into the future' (NSW Department of Housing, 2007: p.2). Hence, by 2007, community housing was seen as superior to the public housing model, and Government would provide additional resources accordingly.

> BY 2007, COMMUNITY HOUSING WAS SEEN AS SUPERIOR TO THE PUBLIC HOUSING MODEL, AND GOVERNMENT WOULD PROVIDE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ACCORDINGLY.

The cornerstone of the Planning the Future Strategy, released in December 2007, was 'channelling a greater proportion of new housing supply through community housing, and continuing to transfer stock from public housing to community housing management (Housing NSW, 2007: p.2). This was intended to lead to an increase of 17,000 properties managed by community housing providers over a ten year period.

In addition, Government envisaged 'supporting selected high-performing organisations to take on a larger-scale housing development role and to be equipped to borrow funds from the private sector' (ibid, p.3). Although housing providers could stay at their current size, 'some may join up with related agencies, such as support service providers ... [others] may decide that their tenants

will be better served by their properties being managed by a larger, better resourced provider' (ibid, p.7). Hence there was to be a continuing focus on competition between housing providers for new projects, and a favouring of larger, high capacity providers.

By 2010, with the introduction of the single housing waiting list - Housing Pathways - NSW finally achieved a more unified social housing sector that had been foreshadowed in the 1990s. While this finally made community housing a fixture of the housing system, it also took away any remaining control exercised by providers on tenant selection. This made community housing of the 2010s a very different sector to the 1980s and 1990s when organisations such as Newmacq had considerable discretion on who they chose to be their tenants.

The commonwealth resurgent

Commonwealth funding was tight under the Howard Government, to 2007, and there was little interest in housing policy with - tellingly - the role of Housing Minister abolished. This all changed with the election of Prime Minister Rudd, a man with a vision for greater national leadership and intervention on the key issues facing the country. One of these challenges was the lack of affordable housing, especially in capital cities. The debate broadened from concern about accommodating very low income and special needs groups to 'generation rent' that were unable to access the fabled Australian dream of home ownership.

It was symbolic of the new approach that the narrow and technocratic Commonwealth State Housing Agreement gave way to a more comprehensive National Affordable Housing Agreement. This was accompanied by a number of National Partnership Agreements between the States and Commonwealth, including on homelessness. These promised more funding, though a greater oversight of where the money went.

However, it was Prime Minister Rudd's efforts to address the Global Financial Crisis that led to perhaps the greatest funding of social housing sector since the decade after the Second World War. The Social Housing Initiative of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus provided $1.9 billion investment in NSW alone for new properties for the community housing sector, and the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) from 2009 promised delivery of 50,000 new affordable homes across Australia in a $5 billion subsidy scheme.

New money meant new opportunities for community housing providers. In NSW the Social Housing Initiative led to the transfer of new housing to the sector, asset ownership as well as management rights. This helped the NSW sectors' balance sheets grow, opening up new opportunities to leverage private finance. NRAS was more complex, with development open to both for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. Given, however, that management by community housing providers was favoured, the sector still did well from the initiative.

Completing the professionalisation project

The move to new forms of sector regulation started from the late 1990s with the shift to the accreditation of NSW community housing providers. A decade later the emphasis had moved to more proscriptive forms of control with the introduction of a dedicated Regulator function within Government. Victoria led the way in 2005, and NSW followed with new legislation 2007 and the appointment of a Registrar of Community Housing in 2008.

Perhaps influenced by the challenges faced by Newmacq in 2003-04, and the lack of clarity under accreditation as to the role of Government in turning-round potential organisational failures, the new Registrar had clear intervention powers. A growing team of staff at Burwood also set out clear principles on governance, risk and procedures - backed up with regular inspection visits. Registration of all community housing providers was completed by 2009, and by June 2013 there were 230 registered organisations of which the 14 Class 1 'growth providers' managed three quarters of all stock in the sector (NSW Registrar, 2013).

By 2010 discussions started on the move to the national regulation of community housing. Progress was slow, though finally NSW passed enabling legislation in 2012 that could be adopted by states. All but two states - Victoria and Western Australia - are in the process of completing the move to the National Regulatory System by June 2015. The reasons for the new approach to regulation are particularly relevant to Compass's development:

> *'Tenants need secure and stable housing. Investors need confidence that they can partner with a viable and well-managed sector. Housing providers themselves need simple regulations which give them the opportunity to expand across State and Territory borders and to enter into solid commercial relationships' (Australian Government, 2010: foreword by Housing Ministster Tanya Plibersek).*

The deckchair policy:
stock transfer to community housing

In the first decade of the NSW community housing sector, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, housing providers were either subsidised to head-lease homes from private landlords, or new properties were acquired and owned by the (then) Department of Housing and passed to community housing providers to manage. From the mid-1990s, and accelerating markedly in the 2000s, 'tenanted transfers' occurred where groups of public housing tenants were encouraged to move to a community housing provider as landlord. This was a particular feature of NSW, which accounted for 80% of the tenanted transfers in Australia between 1995 and 2012 (Pawson et al., 2013).

BY ALLOWING TENANTS A LANDLORD CHOICE, COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS HAVE HAD TO IMPROVE THEIR APPEAL TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITH TRANSFERS.

In NSW public housing tenants have always had the choice to retain their landlord relationship with the public housing agency, though at times the tenancy management role has been sub-contracted to a community housing provider. By allowing tenants a landlord choice, community housing organisations have had to improve their appeal to be successful with transfers. Although not the only reason, one of the drivers for the growing tenant participation, community development and 'customer' focus of many in the sector over the last decade has been the need to woo potential tenants.

While many believe community housing provided better quality landlord services - an idea supported by the higher tenant satisfaction scores in the annual Australian Institute of Health and Welfare surveys - there are also financial benefits in transfers. Commonwealth Rent Assistance is a form of income support paid to low income tenants in the community or private sector, but not the public sector. This makes it more financially attractive for State Governments to run social housing in the community sector, especially with new rules introduced in NSW in 2008 for providers to better 'capture' Rent Assistance.

Community housing providers, unlike public housing agencies, can raise private finance without it being classed as Government debt. The sector's relatively strong cashflows were seen as ideal for leveraging finance because banks required assets to hold as security. Between 1995 and 2012 asset ownership was transferred to 400 properties already managed by community housing providers (ibid, p.19). Furthermore, in a bold political move in June 2009, the NSW Labor state government agreed that both management and ownership of all properties built under the National Building stimulus would be with the community housing sector.

Transfers to the community housing sector have come in many forms in NSW. Some have covered whole districts in regional areas, or relatively concentrated clusters of social housing. These larger estates, of which there are over 100 in NSW, became seen as centres of social and economic disadvantage. The Bonnyrigg Public Private Partnership (PPP) was awarded a contract in 2007 to transform an 833 dwelling public housing estate in Fairfield to a mixed community with social housing managed by a community housing provider. The PPP model fell out of flavour, with political change, the failure of the developer in the Bonnyrigg project, and the stalling of the 1,470 dwelling Airds Bradbury PPP in 2012-13.

The gilding fades

Although some community housing providers faced challenges in the later 2000s, it is in comparison to times before and after that the period can be seen as a golden age. NSW social housing enjoyed a relatively stable set of political management in the years of State Labor rule from 1995 to 2011, despite an alarming succession of Housing Ministers and Premiers in later years. From 2007 the Commonwealth came on board, with leadership and funding.

The good days did not last. The retreat of the Commonwealth from housing policy - which began under Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard - accelerated with the Coalition in power from late 2013 (Gilmour & Milligan, 2012). There was to be no Housing Minister, no housing policy and the ending of funding schemes such as NRAS. In NSW the Coalition Governments of Barry O'Farrell and Mike Baird from 2010 showed a similar lack of commitment to the community housing sector.

NEWMACQ ON THE MOVE, 2004-07

Back in 2004, Newmacq's new management took shape. The Board considered a number of potential candidates for General Manager, including a front runner from a housing background who was backed by the Sydney Office of Community Housing. However, the board were clear on their vision and agreed on the appointment of Greg Budworth from 1 July 2004. It was a decisive move, with a profound effect on the future of the organisation.

Greg Budworth's background was varied, to say the least. He had been employed as an investigative police officer, a bank employee then, by the late 1990s, was Pastor with Newcastle Beachside Christian Community (Newcastle Herald, 1998a). The role involved considerable work in the community, supporting disadvantaged people. He later stood in the 1998 Commonwealth election in the seat of Newcastle for the Christian Democrats campaigning on 'youth issues, including suicide, morality, lawlessness and employment' (Newcastle Herald, 1998b).

The seat was won with a large majority by Labor incumbent Allan Morris, Chairperson of the Newmacq board that had selected Greg Budworth.

Although it was to be Greg Budworth who led the organisation to considerable success over the next decade, Allan Morris's role was important in helping establish priorities. From across the political divide they shared a vision for Newmacq as a dynamic social enterprise run as a professional business. Morris acted as a bridge between Newmacq and Compass, and the transition from Kelvyn Enright to Greg Budworth.

... THE BOARD WERE CLEAR ON THEIR VISION AND AGREED ON THE APPOINTMENT OF GREG BUDWORTH FROM 1 JULY 2004. IT WAS A DECISIVE MOVE, WITH A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANISATION.
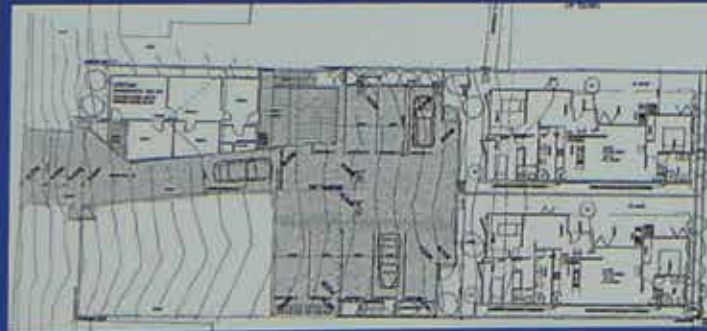
Islington, NSW 2014 - National Rental Affordability Scheme

Compass entered into a partnership with a local developer to deliver this development of 24 studio and one bedroom apartments. This development is well located within close proximity to many services and transport options, as well as close to the inner city of Newcastle.

These units were built by Graph Building and were delivered through the Commonwealth and State Government's National Rental Affordability Scheme. The modern design and finishes consider environmental sustainability and allow functional living.

The Islington project has since been named Special Purpose Housing of the Year and Apartment Complex of the Year by the Housing Industry Association. It was also awarded the NSW Australian Housing Institute Leading Housing Development Award.

Belmont, NSW 2014 - National Rental Affordability Scheme

Compass worked with the developer to deliver this stunning affordable unit complex comprising of 16 units of seven studio apartments, four 1 bedroom units, and five 2 bedroom units.

The development is contemporary in design, and complete with environmental fittings and finishes, as well as being located within a vibrant community at the city centre of Belmont.

These units were built by Base Build Pty Ltd and delivered through the Commonwealth and State Government's National Rental Affordability Scheme.

The new management team had a busy first year. Joining Greg Budworth from mid-2004 was Megan Saxby as Senior Housing Manager and Geoff Woden as Accountant. Lyndall Robertshaw joined at the end of the year, initially as a tenancy and property manager. Her background, like that of her mentor, was not typical for the sector. She originally worked for property developers McDonald Jones Homes and NuSteel Homes in Newcastle as contracts manager, as colour consultant and client liaison officer (see Box 19). Over the next decade the two would provide strong, cohesive leadership.

The total Newmacq staff complement of seven people had a considerable number of problems to fix. From IT systems to rent arrears, procedures manuals to business planning, there was much to do. One issue that emerged when the new management team took over was the true financial position of Newmacq. On the surface, all was good. Surpluses of an average $170,000 were made in the four years to June 2004. However, a review of the Planned Maintenance Program made it clear that insufficient funds had been put aside each year to cover future maintenance costs: 'while we have substantial reserves they are well below the amount required by OCH [Office of Community Housing]' (Newmacq, 2004a: p.4).

LYNDALL ROBERTSHAW JOINED AT THE END OF THE YEAR, INITIALLY AS A TENANCY AND PROPERTY MANAGER. HER BACKGROUND, LIKE THAT OF HER MENTOR, WAS NOT TYPICAL FOR THE SECTOR.

Box 19: Lyndall leading development, 2005

'Lyndall Robertshaw with plans for future affordable housing development' (Newmacq, 2006: p.11).

As Lyndall noted recently, 'just after I took the job [at Newmacq] I was offered another job in construction. I remember Greg said to me there's going to be so many opportunities in this job and this sector. I did stay and there were an enormous amount of opportunities ... it was the right decision, I'm lucky I stayed'.

Nearly a decade later, Lyndall played a vital role in Compass securing the Logan transfer in Queensland (see Chapter 6). 'When I found out we had won I cried ... there was so much passion put into it. We are honoured to be selected and are very excited to be delivering the many wonderful outcomes in this innovative project'.

Source: personal communication

Lyndall Robertshaw and Greg Budworth

OVER THE NEXT DECADE THE TWO WOULD PROVIDE STRONG, COHESIVE LEADERSHIP.

Governance and strategy reforms

One of the issues with Newmacq that helped precipitate the 2003-04 troubles was that of governance. The respective roles of tenants and staff in driving the business had at times run out of balance, therefore a more active membership base was need as a counterbalance. Morris's vision was in some ways ahead of his times when he advocated:

'a strengthening of our grass roots membership and a more active role for Newmacq members ... [including an] advisory committee that would allow the board to tap into the experience and expertise of our members. This could be integrated in some way with a greater level of participation by our tenants (Newmacq, 2004a: p.3).

The following year, subtle changes were made to Newmacq's governing document, the Memorandum and Articles of Association. The 1985 agreement required 'that the proportion of tenant members on the board shall be not less than one third (ASIC, 1985c: Article 37). This was dropped in the 2005 re-write (Newmacq, 2005b). The approach was to be for tenants to have some say on the board, but not for Newmacq to be run like a cooperative.

A final governance change was to settle the matter of Newmacq's off-balance-sheet property vehicle that had been criticised by both State Government and the business's auditors. Whether or not Ironbark was ahead of its time is hard to say, given the recent popularity of arm's length businesses, though it had been singularly unsuccessful in moving beyond the initial purchase of a few poor condition fibro cottages. On 27 September 2004, Newmacq 'effectively regained control' of Ironbark given the change in officeholders' (Newmacq, 2005a).

By June 2005 there is good evidence the corner had been turned for Newmacq. The conditions of State Government's Performance Improvement Plan met, and the organisation was successfully registered by the Office of Community Housing (Newmacq, 2005a). The business also moved to larger offices at 485 Hunter Street Newcastle from October 2004, a few doors away from their previous locations on the city's main street.

However, the organisation was still not completely sure of its future as an independent organisation. Chairman Allan Morris writing in the annual report late in 2006 noted:

'We have been engaged in productive discussions with Community Housing Limited from Victoria, one of Australia's largest providers of affordable housing and we will further develop this relationship if we consider it is in Newmacq's interest to do so' (Newmacq, 2006: pp.4-5).

Box 20: Sue Dark's perspective on governance

Sue's term as Compass Director from 2004 to 2010, and her position as Chairperson (2007) and Deputy Chairperson (2009-2010) give her a good perspective on how the organisation was run from the mid-2000s:

'I've been on a number of Boards and my experience of Compass was that it is the most professional. Always well organised, papers prepared and distributed. The board was in no way tokenistic or a rubber stamper; there was an expectation of a high level of expertise. To be well informed for decision making; governance training was provided'.

The photo shows Sue Dark (right) and the Compass board in 2007 by the much-travelled Compass door, which also features in Box 22.

Source: personal communication; image from Compass (2007), p.4.

This would have been an interesting merger, forming what at the time would have been Australia's largest community housing provider, and the first to operate nationally. It was not to be. The two organisations clashed through competing for the Broken Hill tender, and Growth Provider status for the Hunter region (Greg Budworth, personal communication).

Newmacq remained independent, following a growth strategy first in NSW and later inter-state. Community Housing Limited acquired Mid North Coast Community Housing to gain a foothold in NSW, and expended aggressively inter-state and internationally. The two organisations would continue as competitors, and were later to battle for control of the Logan stock transfer in Queensland. Despite the competition, the two organisations maintain a collegiate approach and both leaders now share a vision for community housing to have a global impact.

NEWMACQ REMAINED INDEPENDENT, FOLLOWING A GROWTH STRATEGY FIRST IN NSW AND LATER INTER-STATE.

New name, new map, new vision

The 'Newmacq' name, selected in February 1985, was not ideal. Many remained unaware of its connection to Newcastle and Lake Macquarie local government areas, and for the first decade all the properties managed were just in Newcastle. The major expansion of Newmacq around 2001, described in Chapter Three, took the business into new geographic areas - though slowly. By June 2005 Newmacq managed properties in neighbouring Port Stephens (1.5%), Cessnock (1.5%) and Maitland (0.5%) council areas though the focus remained on the core original areas of Newcastle at 72.5% and Lake Macquarie at 23% (Newmacq, 2005a).

In 2005 the board decided their geographical spread should increase, finally reversing Kelvyn Enright's strategy of remaining in their core area. The name Compass Community Housing was selected, and the name officially registered on 23 November 2005. Allan Morris, Chairperson at the time, thought of the name and it was adopted by the board as it represented the opportunity to expand to 'all points of the compass' (Allan Morris, personal communication).

Box 21: New brand and logo, 2007

However, despite brainstorming a fashionable new name, no further action was taken for two years until all the terms of the Performance Improvement Plan had been met. Finally, on 1 August 2007, Newmacq became Compass Housing Service Co Limited (Compass). To mark the occasion a re-launch function was held in October 2007 attended by several dignitaries including Matthew Brown, Minister for Housing. A year later Brown, then Police Minister, was sacked for antics at Parliament House involving an oversupply of drink and an undersupply of trousers.

IN THEIR CORE AREA. THE NAME COMPASS COMMUNITY HOUSING WAS SELECTED, AND THE NAME OFFICIALLY REGISTERED ON 23 NOVEMBER 2005.

In terms of organisational strategy, Kelvyn Enright's mission statement in 2000 was step forward as before that date there had been no clarity on what Newmacq stood for. The idea of 'safe, secure and affordable housing' was concise but also limited the organisation to housing activities (see Box 22). Greg Budworth's 2007 mission statement was both practical - stressing the need for a sustainable business model - and visionary. Compass's focus was to be more than just housing, with community outcomes and accountability emphasised. Practical expression of this vision can be seen in the flowering of tenant participation and community development initiatives described in Chapter Five.

FINALLY, ON 1 AUGUST 2007, NEWMACQ BECAME COMPASS HOUSING SERVICE CO LIMITED (COMPASS).

Box 22: Compass's values, 2007

Annual Report 2006-07

compass
housing services

Community and Affordable Housing

"Compass is all about opening doors to affordable housing"

Greg Budworth,
Chief Executive Officer

3

Compass's annual reports for the four years ending 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 feature their legendary door, in a variety of locations: 'Compass is all about opening doors to affordable housing'.

Newmacq's mission statement in 2000 had been 'to provide safe, secure and affordable housing solutions for qualified, low to moderate wage earners and those receiving pension benefits with the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Local Government Areas' (Newmacq, 2000).

By 2007, the mission had changed: 'Compass Housing Services aim to be a successful company having harmony between business operation, sustainability and community values. And to provide a community service based on empathy, accountability, social co-operation and vision' (Compass, 2007).

Source: personal communication

GROWING THE BUSINESS, 2007-10

The internal issues affecting Newmacq in 2003-04, and the years following when the business needed rebuilding, had a major impact on the organisation's ability to grow. As shown in Figure 3, number of tenancies under management barely changed at around 500 between 2001 and 2006. As described in Chapter Three, the organisation continued to lag behind faster growing community housing providers in NSW, falling from number seven in the State in 2003 to number twelve in 2006. If the trend was not reversed Compass could be threatened by an unwelcome takeover bid.

Acquiring Hunter and Central Coast Community Tenancy Schemes

Many of the original Community Tenancy Schemes from the early 1980s had continued to exist in their original format, especially those serving in regional and remote areas of NSW. Government policy was to allow them to continue to exist, but not supply new funding for growth. If these organisations faced financial or managerial problems, or wanted to broaden their horizons, they would have to amalgamate with other community housing providers.

Compass's first corporate move was to acquire the Upper Hunter Community Tenancy Scheme, which added 63 tenancies in the towns of Singleton, Scone, Aberdeen and Muswellbrook (Compass, 2007). This move brought a new office in Scone, the first located outside Newcastle. The Upper Hunter Community Tenancy Scheme had changed little since it was established in the early 1980s, and was still coordinated by the same Housing Manager John Musumeci. In April 2006 it was quoted that 'as a result of the registration assessment, the Office of Community Housing has some concerns about the management (Thompson, 2006). The Board and management threatened to resign, and Government officials worked behind the scenes to smooth the pathway for a merger with Compass (Greg Budworth, personal communication).

THE OTHER COMPASS MERGER IN THEIR HOME REGION WAS IN 2010 THROUGH ACQUIRING COASTAL COMMUNITY TENANCY SCHEME, ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS WYONG SHIRE HOUSING CORPORATION.

The full list of Compass acquisitions of Community Tenancy Schemes is shown in Table 3. Compass was not alone in NSW in adding these types of organisations to their business as the sector was going through a significant period of consolidation around the time of the introduction of the new state regulatory system. Numbers of community housing providers in NSW fell from 59 in 2005 to 27 in 2009 (Farrar, 2014).

In many ways Compass was behind sector trends in the scale of mergers with Community Tenancy Schemes. As noted in Chapter Three, many of Compass's NSW competitors grew from the mid-1990s through merger - in the region these included Pacific Link (1996), Mid North Coast (1996) and Homes North (1998). Despite this, Compass has a perhaps unjustified reputation in the NSW sector for being acquisitive through merger.

The other Compass merger in their home region was in 2010 through acquiring Coastal Community Tenancy Scheme, originally known as Wyong Shire Housing Corporation. Unlike many of the regional organisations created in the early 1980s, Coastal had grown rapidly in scale and by the time of the merger added 242 tenancies, seven staff and an office at Toukley to Compass.

Coastal was a profitable organisation before merger: in the year to June 2009 they achieved a surplus of $0.25 million, had total accumulated capital of $1.1 million and property assets of $0.5 million (ASIC, 2009). During the same year a possible merger between Coastal and Pacific Link was considered, though the former organisation's directors were advised against such a move 'based on funding body consultation' (ibid, p.1). Coastal had met the initial requirements of the new regulatory system, and was registered with the NSW Registrar of Community Housing in December 2009. However, it appears the new rules were seen as too challenging, and all assets and tenancies were merged with Compass in April 2010.

Figure 3: Compass's tenancy numbers, 1985-2010

Numbers of tenancies managed, June
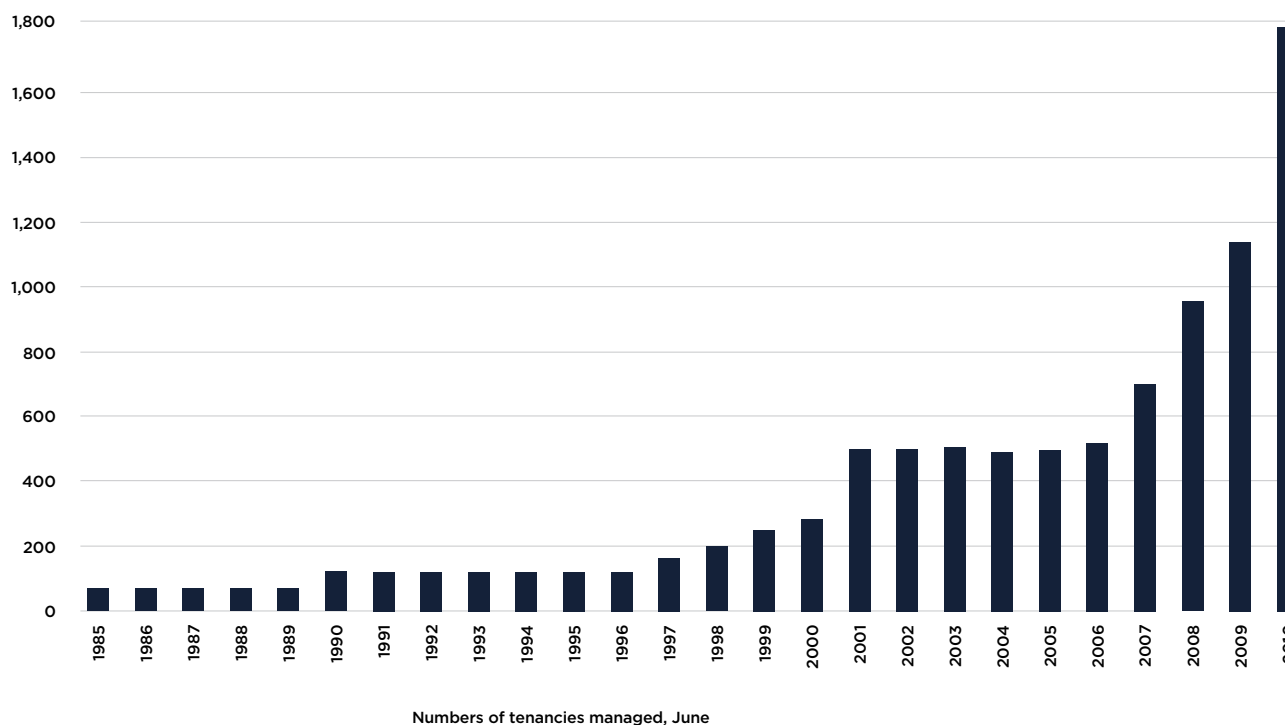
Source: ASIC company searches and Newmacq/Compass annual reports

Table 3: Compass mergers, 2007-10

| ORIGINAL COMMUNITY TENANCY SCHEME (CTS) | TENANCIES | | NOTES | ACQUIRED |
	JUNE 1985	LATE 2000s		
Newmacq	92	521	Renamed Compass, 2007	n/a
Upper Hunter CTS	35	63	Later known as Upper Hunter Tenancy Scheme	Early 2007
Broken Hill CTS	21	40		April 2008, as part of the larger Broken Hill transfer
Wyong Shire Rental Housing Corporation Ltd	47	252	Name change to Coastal CTS in 1991	April 2010
Dubbo Community Tenancy Scheme	21	60	Merged to become Western Plains Housing Scheme	September 2010

Source: Data sourced from Milligan and Housing Commission of NSW (1985), Farrar (2014) and website search.

Box 23: Supporting Indigenous communities: Tina's story

The move to operate in regional areas in the west of NSW broadened the range of tenants Compass assisted. Around a quarter of Australia's Indigenous population live in remote areas, and from 2008 Compass started managing Indigenous housing under various programs for the Aboriginal Housing Office and various Land Councils.

Tina was living in temporary accommodation in a one bedroom flat with her three young children. She was excited when Compass provided her and her children with a home and opportunities to gain a qualification that would allow her to provide for her children.

Tina has now finished studying her qualification and is working in the pediatric ward at her local hospital. The children are settled in school and her daughter is excelling with her mathematics level above the national average, and has also made it to district in little athletics.

Tina said 'If it wasn't for Compass and all the team helping out I would probably still be living in Walgett in 1 bedroom temporary accommodation unit on Centrelink benefits'.

Source: Compass (2014a) p.43

Go West: Broken Hill and Western Plains

In a move that would have important consequences on their future development, in April 2008 Compass won NSW Government competitive tender to acquire social housing and service provision in Broken Hill in only the second 'whole of area' transfer. The area is in the far west of NSW, some 1,170 kilometres from Newcastle. Housing NSW decided to completely exit the far west of the State, making this an unusual and risky transaction for Compass.

The Broken Hill tender included a varied mix of activities. Compass received 109 units of public housing, 34 homes from the Aboriginal Housing Office, as well as 40 community housing properties originally held by the Broken Hill Tenancy Scheme (Compass, 2008). The Broken Hill Tenancy Scheme had been facing internal challenges, describing the 2005-6 Performance Based Registration as a 'saga' (Broken Hill CTS, 2006: p.6). As a result, the Office of Community Housing decided 'that the Broken Hill Tenancy Scheme will cease to exist in its present form' (ibid, p.9). As a result of the Broken Hill tender, Compass became the sole provider of social housing in an area far distant to their original home base and with housing conditions different to their urbanised and industrial heartland.

> APRIL 2008 COMPASS WON NSW GOVERNMENT COMPETITIVE TENDER TO ACQUIRE SOCIAL HOUSING AND SERVICE PROVISION IN BROKEN HILL IN ONLY THE SECOND 'WHOLE OF AREA' TRANSFER.

In September 2010 Compass consolidated their business in the west of NSW by acquiring 60 tenancies from the Western Plains Housing Scheme based in Dubbo. Originally established as the Dubbo Community Tenancy Scheme, by 2005 Western Plains began to feel the pressure to amalgamate (see Box 25). The Office of Community Housing advised Executive Officer Barbara Brown to merge as they only received a C Grade registration score. She claimed that the low result was based on 'financial inequities [sic] in the sector rather than poor performance of her organisation' (NSWFHA, 2005, 3).

Western Plains observed in 2008 that 'it would appear that the Office of Community Housing is determined to faze [sic] out small organisations such as ours for amalgamation and I believe next year's focus will need to be firmly on proactively managing this issue' (WPHS, 2008). Compass approached the organisation in August 2009 with a view to merger, and Western Plains' fate was sealed early in 2010 when they were deemed not to have complied fully with the new Regulatory Code, and a Notice of Non-Compliance was issued.

Compass noted the merger succeeded in 'alleviating the need for Western Plains Housing Scheme to proceed with the rigours of registration. This merger would produce economies of scale, staff specialisation and career prospects, greater client outcomes' (Compass, 2010). It was a pattern repeated across NSW. Through either financial problems, or failure to meet the more onerous regulatory standards of the late 2000s, most of the regional NSW Community Tenancy Schemes lost their independence.

By heading so far from their core operating region, Compass had to develop a model for delivering services across a region equivalent to the distances between London and Barcelona. Head office in Newcastle provided IT, finance and human resource expertise, with much day-to-day decision making devolved to the regions. As a result of the western mergers, an Executive Manager for Central and Western Operations was appointed, based in Dubbo, controlling tenancies from Broken Hill to the Upper Hunter.

Box 24: Compass celebrates merger with Central Coast Tenancy Scheme

Left Matthew Dougherty (Compass Chair 2010-2012), Lesley Bennett of Central Coast Tenancy Scheme.

Box 25: Western Plains: the pressure to amalgamate

Barbara Brown, Western Plains Housing

'I was told that we should form a larger organisation!" reported Barbara Brown during a presentation at the recent Housing Associations Meeting. "It seemed to be the most likely way to get the extra funding or stock transfers we needed" …. Her example highlights a renewed push for amalgamation by the Office of Community Housing and some housing associations themselves … However history indicates that it is not a decision to [be] made lightly'.

Source: NSWFHA (2005) p.3.

> COMPASS BECAME THE SOLE PROVIDER OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN AN AREA FAR DISTANT TO THEIR ORIGINAL HOME BASE AND WITH HOUSING CONDITIONS DIFFERENT TO THEIR URBANISED AND INDUSTRIAL HEARTLAND

NSW stock transfers

As a result of the 2007 'Planning the Future' community housing strategy, NSW Government started a program of transferring tenancy management to selected community housing providers. Compass were part of this select group, having been awarded Growth Provider status in 2008. In April 2009 the then Housing Minister David Borger announced that asset ownership would also be transferred on selected properties. As an editorial in the newsletter of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations noted:

'Title at last [headline] .. The Sector has waited over 25 years to hold title to the properties it manages, since the inception of the Community Tenancy Scheme and the co-op program in the early 1980s. While title alone will not ensure access to new debt finance, together with improved income streams, it will allow providers to secure finance against the whole portfolio and to leverage any increases in the value of assets' (NSWFHA, 2009: p.1).

> *Title transfers would be of 3,000 properties already managed by community housing providers through the Property Transfer Program. Further newly developed properties would also be transferred under the Nation Building program, described in the next section. Bobbie Townsend, NSWFHA President, noted that 2009-10 was the 'largest single year's growth in the sector's history. But this will pale into insignificance compared to 2010-11 when we expect a further 40% growth' (NSWFHA, 2010: p.11).*

As shown in Figure 4, title transfers of social housing from Housing NSW made a considerable impact on Compass's equity (net tangible assets) from the late 1990s. As late as June 2008 equity was only $3.3 million, of which land and buildings were valued at $0.9 million - only around three times the value of the first property acquired by Ironbark in the late 1990s. Two years later, in June 2010, equity had increased to $29.1 million and property assets to $25.1 million. The period 2008-10 saw the highest proportionate increase in asset holding in Compass's history, although the property holdings were set to increase further reaching $194 million by June 2014.

During this growth period, projects were awarded based on tenders that pitched Compass against other larger NSW community housing providers. By this stage the organisation had strong in-house capacity, with Greg Budworth and Lyndall Robertshaw leading the bid writing team. In 2008 Compass won $1.3 million under the 'Debt Equity 2' program to build 11 homes in Cessnock, in partnership with Cessnock Council who donated two blocks of land with an estimated value of $300,000 (Compass, 2009a). Compass also successfully applied for $600 000 to develop four dwellings at Wallsend under the Affordable Housing Innovations Fund with the support of longstanding supporter Newcastle City Council.

DURING THIS GROWTH PERIOD, PROJECTS WERE AWARDED BASED ON TENDERS THAT PITCHED COMPASS AGAINST OTHER LARGER NSW COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS.

Figure 4: Compass's equity, 1985-2010
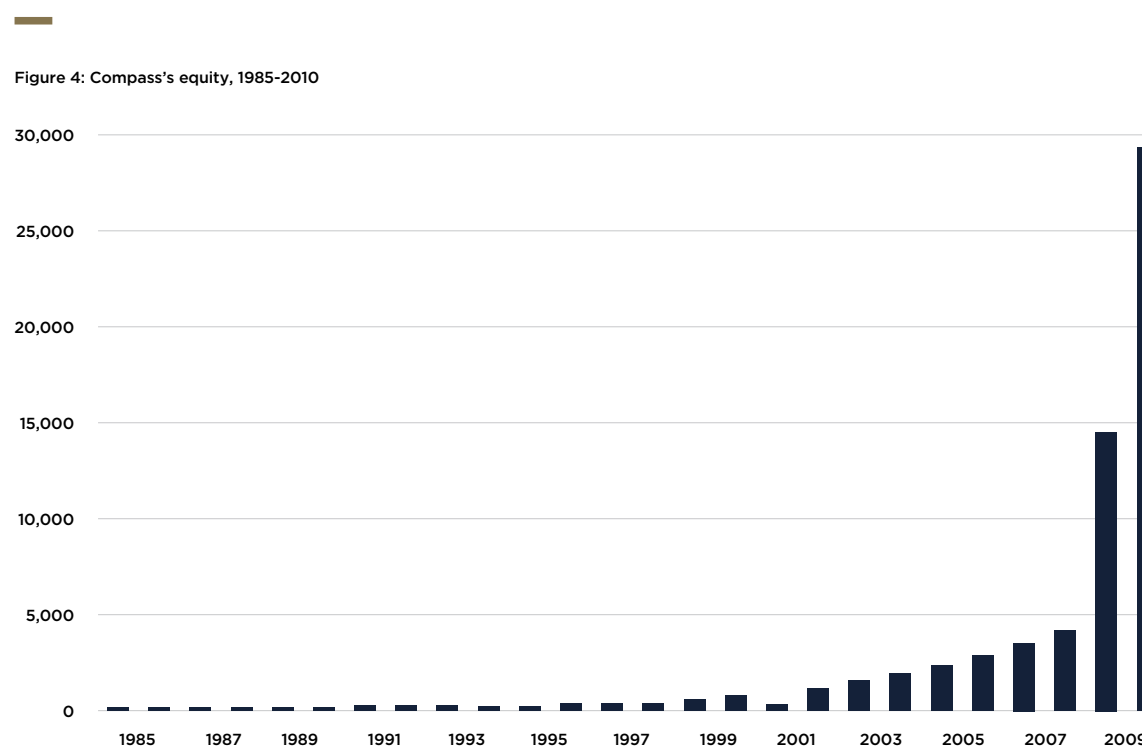
Equity, $000s, Year ended June 30

Source: Company searches from ASIC and Newmacq/Compass annual reports

Building a nation; building Compass

The Social Housing Initiative of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package was a once in a generation boost of Commonwealth funding to expand social and affordable housing. Projects such as this, and others like the National Rental Affordability Scheme, were increasingly awarded based on competitive tendering, favouring high capacity community housing providers such as Compass. This is in stark contrast to the funding under the NSW Community Tenancy Scheme in the 1980s when monies were allocated by public sector staff behind closed doors and based on a rational calculation of housing need by area.

NSW Government decided the best way to deliver the Stimulus Package was to develop properties themselves, then transfer ownership to community housing providers in return for 'leveraging targets' of additional properties they could develop based on raising bank finance. The first stage of NSW Nation Building delivery involved 857 properties being directly allocated by Government to Growth Providers in the traditional non-competitive approach, with Compass receiving a high proportion of the total - 241 homes - in the Hunter and Central Coast regions. In the second stage, tenders opened in December 2009 for 4,550 properties in 17 packages to be awarded through open competition (CHD, 2009).

THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND STAGE SAW COMPASS WIN THE THREE PACKAGES IN THE HUNTER, NEWCASTLE AND GOSFORD REGIONS. THEIR TOTAL OF 787 PROPERTIES WAS THE THIRD HIGHEST IN THE SECTOR.

The results of the second stage, announced in February 2010, saw Compass win the three packages in the Hunter, Newcastle and Gosford regions. Their total of 787 properties was the third highest in the sector, behind Mission Australia Housing (1,046 units) and St. George Community Housing with 1,103 units (www.communityhousing.org.au). It was estimated that Compass's Nation Building portfolio would have a value of $240 million - a significant figure given their equity as June 2010 was only $29 million (Compass, 2010a; b).

Title was transferred on a total of 571 Nation Building properties worth $110 million during financial year 2010-11. However the remaining 457 asset titles valued at $137 million were not transferred until July 2014 as in March 2011 the newly elected Coalition Government put a hold on further title transfers. In 2011-12 Compass arranged a $50 million facility with Westpac Bank to fund their targets for leveraging new social housing. By June 2014 Compass had delivered 33% of their leveraging targets, and expected to reach 94% of target by June 2017 - six years into their ten year agreement (Compass, 2011; 2012; 2014a).

Unlike a number of larger community housing providers, Compass has played a relatively modest role in direct property development. Most new properties have been bought from property development companies, including many off the plan. This approach has the benefit of using Compass's buying power to secure good prices in markets with relatively flat levels of demand, and takes advantage of lower borrowing costs as the bank does not face development risks. Collaborative approaches have been built with local developers, providing input to accessible design and using the Affordable Rental Housing planning policies. Only a modest number of smaller schemes have been developed using in-house skills.

Compass's approach to property procurement has limited the advantage that could be taken of the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Introduced in 2008, the Scheme provides a mix of Commonwealth and State grant 'incentives' of around $100,000 towards the development of new housing to be rented to eligible tenants at no more than 80% of local market rent. From the latest data in June 2014, a total of 38,163 incentives have been made available and have resulted in 16,252 new rental homes (Australian Government, 2014). The scheme was closed for new applications in mid-2014, so the original 50,000 target will not be met.

According to Commonwealth figures, by mid-2014 Compass has been awarded 271 incentives and delivered 208 new homes. This delivery rate of 77% is much higher than the national average of 43%, though Compass rank number 38 of the 157 organisations receiving incentives and number 8 of community housing providers. Compass has focused on using incentives to deliver long term affordable housing rather than undertake fee-for-service arrangements with developers in complex contractual arrangements. With the scheme now closed, compliance becoming more onerous and deals with developers under scrutiny, Compass's caution may turn out to be a strategic masterstroke.

NBESP complex Milford Street, Toronto NSW 2010

IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT COMPASS'S NATION BUILDING PORTFOLIO WOULD HAVE A VALUE OF $240 MILLION

The 2009 strategy

By the late 2000s Compass had well and truly turned the corner, and demonstrated an ability to grow through acquisitions and winning tenders. The question now was which direction to steer the ship? Greg Budworth sees the 2009 strategy as a pivotal moment for the organisation, one where the Board under the Chairperson Mathew Dougherty gave clear leadership and vision for the next five years (personal communication).

Although the strategy did not alter the organisations mission, as detailed in Box 22, there was to be a much clearer focus on growth and diversification. The 2009-14 strategic objectives were:

'Growth. Greatly increase social and affordable housing stock by active participation in appropriate transfer and tender opportunities and through self-initiated programs and development ….

Quality. Continuously improve the quality of services to client and benefits to the general community …

Diversity. Develop new business, social, environmental and housing opportunities to encompass a wide range of people …

Reach. Expand provision of services to other regional areas … Contribute to the national agenda and national programs for community housing development' (Compass, 2009b: p.3)

One of the key outcomes from the new strategy was the launch of the Total Sustainability Program that linked the health and well-being of tenants, community wellbeing and environmental sustainability. There was also to be an expansion of the tenant participation program, with the launch of Local Tenant Advisory Groups. These innovations beyond conventional landlord services are described in more detail in Chapter Five.

Figure 5: Compass' geographical expansion in NSW, 2005-2010

Source: Map prepared using Google Earth. Council areas coloured in red are as at 2005, and those in gold were added between 2005 and 2010.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

By June 2010, Compass was back in the ascendant and barely recognisable from the struggling Newmacq. Staff numbers had increased to 53 from 7 in 2004, and the property portfolio more than tripled from 501 to 1,740. After ignominiously descending the sector rankings for a decade, by 2010 Compass was the third largest community housing provider in NSW (after St George Community Housing and Affordable Community Housing Limited), and fourth in Australia (also behind Community Housing Limited).

Instead of operating from a single office in Newcastle, serving the city and surrounding towns, by 2010 Compass had a chain of 7 offices across much of the vast geography of NSW (see Figure 5). The organisation rightly claimed to be 'the largest regionally based community housing provider in Australia' (Compass, 2010a: p.6). In 2008 the decision was made to move head office to Hamilton, a Newcastle suburb, with the original head office becoming another branch operation.

The turn-round in Newmacq/Compass's fortunes had come just in time for the organisation to take full advantage of the generous funding available in the late 2000s. Largely led by people new to the social housing sector, the organisation navigated the tides of change with remarkable success. The new professional and business-like approach promoted by Allan Morris as Chairperson and Greg Budworth as Chief Executive suited the times and helped the organisation navigate change. As will be seen in the next Chapter, Compass managed to keep a focus on more than the business side of community housing while at the same time pioneering innovative approaches to supporting people and communities.

Compass 2011 Staff conference, Cam's Wharf

STAFF NUMBERS HAD INCREASED TO 53 FROM 7 IN 2004, AND THE PROPERTY PORTFOLIO MORE THAN TRIPLED FROM 501 TO 1,740.

COMPASS IN THE COMMUNITY

TODAY AROUND 90% OF TENANTS IN BOTH PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY HOUSING ARE NOT WORKING, AND MANY HAVE HIGH AND SPECIAL NEEDS. AS A RESULT, GREATER SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO SUSTAIN TENANCIES.

At the most basic level, community housing organisations are landlords. Tenancy agreements need to be signed, rent collected and properties maintained. However, unlike for real estate businesses and property investors there are a range of additional tasks that many community housing landlords either choose or are required to carry out.

One of the main reasons community housing providers have broadened their mission and become involved with people and communities is to take account of the higher needs of social housing tenants. In the three decades after the Second World War when many of the housing commission properties were built, most tenants were working families. Today around 90% of tenants in both public and community housing are not working, and many have high and special needs. As a result, greater support is needed to sustain tenancies.

This emphasis is clear from the National Community Housing Standards Manual which has 40 pages guidance on tenant participation and working with the community. In contrast tenancy management is covered in a brisk 30 pages (Housing NSW, 2010). Governments increasingly expect social landlords to cure a variety of ills in society. These include calming dysfunctional estates, improving access to employment and training and helping people transition along the 'housing continuum' to private market housing. In part these tasks become hard-wired into organisations when they need to competitively tender for management outsourcing contracts, as will be discussed in Chapter Six.

However, beyond Government policy imperatives, one of the main drivers for a wider role for community housing has been innovations led by directors, management and front-line staff. Whether from a faith or philosophical basis, or a wish to leave a legacy for society, community housing leaders have sought to steer their organisations into new areas not immediately connected with housing. It is in these areas, as much as the growing the organisation, that the post-2004 Newmacq/Compass management team has innovated.

Box 26: Secure housing supports a young achiever

In March 2015 Compass tenant Cheryl-Leigh Smith won the leadership and Innovation of the NSW/ACT Young Achievers Awards.

Rising above her tumultuous past dotted with a trail of volatile relationships, substance abuse and teen homelessness she is proof that it is possible to overcome challenging obstacles. Cheryl-Leigh now focuses her spare time on helping other young women make smart life-choices and overcome personal battles.

Source: Fairfax Media

TRANSFORMING THE ROLE OF TENANTS

The relationship between a social landlord and their tenants is complex, and there have been a number of shifts over the last three decades in Australia. Unlike private sector landlords where the main obligation is to maintain the property and collect the rent, social housing landlords are often encouraged to allow tenants to influence the running of the landlord organisation. There are also often a series of events and activities provided by the landlord in an effort to improve the lives of tenants and their connectedness to community.

As noted in Chapter One, the second of the two objectives of the establishing the Community Tenancy Schemes in NSW had been to 'involve tenants in the management of individual schemes'. In part this was to differentiate the emerging sector as 'tenant participation has not been an active component of public housing policy in NSW (Milligan & Housing Commission of NSW, 1985: p.47). Subsequently some public housing landlords sought to emulate the approaches used in early community and co-operative housing organisations, though with limited success and by the later 1990s many of the schemes had been de-funded.

The ideas of the founders of the Community Tenancy Scheme were radical and utopian by the standards of today. Once the program had become established 'it was hoped that the need for non-tenant or professional support would be diminished as strong tenant management took over' (ibid, p.64). However, just two years after the scheme launched, it has become clear this was not working quite as planned:

'most tenants approach CTS [Community Tenancy Scheme] with the aim of gaining secure and affordable housing, rather than wishing to be part of a co-operative or taking responsibility for organisational matters' (ibid, p.64).

The Scheme's founders noted in 1985 that there had been a number of examples of other ways in which tenants were becoming involved. Some organisations formed separate tenants committees, other employed tenants as paid staff. Newsletters started being printed, social events were organised. However, as the founders noted '… it cannot be emphasised too much that there is a fundamental difference between tenant involvement and tenant control of housing' (ibid, p.65).

Tenant involvement at Newmacq to 2004

Newmacq's first decade saw strong tenant involvement in the organisation, mainly through direct decision making. Tenants were encouraged to become members of the organisation, vote at annual general meetings, and stand as directors. As noted in Chapter Two, at least a third of the board had to be tenants, and in the early 1990s up two thirds were directors - normally holding the roles of President and Deputy President. Existing tenants were involved in selecting new tenants, and residents such as Wendy McKenzie became staff members.

Along with direct involvement in running the organisation, tenants were also engaged through newsletters and events. The first Newmacq newsletters provide a glimpse into how the organisation was run and its priorities at the time. Publications were prepared by the tenants themselves, using typewriters or hand drawn sketches (see Box 27). They included news and views, recipes and handy information for tenants. Despite the advances in desktop publishing technology, the content has not changed much over the years.

There was a focus on providing information to prospective tenants about what community housing had to offer, and encouraging calm relationships between tenants and the wider community. Tenants were urged to solve neighbourly disputes through civil discussion rather than using other means. A cartoon in a 1989 newsletter proffered the rather direct and confronting advice 'Don't you think it would be better to talk it over before you punch his lights out' (Newmacq, 1989b).

By encouraging a peaceful community atmosphere, tenants seemed to be committed to changing the negative stereotypes often associated with social housing estates. Some tenants believed that by improving tenant behaviour, the Community Tenancy Scheme's chances of survival would also be increased, and by extension, Newmacq and their homes.

A sense of community support can also be felt in these newsletters. An earthquake that hit Newcastle around Christmas of 1989 damaged local infrastructure including Newmacq properties. The newsletters urged affected tenants to contact Newmacq for help and encouraged other residents to donate household goods.

Tenant participation was also encouraged through a variety of social activities via 'a small but enthusiastic band of tenants' that hosted social club morning teas and organised painting groups for tenants to come together (ibid.). Plans for card days, picnics and tai chi lessons were also underway. While these social activities were designed to foster a community atmosphere, widespread tenant participation was difficult. A 1989 Christmas newsletter (in a section titled 'BOARD (BORED) NEWS') regretfully noted that Newmacq's AGM had a small attendance (ibid.).

The arrival of Kelvyn Enright as Newmacq's Coordinator in 1997 did little to enhance tenant participation in the management of the organisation. Enright's approach was to limit the role of tenants on the board in favour of people with a broader range of professional skills. There is some evidence of the occasional tenant newsletter and social event. However, as noted in Chapter Three, critical observers may conclude that during this period the staff became more influential in the organisation than the tenants.

While some tenants remained committed to the idea of Newmacq being run by its tenants, engaging more people to the cause was not an easy task and would become a continuing issue for the organisation over the next few years. The 2000-01 business plan included an analysis of their strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. Their main weakness was seen to be that 'tenants need to have greater involvement in providing Newmacq with feedback about issues which directly/indirectly affect them' (Newmacq, 2000: p.5).

Early tenant newsletters were written and illustrated by Newmacq's own tenants.

Source: Newmacq (1990)

THERE WAS ALSO THE GENESIS OF A TENANT INCENTIVISATION SCHEME TO REWARD RESIDENTS WHO WERE DILIGENT AT PAYING THEIR RENT AND FULFILLED THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AS TENANTS

Box 28: Going for gold: the Tenant Incentive Scheme

Source: Newmacq (2004c).

New leadership at Newmacq

Upon his arrival in 2004, it did not take long for Greg Budworth to set a marker for changed approaches to tenancy management. His first newsletter, issued within a couple of months of being appointed General Manager, encouraged more tenants to join as members as 'you have an ability to participate in the direction and policies of the company'. It was noted that 'the new GM is keen to get as much feedback as possible … your feedback is very valuable in assisting us provide a quality service to you' (Newmacq, 2004d). By late 2004 tenants were asked to provide input on drafting housing policies and on the new business strategy.

There was also the genesis of a tenant incentivisation scheme to reward residents who were diligent at paying their rent and fulfilled their responsibilities as tenants (see Box 28). Tenants who kept their rent up to date were entered into a monthly draw to become 'tenant of the month', and those with rent in advance by at least one week were eligible to enter a draw for a Christmas hamper (Newmacq, 2004c). The scheme is self-financing for Compass, with benefits paid for by the interest earned on rent payments received in advance.

The Incentive Scheme was successful enough that Compass began offering financial incentives, certificates and discounts on sponsored events to reward its tenants. Still running today, the Scheme invites all those who reach the 'gold category' to a lunch at the end of the year as a reward for their excellent performances, top prizes of $1,000 cash, and 20% off the cost of bus trips and social events. It was not only the first social housing incentive scheme in Australia, but remains the only one to operate today.

The scale of tenant engagement also increased with the arrival of Greg Budworth. Compass hosted their first Christmas picnic in December 2004 (Newmacq, 2005a). By 2007 some 350 tenants and staff were attending, increasing to 500 the following year. Other social highlights organised for tenants in 2007 included the Breast Cancer fun run and bus trips to Taronga Zoo and Luna Park.

Newmacq's new approaches to working with tenants would be considered mainstream in the contemporary community housing sector, though were radical for 2004. What is more surprising is that they were launched at a time when the new management team had to transform operating procedures on more important matters such as allocations and arrears so that Newmacq would not be closed by the Office of Community Housing.

Box 29: Is this you? Christmas party 2007

Tenant Christmas parties are still going strong.

Source: Compass (2007)

IT WAS NOT ONLY THE FIRST SOCIAL HOUSING INCENTIVE SCHEME IN AUSTRALIA, BUT REMAINS THE ONLY ONE TO OPERATE TODAY.

Compass Tenant Panel

With new management came a new style of participant engagement. While tenants were no longer a majority on the board, tenant groups became more formalised than their earlier counterparts and played an important role in shaping Compass's direction. The first mention of a Tenant Reference Group 'to advise board and management is during the 2004-05 financial year' suggesting it was one of the first moves of the new management team (Newmacq, 2005a). Early tenant groups created their own constitution and worked with Compass management to suggest improvements to their policies and procedures.

By the 2007-08 annual report, the Compass Tenant Reference Group - as it was then known - had a four page section describing their activities along with other details on community development. By contrast the Chairperson had three pages in the annual report and the Chief Executive Officer three pages (Compass, 2008). During this period the Group met monthly, helping advise on policies, planning tenant events and contributing practical ideas on asset management. As a result of this work, in 2007 Compass's tenant participation approach was awarded a top prize at the NSW Federation of Housing Associations conference.

In November 2007 Michelle Robinson, Chairperson on the Compass Tenant Reference Group, was elected to the Compass board. This re-established the participation of tenants as Directors from the early days of Newmacq, though was quite radical for the time. Although a number of community housing providers have tenants serving on the board, they are normally selected by other board members rather than being elected by the tenants themselves.

By 2012 the group had been renamed the Compass Tenant Engagement Panel, and aimed to be 'an independent group of residents charged with the responsibility of bringing our views to the management process within Compass' (Compass, 2012: p.48). The most recent name change is to Compass Tenant Panel (see Box 30).

The current Panel is chaired by Mark O'Dwyer who meets with other Compass tenants on a bimonthly basis (see Box 31). With such a large geographic spread of tenants, the Panel host 'Have Your Say Sessions' in Hamilton where interstate tenants can raise tenancy issues via a video link.

Mark O'Dwyer served on the Compass board until the end of 2014 when it was decided that directors would in future be selected solely based on their professional and business skills, and tenants would be involved through a parallel advisory structure. He is now Chairperson of the NSW Committee, a new regional structure that reports directly to the main Board.

In 2014 the Tenant Panel started a new initiative by encouraging residents to give back to society by raising and donating funds to various causes. The Panel along with the wider community raised $1,600 for the Central Coast's Oasis Centre, which supports homeless youth. More recently, the Tenant Panel established a Tertiary Education Scholarship fund for 18-25 year olds. They raised $1,300 through fundraising barbeques at Bunnings Warehouse stores. Mark aptly noted 'You don't have to be big to do big things, and our best is yet to come!' (Personal communication).

Box 30: The voice of many is more powerful then the voice of one

In 2014 the Compass Tenant Panel helped raise more than $1500 to assist the work done in the Wyong Shire for youth in crisis.

Box 31: Mark O'Dwyer: tenant leadership

Mark has been a Compass tenant since 2009, and is currently head of the Tenant Panel. He is a strong supporter of the organisation: 'Compass do a wonderful job looking after their tenants, staff are exceptional'. He likes the fact that 'Compass is not just about bricks and mortar, it's about people'.

For Mark, his involvement on the Tenant Panel is about an 'opportunity to make a difference and give back'.

Source: Personal communication

BUILDING NEIGHBOURHOODS, SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

To increase social inclusion and reduce disadvantage, community housing organisations are increasingly considering the wider needs and aspirations of tenants and neighbouring residents, as individuals, and as communities. Involving tenants in the strategic direction of the organisation has been essential in differentiating Compass (and other community housing providers) from public housing agencies.

Compass's earliest experiments with building communities can be seen from the 2006-07 annual report with a section on 'community development', and the appointment of a Community Development Officer (Compass, 2007: p.13). A $5,000 grant was also received from the Housing Minister to build a community garden. Activities remained limited during the late 2000s, with a greater focus on tenant participation and environmental sustainability.

Community building through Compass Connect

In 2010 Compass took over management of a community hub at Tumbi Umbi on the NSW Central Coast. This led the to a greater focus on place making opportunities, with a strategy devised by Greg Budworth

and the senior management team originally known as 'PPP: people, place, performance'. At the suggestion of the new Executive Manager of Community Sustainability, Debra Allan, the strategy was re-named 'Compass Connect'. This broke any negative association with the other use of PPP - public, private partnerships (Greg Budworth, personal communication).

Compass Connect provided an over-arching framework bringing together aspects related to tenant participation and engagement, environmental sustainability and efficient asset management. Part of the approach was to take a more sophisticated view of place-based approaches to community building:

'The Compass community is an important member of our wider community. For our community to remain sustainable we each need to contribute and participate. We can all be part of the "solution" to creating a more harmonious and productive community. We believe everyone has something to contribute; we are all responsible for the sustainability of the community' (Compass, 2012: p.15).

Compass Connect and its three guiding principles are unique in the community housing sector. Through the program, Compass has been involved in a variety of place based incentives aimed at improving local communities. In 2012 Compass agreed annual special purpose funding of $200,000 aimed at encouraging tenants to develop funding plans for new schemes. The projects should promote place based initiatives, tenant engagement and community participation in the community, and are approved by a panel. Funding has led to new shared spaces, skills based initiatives for tenants and community inclusion activities.

Compass' three core principles of people, place and performance provide an integrated approach to portfolio management:

1. Compass focusses on People's physical and mental well-being.

2. Places are emphasised through the strategic designs of homes, neighbourhoods and local facilities to foster a positive sense of place and encourage connections to the wider community.

3. Performance is crucial to effective tenancy management. Compass understands that high quality services are critical to maximising rental returns.

Case study: Maree's Fresh Idea

Maree Dixon is a proud Compass tenant and an avid gardener. Around two years ago Maree noticed a number of her neighbours were struggling with loneliness and social isolation and decided a community garden would be a great way to bring tenants together.

With the help of Compass Connect funding, (and Maree's green thumb) tenants in Maree's complex now have a flourishing vegetable garden which provides a place for neighbours to connect, not to mention fresh fruit and vegetables all year round!

"Not many people have access to a garden like this," Maree said.

"Thanks to Compass Connect it's a reality. At least half the tenants in the complex make use of the garden and I'm really loving what it's done for the sense of community.

"In the past we had people who had been here for years and never spoken to their neighbours but now people say hello and are getting to know each other.

The Meeting Place

As part of a transaction negotiated with Housing NSW, Compass took over the management of the KBT Hub in June 2010. Located in areas with a high concentration of social housing, and with a number of longstanding social issues, the hub had been established by Government as a community centre and access point for services and support. Under Compass's control, the hub expanded its activities including through use of tenant volunteers. Activities include market days, a community garden, morning teas, free access to computers and community noticeboards and operating a weekly fruit box program from the Hub selling 286 fruit boxes to local tenants and residents (Compass, 2011).

By 2013 the KBT hub became known as The Meeting Place (see Box 32). Such has been the success of the scheme, that a new community hub known as the 123 Hub has been opened by Compass Housing in Broken Hill.

Box 32: The Meeting Place, where the community comes together

the meeting place

where the community comes together

Box 33: Connect Projects - Rose Garden Project

The Dangar Park Rose Garden, was an immense success bringing together Compass tenants, compass staff, students and staff from the local school, local community groups and members of the wider community.

The project consisted of a new covered picnic table, featuring an Aberdeen themed mosaic designed and created by students from the nearby St Joseph's Primary School, as well as the addition of a new rainwater tank. This idea for the project was conceived by a Compass tenant group and was assisted by Compass Upper Hunter Community Development Officer Melinda White.

This project was a real community effort with the Upper Hunter Shire Council providing the concrete slabs for the table and tank, and the Lions Club of Aberdeen constructing the table, chairs and picnic area cover, all of which was funded through the Compass Connect program.

Source: information supplied by Compass

Box 34: The Meeting Place - Giant Mural Project

On Wednesday the 26th of June 2013, a wonderfully large and inspiring mural was unveiled at Compass' The Meeting Place. The mural is another fantastic project delivered through Compass Connect.

The project was slated as a community art project delivering a mural developed by community members under the supervision of a community artist. The project was completed over an eight week period and provided opportunities for intergenerational development within the Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay and Tumbi Umbi (KBT) community. Once the artwork was completed, it was installed on the side of The Meeting Place building for all community members to see.

The project brought people of all ages together to create a visual representation of what they considered to be the strengths of the community.

Source: information supplied by Compass

Investing in the community

Compass further innovated with community activities in 2012 with the launch of the 'GROW a Star', the idea of former Newcastle Branch Manager Callan Walker who prepared a business plan that caught the attention of Greg Budworth. The program, open to all young Australians whether or not they are Compass tenants, provides financial assistance for talented and passionate young people to develop their sporting, musical or academic skills. This is an effort to reduce inter-generational disadvantage, and promote more inclusive communities (see example in Box 35).

The program uses monies raised externally, as well as Compass' own funds. In 2012 Westpac Bank donated $10 000 and ran a promotional campaign via their ATM network. This monetary assistance helped host 45 events held during the same year with a total of 556 people attending these activities. Young community housing residents had the opportunity to receive assistance and support from mentors on 54 occasions.

In other forms of community support, Compass has started providing more backing for homeless people now that the organisation has diversified into accommodation options for this high needs group. For example, Compass supported the Hunter Homeless Connect Day, which has been running since 2009. Over the day, over 500 blankets and 350 care packs were handed out, in addition to free food, vaccinations and haircuts. The event was attended by 1,000 people who came together to help out for the cause.

In a similar move, Compass has supported The Red Door Kitchen in Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley. Since 2013 the project has offered food for the homeless, supplemented by a fortnightly service of serving hot lunches for those in need. However, maintaining this service was proving difficult as the kitchen needed renovations. Therefore $5,000 was donated through Compass Connect. The service is provided in partnership with support organisations, and the local community have also shown their generosity by volunteering and donating non-perishable items. The kitchen is now a place of community inclusion, where people can share a meal and enjoy companionship.

Box 35: Grow A Star 'Suzie's Way'

One group that has benefitted from the 'GROW a Star' program is a band called 'Suzie's Way'. This talented group consists of three young artists, aged 14, 15 and 17 who reside in Compass homes on the NSW Central Coast.

Through GROW a Star each member of the band received a tuition grant from Compass to assist them develop their musical talents. Additionally, the whole group received a grant to enable them to purchase a PA system which has allowed them to perform live at events.

Here you can see a photo of the band performing with Suzie on lead vocals, Jordan on keyboard and Matena on guitar and vocals.

'We love that Compass has helped us out with our music. If it wasn't for the Grow a Star program we would still be just jamming at home. Instead we are now performing at live events and growing as a band and musicians'

Box 36: Grow A Star - 'Mundi'

Mundinarra is a tenant of Compass living with her mother. While playing soccer at a representative level on the Central Coast she gained the attention of The National Scouting Report (NSR), a large scouting organisation that finds talented athletes to send over to American colleges on scholarships. Marketing these talented athletes to the US colleges costs money though, money that Mundi and her mum didn't have.

Through the GROW a Star program Compass was able to help Mundi pursue her dream. "I've played soccer all my life ... I never thought I'd get somewhere with it", Mundi said. Holding back tears of gratitude Mundi's mother said "Without Compass, she wouldn't have had this opportunity so we really appreciate that".

Box 37: Grow A Star - Brianna's Star

Brianna is a smart, vibrant and focused young woman who dreams of one day becoming a political journalist. Two years ago Brianna was struggling to afford the laptop she needed to complete her assignments, and was having trouble with parts of her Spanish classes. Through the Grow a Star program, Compass provided Brianna with a brand new laptop and Spanish tutoring which saw her grades jump into the top 10% of students at her school.

Over the past two years Brianna has gone from strength to strength and is now pursuing her dreams studying journalism at university.

The Deep Place Method

Compass is also building on its historical experience of community development to advance a new approach to social housing services, with the appointment of Professor Adamson, OBE, an Emeritus Professor with the University of South Wales. Internationally recognised for his expertise in economic and community regeneration, his community regeneration approach, the 'Deep Place Method', is successfully implemented in Wales.

The Deep Place method links community development approaches with local economic development in which residents are the focus of new employment opportunities. The Deep Place approach has three phases:

· The conduct of a deep statistical review which assembles as much data as possible to fully understand the challenges and opportunities in the locality or region concerned.

· The identification of economic development opportunities to increase activity in the local economy and link economically disadvantaged groups to those opportunities. Major emphasis is placed on development of the 'foundational economy' a concept developed by Manchester University Business School.

· The development of a 'coalition for change' constructed from local partners who commit to developing shared objectives, coordinated delivery and integrated services which are organised around the needs of the community.

New employment patterns are created through the use of social procurement clauses in contracts coupled with targeted recruitment and training of local residents to ensure they have the capacity to engage with employment opportunities.

Deep Place builds on the historical social and community development actions of Compass to deliver a comprehensive model of social housing provision which provides a range of responses that more fully matches the needs of the client. Compass will initially pilot the Deep Place method in Newcastle and Logan.

THE GREENING OF SOCIAL HOUSING

As Compass continues to grow as an organisation, it has looked for new opportunities to expand into beyond its core of tenancy management. One key area that sets Compass apart from other community housing providers has been its focus on environmental sustainability.

Fuelled by Greg Budworth's passion for improving the lives of tenants and lessening impact on the environment, the Total Sustainability Program was developed in 2009 and covers the areas of personal, social, environmental and corporate sustainability. It aimed to have 'a lasting positive impact on the lives of Compass' clients, staff, partners and the general community' (Compass, 2009a: p.6).

Cultivating 'GROW': a Total Sustainability Initiative

By 2010, the Total Sustainability Program became part of a broader initiative known as 'GROW' (see Box 38). As Director Sue Dark noted, 'when Debra Allan was employed it was a pivotal point in the organisation because Greg [Budworth] had an epiphany of the GROW philosophy and how it would work, fully supported by the Board's commitment ... The values and philosophies such as the GROW program separate Compass from other housing organisations' (Sue Dark, personal communication).

GROW brought together the community development approaches described - earlier in this Chapter - with a number of radical environmental and sustainability initiatives. Put somewhat immodestly, 'it strives to the be the greatest value-add endeavour to the existing provision of social and affordable housing currently seen in the Australian Housing Sector' (Compass, 2010c: p.5).

If the claims are bold, so is the thinking. GROW is one of the most radical initiatives produced in the community housing sector, in Australia or overseas. It combines a concern with environmental issues with a concern for how people can better achieve 'personal sustainability'. Compass:

'Encourage all our clients to keep healthy physically, mentally and financially. We provide our clients with information about nutritious food and food preparation, healthy lifestyles and budgeting' (ibid., p. 3).

The moralising tone of GROW is balanced by a more practical approach to environmental issues. Much work was needed to improve the environmental sustainability of social housing properties, reducing costs for tenants and the landlord. This now forms part of Compass's EnviroBuild Project which investigates ways to retro-fit older style properties to lower resource consumption (see Box 39). Other steps, intended as a wayfinder for both staff and tenants, include:

By recycling, turning off lights, watering plants early morning, participating in Earth Hour, our staff and clients are participating in environmental sustainability practices. Our community development workers have been trained to assist our clients with tips on how to save power and cut utility bills' (ibid., p. 3).

Compass become a Silver Partner status in 2011 of the Sustainability Advantage Program, in acknowledgment for strengthening environmental performance in the shortest period in the history of the program.

Later Compass received the silver prize, and is working towards gold. Further awards came in 2013 from the Hunter Business Chamber and PowerHousing Australia.

Tenants have also taken initiatives in greening their own local communities. In 2012, tenants of the Avery Street Complex approached The Meeting Place with the idea of planting their own local community garden. With the support of Compass, tenants of both Compass and Housing NSW have come together to grow fresh fruit and vegetables. The garden is now wholly run by tenants and allows local community members to meet each other as well as produce healthy food options.

Box 38: The GROW strategy

Welfare
(Personal Sustainability)

Health and Nutrition
Esteem and Well Being
Security of Tenure

Responsible
(Community Sustainability)

Community Contribution
Economic Participation
Generational Advancement
Tenant Participation

Green
(Environmental Sustainability)

Neighborhood and building
design and development for 21C

Retrofitting environmental
features to dwellings

Greening the workplace

Opportunities
(Corporate Sustainability)

New Environmental Business
Developments
Efficiencies & Improvements

Box 39: EnviroBuild sustainability initiative

Compass has built an environmentally sustainable demonstration project at Canton Beach, Central Coast, NSW. The project aims to achieve a higher than average energy efficiency, and use smart metering to help tenants reduce their energy costs.

Source: Compass (2013)

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

The organisation's work around tenant participation has been continuous for three decades, though has taken many different forms. Tenant governance under Newmacq retreated by the late 1990s, to be replaced by more formal consultation on practical issues. Under the new management team at Newmacq/Compass, as with so many other aspects of running the business, the scale has increased and processes have become formalised. There has been a longstanding tradition of innovation in tenant and community matters, and this continues.

Creating successful and environmentally sustainable communities has become a defining feature of Compass from the mid-2000s. Through Compass Connect, a large number of initiatives have been funded that are aimed at improving the wellbeing of local communities. Community events have been hosted, public meeting places created and inter-generational opportunities improved, most noticeably through GROW a Star.

Compass took an extra step with its commitment to environmental sustainability, and the application of this approach to staff, stakeholders as well as tenants. By crafting a narrative around 'people, place and performance', Compass has developed a unique positioning in the Australian community housing sector. And as will be seen in Chapter Six, this has positioned it well for recent growth opportunities.

Avery Street complex residents, community garden project 2014.

THROUGH COMPASS CONNECT, A LARGE NUMBER OF INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN FUNDED THAT ARE AIMED AT IMPROVING THE WELLBEING OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

COMPASS ON THE MOVE: 2010-2015

Many years' hard work following the Newmacq troubles had left Compass as one of the handful of very high capacity not-for-profit housing providers in the country. Processes and controls were in place, Compass's balance sheet strong and the senior management team seasoned in bidding for new business opportunities.

As noted in Chapter 4, by 2010 Compass was already an organisation spanning across much of NSW from the border with South Australia to the Pacific Ocean. If geography was no barrier to running a contemporary community housing provider, could Compass step onto the national stage? To date only two organisations had broken beyond state boundaries. Community Housing Limited's business stretched across many parts of Australia, and internationally to the developing world, and Mission Australia Housing had footholds in both NSW and Victoria. Most other housing providers kept to their local parish.

The move to a national business was foreshadowed in the Commonwealth Government's 2009 discussion paper on the need for a national system of sector regulation. Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek thought 'housing providers themselves need simple regulations which give them the opportunity to expand across State and Territory borders and to enter into solid commercial relationships' (Australian Government, 2010: p.iii). For organisations like Compass, a move to a new state also provided opportunities for growth when the policy and funding environment in NSW became less favourable.

AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY, AN AGE OF OPPORTUNITY

The golden age of community housing in NSW arguably came to an end on 28 March 2011 with the election of Barry O'Farrell as Coalition Premier. Although the administration was benign in comparison with the Greiner Government in the 1990s, the largesse of the long Labour Government over the previous 11 years came to an abrupt end. The clarity of the 1996 Community Housing Strategy became a distant memory, and at the time of writing this book - some four years after the Liberal Government has been in power - no new social housing strategy has been put in place although consultation is underway.

Political winds of change

At state level, there has both political and administrative change. The Department of Housing was re-branded Housing NSW in 2008, though the bigger shift came in July 2009 when the agency merged into the new Department of Human Services. The change aimed to 'ensure a greater focus on our clients, better integration of public services' (DHS, 2010: p.7). Social housing, including funding community housing, now became subsumed in a large, bureaucratic department with more focus on service delivery and less on housing.

The in-coming NSW Coalition Government further diluted the focus on social housing. The business was split in 2011, with tenancy management remaining in the Department of Human Services (later renamed the Department of Family and Community Services), and assets were transferred to the Land and Housing Corporation in the Department of Finance and Services. There were two Ministers, yet neither took the title of Housing Minister. In a further change in August 2013, the assets part of the business returned to the Department of Family and Community Services. However, they remain run as separate business units.

In a damning report in 2013, Housing NSW was declared 'not financially sustainable long-term' and criticised for 'the absence of a clear direction' (NSW Auditor-General, 2013: p.3). The response has mainly been to tighten the terms for public housing, with 'undeclared occupant amnesties' and a 'bedroom tax', and asset sales such the disposal of 293 properties at Millers and Dawes Points announced early in 2014. For community housing providers there is uncertainty, an absence of tenancy transfers, and a block on further 'vesting' of property title.

To compound the change in political mood, in September 2013 a Coalition Government under Prime Minister Tony Abbott was elected. There was to be no Housing Minister, and it was suggested housing responsibilities would pass fully to the states. Future National Rental Affordability Scheme incentive subsidies were cancelled in May 2014, and several peak bodies such as the influential Community Housing Federation of Australia had their termination notices issued just a few days before Christmas 2014.

Outsourcing tenancy management

Transferring social housing tenancies from the public housing to the community housing sector dates back many years, as noted in Chapter 4. Prior to the Nation Building stimulus, around 90% of the 10,500 transfers to 2011 were 'management outsourcing' where State Governments retained property ownership, and only 10% involved a transfer of title (Pawson et al., 2013). Generally the transfers were of a modest scale, of a few hundred properties, and no particular expectations were placed on the recipient community housing provider other than to be a good landlord.

From 2011, new approaches to management outsourcing emerged. Transfers to community housing providers were packaged into larger transactions involving upwards of 500 properties, and contracts would be awarded for fixed terms - normally 20 years. Recipient organisations would need to meet a set of strict Key Performance Indicators showing they had met targets such as improving housing quality, re-building community cohesion, engaging tenants and developing new affordable housing. In most cases tenants would need to be persuaded to sign-up with the community housing provider as landlord, allowing an adjustment to rent settings so that Commonwealth Rent Assistance could be received.

These new mega transactions involved an extended bidding process, complex financial modelling, debt raising and cross-sectoral partnerships. Larger community housing providers such as Compass, with skilled staff members (Box 40) and teams of professional advisors and consultants, all benefitted. Furthermore, the emerging 'super league' of larger community housing organisations either decided to or were positively encouraged to cross state boundaries. Tenancy management outsourcing became a national business, as foretold by Minister Plibersek in 2009.

The first state to pioneer outsourcing was Tasmania. In January 2012 'Better Housing Futures' promised 500 residents of the forlorn public housing estates of Clarendon Vale and Rokeby outside Hobart a new landlord, greater access to support services, warmer houses and access to a new community centre. Three larger parcels of around 1,100 Tasmanian public housing homes each were awarded in 2013. Similar large scale outsourcing projects were initiated in Queensland in 2012 and South Australia in 2013.

Compass, as Australia's fourth largest community housing provider in 2010, was one of the few organisations that had the scale and capacity to take advantage of the management outsourcing opportunities. However, this was just one of a number of new growth options that could be pursued. Which direction would they turn?

Newmacq, 2006

Box 40: Compass staff through the decades

During the 1980s and into the late 1990s Compass employed three members of staff, often part-time. As tenancies under management increased, so did staff numbers - to seven in the early 2000s. However, the biggest growth has been over the last decade, with 53 staff employed by June 2010 and 86 full-time-equivalent employees by June 2014.

Source: Newmacq (2006) p.3, Compass (2014a) p.10

Compass, 2014

NEW AVENUES FOR GROWTH AFTER 2010

Despite the pessimistic picture painted of funding and policy opportunities during recent years, there have still been a number of opportunities. Many of these are legacies from earlier Commonwealth largesse - from the 1990s Building Better Cities program to the more recent Rudd/Gillard initiatives such as Nation Building and the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Other funding sources have been offered from local councils, and NSW Government where there has been a greater focus on supporting high needs groups.

Transforming the affordable housing business

Compass was one the first of the NSW Community Tenancy Scheme organisations to diversify into providing affordable housing with the delivery of Building Better Cities homes from the late 1990s, as described in Chapter 2. Affordable housing is generally provided at a 20-30% discount to market rent, and aimed at moderate income 'key workers'. This is in contrast to traditional social housing where low income residents pay a maximum of 25% of household income on rent. In the case of Better Cities rental properties, applicants must be in employment, have incomes in the range $30,000 and $72,000, and be connected to the area in where they are seeking housing.

In 2012 Compass established a new business unit 'My Place Property' to coordinate the 188 directly managed affordable houses (see Box 41). Interestingly this operates from dedicated offices at 1 Brown Street in Newcastle city centre, and with a distinct brand. My Place manages affordable housing tenancies, and also liaises with developers and investors for projects part-funded under the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

By 2014 the business had grown in scale and is now looking to diversify into commercial real estate. My Place Property has been established as a separate legal entity, with its own board and general manager. All profits made from commercial activities will be passed to Compass, the parent company, and used to support high needs tenants (Compass, 2014a). Establishing a separately branded business of this type is unique in NSW, and one of the few examples in Australia. It should align with the State Government's wish to help transition from social rental housing to the private market.

Box 41: My Place Property
Alexandra Lamb and Kirsten Adam at the King Street office

Supporting higher needs households

Compass's core business remains the provision of community housing, with 86% of properties used for this activity. However, in parallel with expanding affordable housing which caters for low to moderate income households (7% of housing), Compass has also expanded to support people with higher needs. Around 5% of properties are managed on a fee for service basis, mainly on behalf of the Aboriginal Housing Office. The remaining 2% are crisis housing, transitional housing and accommodation for people with disabilities.

Box 42: SAIF housing for Jema-Lee

The Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund (SAIF) program delivers housing for people living with a physical or mental disability (around one fifth of all of Compass's tenants).

Jema-Lee was one of the first tenants to be housed in a Compass SAIF home: 'I'm very happy with making and creating new friends and friendships and I will look forward to having sleepovers with my friends and being independent'.

'I will be doing the same thing as my brother, sisters and cousins are doing. This is very important to me. I know I still have family who will visit me and I know that I will be more independent from my family as well'.

Source: Compass (2014a) p.36

Box 43: Elermore Vale, NSW 2014 - Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund

In 2012 Compass received funding under the Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund (SAIF) to deliver 20 new homes for people with a severe disability in the Newcastle and Central Coast area.

The properties are architecturally designed; include key features to improve accessibility, safety and functionality, and have attained platinum level under the Australian Liveable Housing Design guidelines.

Tenancies are managed by Compass with ongoing support delivered by Ability Options.

In 2012 Compass received the highest allocation of funding of any community housing provider under the Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund (SAIF) program, a Commonwealth initiative to house people with disabilities (see Box 42) (Compass, 2013). Grants of $7.3 million provided 20 new homes that were delivered to Liveable Housing Design platinum standards in the Newcastle and Central Coast areas. In addition to these new accessible homes, Compass already works closely with partners to support the 20% of current tenants living with a mental or physical disability.

Another recent growth area has been support for people who are homeless. In 2012 Compass's 'This Way Home' program began providing 24 medium-term properties and nine temporary accommodation properties for chronically homeless or those at risk of homelessness in the Newcastle council area. Based on the 'common ground' principles initially pioneered in New York, the program not only provides accommodation to those in need, but also supports personal development through education on domestic violence, parenting, cooking on a budget and the 'Rent it Keep it' sessions on sustaining tenancies.

Some eighteen years after funding for the Building Better Cities program was agreed, the benefits are still being felt. Funds have remained under the control of Newcastle City Council and are allocated when suitable projects emerge. The This Way Home project was part funded by $2 million from Better Cities, with NSW Government providing the land at Mayfield (see Box 44). Compass is the lead property manager, with services provided by a number of organisations including Mission Australia, the Salvation Army and Wesley Mission.

The most recent payment from Building Better Cities, and probably the last, was announced in May 2014 with a grant of $2.8 million. Supported by NSW Government's contribution of the old Empire Hotel site on Hunter Street West, valued at $2.9 million, a new local consortium – Newcastle First - will develop a 14 storey apartment building, to include 25 affordable homes to be managed by Compass out of a total of 100 units (ABC News, 2014).

The Tasmanian tiger?

Compass's first move inter-state, the related establishment of a new type of corporate structure, and a bid for a management outsourcing contract were all set to be useful learning processes. However, as can often happen, not everything went according to plan.

In 2010 the incoming Tasmanian State Government had indicated a new approach to social housing under what became known as 'Better Housing Futures'. The potential growth opportunities may have been one of the reasons for Compass establishing a partnership relationship with STEPS Housing Limited early in 2011. In an echo of the Ironbark model of the early 2000s described in Chapter Three, the Tasmanian partnership model allowed STEPS to maintain its autonomy. Compass shared housing and property management skills as well as financial resources. This approach 'was part of Compass' strategic plan to operate in more areas with a capacity over time for national operations' (Compass, 2011).

STEPS operated from an office in Hobart, and managed 51 properties owned and headleased by Housing Tasmania across seven local government areas - mainly in the Huon Valley and Glenorchy. Unfortunately the loose working arrangement did not work well given financial and board challenges. On 29 August 2011 Compass exercised their rights under a Memorandum of Understanding and assumed full control of STEPS and appointed a board mirroring the main Compass board. Later the organisation was renamed Compass Housing Services (Tasmania) Limited, and coordinated through the Western Division which also covered Compass housing in Broken Hill and Dubbo.

Having a base in Tasmania provided a good opportunity for Compass to bid in early 2012 for the first larger scale contemporary management outsourcing contract for 500 properties near Hobart. The outcome was less positive for Compass, and after a strongly contested tender process, the contract was awarded to Mission Australia Housing. For many of the larger nationally ambitious community housing providers who were not successful - including Compass - it was a vital step in building capacity. Most would go on and win subsequent management outsourcing tenders in the second Tasmanian contracts, or Queensland.

Compass's strategy was to plan to exit Tasmania if they lost the tender as they would find it hard to reach critical mass. As Greg Budworth noted, there were a number of community housing providers 'competing for a limited number of chairs in the musical chairs game when the music stopped' (personal communication). In April 2013 Compass successfully transitioned their Tasmanian staff and tenants, and exited the state while recouping their initial investment.

By this time there were more substantial and complex management outsourcing opportunities to pursue in Queensland. Although the adventure to the Apple Isle had been disappointing, it provided key learnings into the corporate structure needed for a national business, and in bid preparation. Compass learned these lessons well.

OUR FRIENDS IN THE NORTH: COMPASS IN QUEENSLAND

Compass's move to become a national community housing provider had been foreshadowed as early as 2010 when Greg Budworth noted in the annual report that was 'actively pursuing various models for establishing a group structure having national capacity and advantages with other inter and intra state organisations' (Compass, 2010a: p.9). In 2011 Compass acquired STEPS in Tasmania, then pursued new tendering opportunities for tenancy management outsourcing contracts as they emerged.

Logan: the new frontier

The Queensland Government under Premier Campbell Newman came to power in March 2012 with an agenda for radical change. In August 2012 the Logan Renewal Initiative was announced - a radical plan to revitalise around 4,600 public housing dwellings and deliver new affordable housing in the fast growing area in South East Queensland between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. This would be the largest management transfer ever attempted in Australia, being around five times larger the largest transaction to date - the Bonnyrigg Living Communities Initiative in NSW.

In response to a call for Expressions of Interest in September 2012, a rumoured twelve consortia entered submissions. By February 2013 the list was down to just three. Two large Queensland providers - BHC (Brisbane Housing Company) and Horizon Housing - formed a joint bid with developers Devine and Bouygues Construction, asset manager Transfield and the Salvation Army. The second group included Churches of Christ Care, Community Housing Limited and Mangrove Housing Association along with Mirvac and the Queensland Affordable Housing Consortium.

Compass were also through to the next stage, partnering with Queensland community housing provider 4Walls, developers Becton, RTC facilities management, urban planners Urbis, Life Without Barriers and the Hornery Institute (Queensland Government, 2013a). The public information bulletin in March 2013 marked the first time that news was made public that Compass and 4Walls were in discussions, though there was no indication that a merger might follow.

The three winning bidders then had to complete the next stage, with the Request for Proposal launched in February 2013. By this stage negotiations were not in the public domain, so little is known of negotiations. However, there was an understanding that a decision would be made by the middle of 2013 with a public announcement later in the year noting that the transfer would take place in 'early 2014' (Queensland Government, 2013b: p.11). In the meantime (during June 2013) the Newman Government announced what is arguably Australia's most radical housing policy, suggesting moving 90% of social housing to the community sector by 2020 (see Box 45).

Deadlines came and went for the Logan Renewal Initiative. Government made no announcements, though it was rumoured in the sector that there had been a number of shifts in consortia membership and that the contest was down to teams led by two national housing providers - Compass and Community Housing Limited. As noted in Chapter Four, these two organisations had been considering a joint alignment in 2005. Today they remain the two goliaths of the Australian sector, number one and number two community housing providers by numbers of tenancies managed.

Finally in September 2014 - two years after the proposal was first announced - Compass's team were announced as winners in the Logan Renewal Initiative (see Box 47). The project will be delivered jointly with BlueCHP, a not-for-profit affordable housing development company established by five NSW community housing providers in 2008. A new organisation titled 'Logan City Community Housing' has been formed to deliver renewal in Logan.

The main goals of the Logan Renewal Initiative are known, though much of the detail remains in commercial confidence. Service provision will be contracted by Logan City Community Housing to its partners, with Compass providing tenancy and property management and BlueCHP coordinating development activities. Social housing will remain owned by Government over the 20 years of the contract, and there are plans to build new social and affordable homes over the first decade (Queensland Government, 2014). Compass (2014b) confirmed that 1,000 homes will be replaced with 1,600 new properties, and there will be an additional 1,000 new affordable homes for rent.

Box 45: Radical change in Queensland

Department of Housing and Public Works

Housing 2020

Delivering a flexible, efficient and responsive housing assistance system for Queensland's future

Great state. Great opportunity.

'The Housing 2020 Strategy marks the beginning of a new era and will deliver the major renewal necessary to bring Queensland's social housing system into the 21st Century'.

'Our aim is to establish a flexible, regionally based, integrated system that, by 2020, will deliver an additional 12,000 homes and see up to 90% of social housing dwellings managed by community housing providers'.

Source: Queensland Government (2013b)

Box 46: General Manager of Operations, Queensland, Jo Ahern outside the Compass office on Stanley Street, Woolloongabba.

In August 2014, Compass merged with Brisbane based community housing provider 4Walls and continued operations under the Compass banner.

Based out of the heritage listed Post and Telegraph Office in Woolloongabba, the Queensland team currently manage more than 900 tenancies through a variety of affordable, transitional and long-term social housing programs including the Community Rent Scheme, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service and National Rental Affordability Scheme as well as providing referrals and casework support to refugees through the Settlement Grants Program.

For Compass, the transaction marks a major step in their growth. As noted by an ebullient Greg Budworth in the 2014 annual report:

'This is a $5 billion contract over 20 years ...the largest property transfer in Australian history, to the largest charitable joint venture in Australian history and makes Compass the largest community housing provider in our nation's history.

'In contrast it has been a further year of relative inactivity in NSW for property transfers and policy announcements towards community housing' (Compass, 2014a: p.18-19)

It will enable the community development, tenant participation and environmental sustainability initiatives detailed in Chapter Five to be rolled-out across a portfolio of properties noticeably larger than the total managed as at 30 June 2014. For local tenants, much of the basic tenancy management services will remain unchanged, with the business continuing to operate from the Woodridge Housing Services Centre which will transfer to Compass along with many former staff from the Department of Housing and Works. Woodridge is seen as a high performing office, and their manager Charmaine Schoutens will become Compass's General Manager for the Logan project.

SERVICE PROVISION WILL BE CONTRACTED BY LOGAN CITY COMMUNITY HOUSING TO ITS PARTNERS, WITH COMPASS PROVIDING TENANCY AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT AND BLUECHP COORDINATING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Box 47: Logan renewal - at last

Charles Northcote (BlueCHP), Lyndall Robertshaw (Compass), Michael Crandon MP, Cr Russell Lutton, Tim Mander MP, former Minister for Housing and Public Works, Mark Boothman MP, celebrating the announcement of the Logan Renewal Initiative, 2014.

'Logan City Community Housing is keen to play an active role in the Logan community, and will be looking for residents to get involved in the projects and activities they have planned'.

Source: BlueCHP, 2014 Queensland Government (2014)

4Walls Housing join the family

Much recent focus on Compass in Queensland has been connected with the Logan Renewal Initiative that was announced in September 2014. However, a month earlier on 21 August 2014 Compass announced that they had merged with 4Walls - a Queensland community housing provider - with effect from 1 July 2014 (Compass, 2014a; c). Compass started discussions with 4Walls at least as early as the end of 2012 when a consortium was being formed for the Logan bid.

The Queensland community housing sector has developed in a different way to NSW, though both states started funding not-for-profit organisations in the 1980s based on the new approaches in Commonwealth housing policy described in Chapter One. Both NSW and Queensland have similar proportions of 'mainstream' social housing managed in the community housing sector - 18% as at June 2014 (Compass, 2014c). However, Queensland has remained characterised by a larger number of small providers, often involved in more specialist housing provisions.

4Walls was founded in 2009 through a merger between Brisbane Boarders and the Metropolitan Association Towards Community Housing (MATCH). Brisbane Boarders traditionally provided transitional housing for low income earners, people with a disability and other marginalised people who are or are at risk of homelessness. The organisation was established as a limited company in October 2005. MATCH remained a registered association, rather a limited company, and was established in April 1993 (www.asic.gov.au). Based on the claim that by 2012 the two former organisations had 'a collective history of over 27 years', these two founding dates - 2005 and 1993 - look realistic (4Walls, 2012).

MATCH appear to have been an organisation with a strong community focus, combining housing high needs people with refugee work. There seems to have been an atmosphere in the organisation in the 1990s and 2002 similar to Newmacq before the arrival of Kelvyn Enright.

The 4Walls business model after the 2009 merger covered a wide range of services, from social and affordable rental housing to homelessness provision. Of their 900 properties as at June 2013, 427 were transitional housing, 234 long term social housing and 254 'private programs' including managing 150 properties on behalf of investors under the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Most properties were not owned by 4Walls, rather managed on behalf of the Department of Housing and Brisbane City Council. 4Walls made losses in 2011-12 and 2012-13, and had a modest capital base of $2.4 million at June 2013 (4Walls, 2013).

4Walls also provided advocacy and support services to migrant and humanitarian groups under the Settlement Grants Program, and assisted refugees in need of a home through the Red Cross Program. This continued the work of MATCH. Services offered by 4Walls were delivered across a wide area in South East Queensland, encompassing greater Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Now operating under the Compass banner, the Brisbane based operation continues to provide housing services to vulnerable people through a variety of long-term and transitional housing programs including the Community Rent Scheme, Youth Housing and Reintegration Service, National Rental Affordability Scheme and Settlement Grants Program. (see Box 46).

Housing Without Borders

Much of the day-to-day operations of community housing providers revolve around the very practical issues of providing safe, affordable accommodation for people in need in our local communities. Sometimes it can be hard to see beyond the narrow limits of forms, policies, tenants and rent collection. There are times, however, when organisations raise their game and see the right to housing as a human right. 2015 was one of those times for Compass Housing.

Compass has long recognised that its vision 'that all people have appropriate and affordable shelter and are engaged in sustainable communities' was not constrained by state or national borders. In the first years of the introduction of the GROW program, the partnership with World Vision and Compassion Australia encouraged staff and tenants to collectively give to a child sponsorship program. This donating still continues today, though it was always the intention that Compass Housing would become more directly involved.

In April 2015 Compass Housing representatives attended the Preparatory Committee Meeting in Kenya for the forthcoming United Nations Human Settlements Programme's Habitat III Agenda in Ecuador in 2016. In 1996 UN Heads of State committed themselves to enabling people to obtain shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, assessable and affordable and includes basic services, facilities and amenities in which everyone enjoys freedom from discrimination in housing and legal security of tenure. This aligns closely with core Compass Housing values.

Although UN national committees should have been set up in 2013, Australia has lagged behind. Compass has been taking a lead, trying to form coalitions between interested not-for-profit organisations. As a result Compass was granted special accreditation to attend the Ecuador event, and will be involved in future UN meetings. More practically, in the Asia Pacific region, Compass is working to help with housing provision in Vanuatu, and longer term in China if the right opportunities can be identified.

Nearer to home, and in the developed world, the recent focus has been on New Zealand. Trans-Tasman rivalries abound, and not just over sport. However we share many similar housing and community characteristics. Traditionally New Zealand social housing has been carved-up between the National Government and the Councils, with barely a look-in for community organisations. Now that this looks likely to change, it is a good chance for Compass to help share knowledge and learnings from three decades' work in Australia.

In February 2015 the board authorised Compass to become a registered New Zealand community housing provider. This will likely be a first in Australasia, placing the organisation in a new and exciting position. Stock transfers of up to 20% of National Government owned social housing homes are proposed starting later in 2015, and this gives an opportunity for Compass to pass-on learnings from the Logan transfer. The key success factor is listening to and collaborating with local communities, and this applies as much as whether they are in the same state, in a different state, or in a different country.

In addition to the venture into New Zealand, Compass Housing is considering measures to address shelter needs in Vanuatu, as previously mentioned. Research and site visits to Vanuatu revealed the urgent need for educational opportunities and facilities for children; such as the construction of kindergartens, primary schools and resources and support for existing facilities and teachers. The urgency for support was exacerbated by the ravages of Tropical Cyclone Pam in March 2015. The need for employment, as well as education and vocational training is clear, to redress the cycle of poverty that is present across Vanuatu. The impact of lack of education, employment and safe housing is impacting on the safety and wellbeing of children in particular and on women also. At the time of writing Compass is preparing a proposal outlining a number of projects which are intended to add support to the communities of Vanuatu and to enhance their social and economic development.

In July in 2015 Dr Bernadette Pinnell was appointed General Manager of Compass Housing Services New Zealand Ltd. Bernadette brings detailed knowledge of social housing reform in the United Kingdom and Australia, though has been working in New Zealand so understands the local context. By working on a partnership basis, and adding value where needed, Compass may well become one of the main trans-Tasman housing organisations. This would also make them one of the few not-for-profit housing providers to run a business spanning national borders.

Settlement Grants Program Day out, Compass 2015

COMPASS QUEENSLAND'S SETTLEMENT GRANTS PROGRAM
PROVIDES INFORMATION, REFERRALS AND CASEWORK
SERVICES TO HELP REFUGEES WHO HAVE LIVED IN AUSTRALIA
FOR LESS THAN 5 YEARS TO BECOME SELF-RELIANT.

CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

As noted in Greg Budworth's quote in the 2013-14 annual report (see above), Compass's move inter-state had to be understood in the context of a lack of opportunities in their home state of NSW. As shown in Figure 6, numbers of tenancies under management in their core business areas remained relatively stable after 2011, with a small drop in numbers when the STEPS business in Tasmania was sold. Although tenancies remained stable, the business's asset base increased sharply with title transfers of $110 million in 2010-11 and a further $137 million at the start of the 2014-15 financial year (see Chapter Four). This should bring the capital base of Compass to around $330 million in July 2014 not taking account of the 4Walls merger or the Logan transfer.

The 4walls merger added 934 properties to Compass, to be run through a wholly owned subsidiary known as Compass Housing Services (Queensland). The total tenancies as at July 2014 will be around 4,250 making Compass a close second to Community Housing Limited with around 4,300 as at June 2014 (CHL, 2014). This will change when Compass more than doubles in size with the Logan transfer.

Figure 7 shows the large geographic area now covered by Compass, Brisbane in Queensland, down the coast to the Gold Coast, Newcastle and the NSW Central Coast, then across west to Broken Hill in outback NSW. Quite a contrast to Newmacq who in its first decade rarely ventured out beyond the city boundary of Newcastle. The final Chapter will review why the organisation has grown so fast, and what the implications are for the community housing sector going forward.

Figure 6: Compass's tenancy numbers, 2001-2015

QLD - Logan • QLD - 4Walls • NSW
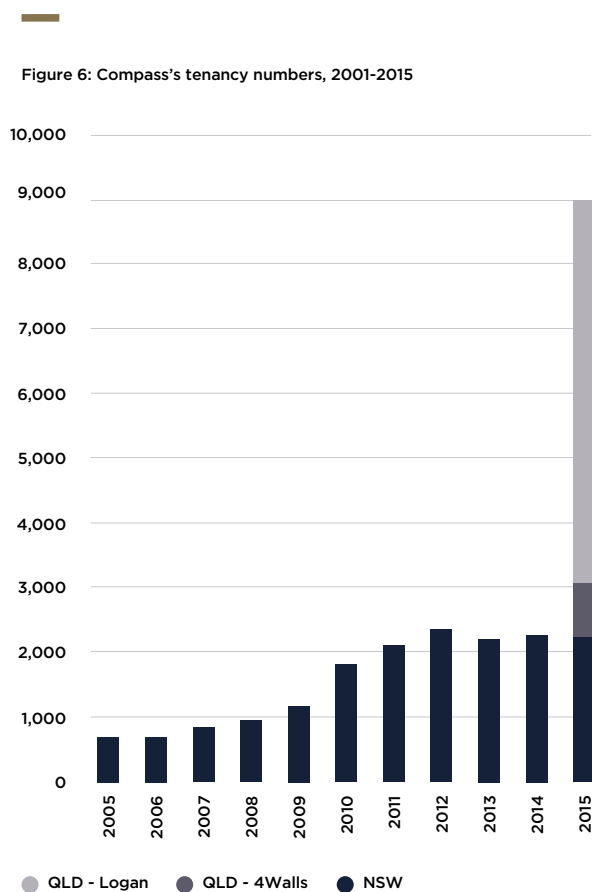
Numbers of tenancies managed, June

Source: Newmacq/Compass annual reports. Note: 2015 figures do not take into account any growth in tenancies in 2014-15, and assume the Logan transfer is completed by the end of June 2015.

Greg Budworth launching Compass's Total Sustainability Program

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otal Sustainability Pro

NAVIGATING CHANGE: COMPASS PAST AND FUTURE

The three decades of growth of the organisation we now know as Compass shines a light not just on changes in the community housing sector, but also on wider shifts in Australian society. This book aims to be not only the first detailed organisational history of a community housing provider, but to place the organisation's development in a political, policy and funding context. Newmacq and Compass's management has had to navigate change as much as lead it.

In the 1980s there was a drive by community activists to break free of what many saw as the dead hand of bureaucracy and provide housing for whole groups of people excluded from the Housing Commissions. Over the next decade a hundred flowers bloomed. In NSW the Community Tenancy Scheme scattered new housing organisations across the length and breadth of the State. Elsewhere in Australia housing cooperatives were popular. Whatever their organisational form, these new community housing providers were grass-roots collectives, powered by volunteers as much as paid staff members.

By the turn of the millennium, not-for-profit organisations that provided social welfare support were viewed differently both by Government and society. For many the voluntary aspect became less important as an increasing number of tasks were outsourced to them by Government. These were often services that would once have been directly delivered by the State. In this new role the larger community organisations needed to become more professional and adopt the language, controls and funding models of business.

Newmacq/Compass's development from 1984 has been a story of both continuity and change. Significant growth in NSW came in two distinct phases, separated by long periods of stability. The first expansion was under the leadership of Kelvyn Enright between 1998 and 2001 when Newmacq became a 'growth association' and took advantage of opportunities provided by the 1996 NSW Community Housing Strategy - Australia's first.

The second period of rapid growth in NSW for Compass came between 2007 and 2011 under the leadership of Greg Budworth, during what has been referred to in this book as community housing's 'golden age'. This was a period where a favourable NSW policy and funding regime under the 2007 'Planning for the future strategy' coincided with radical new funding and leadership by the Commonwealth after 2008.

However, despite the importance of the funding and policy environments set by Commonwealth and State governments, community housing providers are not merely passive agents of public

policy. Some organisations thrive, others struggle. This is mostly due to the wit and perception of their leaders, and the leaders' ability to identify the right strategic direction for the times. Success or failure also depends on the leaders' ability to ensure the organisation has the capacity, systems and controls in place. Both strategic and operational issues are important, and the top sector leaders master both.

Newmacq/Compass is unusual but not unique in having had only a small number of leaders over a long history. Until the late 1990s Newmacq was run as a collective, with the officer manager acting as first amongst equals. Kelvyn Enright's arrival in 1997 brought Newmacq its first professional manager, and one from a non-housing background. In one of the many surprising coincidences that emerged when researching this book, the organisation's second leader - Greg Budworth - was also from a professional management rather than a housing background.

While both Enright in the late 1990s and Budworth in the late 2000s took advantage of new growth opportunities, their styles and strategies were fundamentally different. Enright had a traditional view of community housing, fully in accord with the spirit of the Community Tenancy Scheme from the early 1980s. Community housing providers should be local organisations providing housing for local people. By contrast Budworth saw earlier than most the breaking-down of geographical 'parishes', first across NSW and later interstate.

In the early 2000s Newmacq stagnated under Enright's strategy, falling from number one to number twelve in the NSW sector. By contrast, a decade later, Budworth's expansionary vision led to Compass becoming once again number one in NSW and, with the recent Logan Renewal Initiative, soon to be number one in Australia. There is no single correct strategy for community housing providers, but there are those that work best at particular times. By moving into Queensland, Budworth reduced the organisation's dependency on the NSW State Government just at the time when opportunities became more limited in their home state.

Source: Map prepared using Google Earth. Council areas coloured in red are as at 2005, those in gold are as at 2010 and those in yellow as at 2015.

BRISBANE

LOGAN

BROKEN HILL

DUBBO

NEWCASTLE
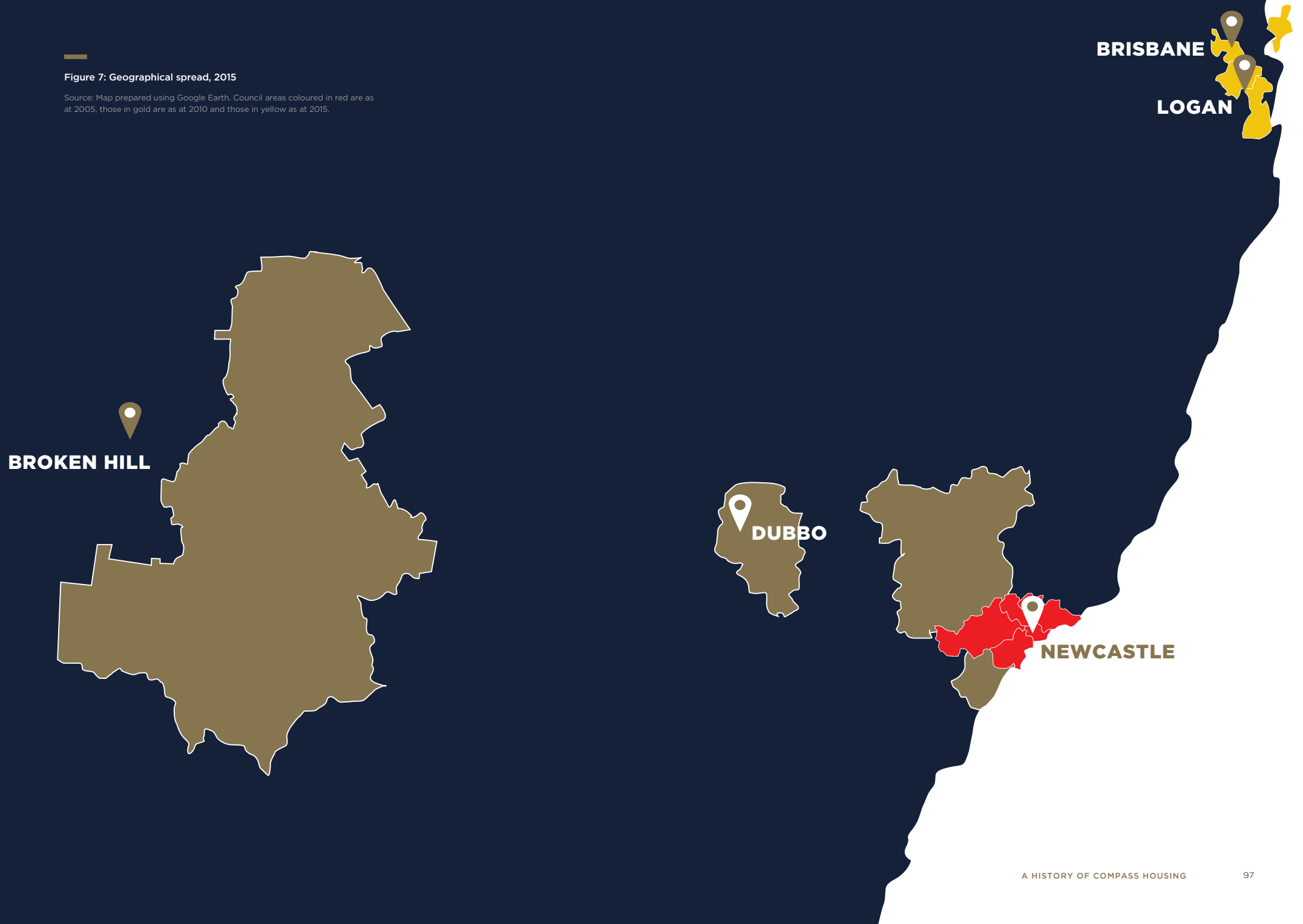
The fall and resurgence of Newmacq in 2004-05 is an important story. Many Australian community housing providers have had troubles, as happens with housing associations internationally and in other sectors of the economy. Many of the early Community Tenancy Schemes faced financial challenges, management problems or a failure to professionalise in line with Government expectations. Several have ended up part of Compass, including housing providers serving the Hunter, Central Coast, Dubbo and Broken Hill areas.

COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS THAT ARE SOLIDLY GROUNDED IN THE NEIGHBOURHOODS IN WHICH THEY OPERATE FIND THEY HAVE DEEP RESERVOIRS OF SUPPORT WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH.

Newmacq's problem in the early 2000s was its capacity building drive and move to contemporary governance. These changes were initiated by Enright, but did not go far enough, or deep enough, or fast enough. Regulatory expectations had increased significantly since the 1990s when Community Tenancy Schemes were controlled through their funding agreement to ensure that grant monies had been correctly spent. By 2004 community housing organisations were expected to have detailed systems and controls in place in areas such as waiting lists, rent setting and tenancy allocations.

What is noticeable in the troubles of 2004-05 is that, despite any formal procedures for rescuing a community housing organisation, the transition to normality went remarkably smoothly. Although there was helpful support from the Office of Community Housing in Sydney, it was mainly the strength and determination of Newcastle people such as politician Allan Morris and tenant advocate Sandra Calland who made change happen. Community housing providers that are solidly grounded in the neighbourhoods in which they operate find they have deep reservoirs of support when times are tough.

The establishment of Newmacq in 1983-85 is another example of the importance of local roots. Back then it was what this book has described as the 'founding mothers' of Newmacq - Hilary Bradbury, Tracie O'Shea, Coralie Kelly and Alma Tate - who helped formed the organisation. Newcastle City Council was a strong advocate for establishing Newmacq, and the organisation very nearly became a council controlled entity. In each of the subsequent decades Newcastle City Council supported the organisation in word and deed, especially in their role as custodian of the Commonwealth's Building Better Cities funds.

Newmacq/Compass has been buffeted by political change, and not just over funds and policy. Back in 1988 many feared NSW Government would close the Community Tenancy Scheme. There were many in the Housing Commission and later Department of Housing who viewed the rise of the community housing sector as a threat not an opportunity.

> **Box 48: Sandra Calland on Greg Budworth**
>
> Sandra has the distinction of being Newmacq/Compass's longest standing director, serving on the board from 2001 to 2014.
>
> 'When Greg and Lyndall first came on board, their commitment wasn't just the hours that they were paid, it was well and truly outside that. The things they did in their time contributed to where we are now. They both care about community.
>
> 'Greg's just got the ability to talk to a politician, talk to tenants, as individuals. Make them feel comfortable and important. That's not an ability everybody's got'.
>
> Greg's ability is combining what he feels in his heart towards people, and what he knows in his head has to be done to sustain [the organisation]'
>
> Source: Personal communication

However, despite the important role of politics in the growth of the community housing sector, there has not been a clear link to party politics. While Newcastle's rival family political dynasties such as the Tates and Morrises may have disagreed on many matters, they all supported Newmacq/Compass.

Over the last decade Compass has been shaped by the personality and vision of Greg Budworth. It must have been a herculean task to transform a failing organisation into Australia's largest and arguably the most successful community housing provider. Yet, despite a necessary focus on business processes and branding, Compass remains an informal and accessible organisation. The national head office is above a row of shops in a suburban high street. Many large community housing providers operate from city centre offices that are hard to distinguish from top-notch accounting firms.

What is also remarkable about Budworth's tenure as Managing Director is that the innovative and inclusive approaches to tenant participation and community development started within the first six months of him being in office. Tenants were invited to play a greater role in Newmacq even while the organisation was on Government's 'watch list'. The breadth and depth of programs such as Compass Connect, and the integration of a single vision covering personal development, place making and community development is ahead of the Australian sector. It even compares favourably with best international practice, with a 2015 independent review concluding the Compass social mission compared very favourably with current best practice in community focused regeneration in the UK social housing sector, generally recognised to be the international leader.

INNOVATIVE AND INCLUSIVE APPROACHES TO TENANT PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STARTED WITHIN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF BUDWORTH'S BEING IN OFFICE.

Where next for Compass? The move to Queensland carries risk, though also great opportunity. For the thousands of residents of Logan, Compass's tried and tested participation approaches, and initiatives such as GROW a Star and active tenant participation, should prove a welcome contrast to public sector management. Governments are increasingly passing complex challenges to the not-for-profit sector, and larger organisations such as Compass will be at the forefront of resolving deep seated social and community challenges across the Australia.

The new frontier is global challenges. Compass's vision is that all people should have appropriate and affordable shelter and that those people are engaged in sustainable communities.

Once again, Compass mirror and yet expand on the approach of their one-time suitors and now principal competitors - Community Housing Limited. Influencing policy makers nationally and internationally to end housing poverty is a good idea. Yet it need not be a purely abstract concept. Compass's move to New Zealand could allow very practical knowledge sharing, partnering and capacity building to take place.

The lessons of Compass's story to date are clear. Growth can provide strength when navigating change. However, the success of a community housing provider is not measured on how many tenancies are managed, but the quality of services provided and the number of lives transformed. On this score, sound foundations have been laid for Compass's next three decades.

THE NEW FRONTIER IS GLOBAL CHALLENGES. COMPASS'S VISION IS THAT ALL PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE SHELTER AND THAT THOSE PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Archival information held by Compass pre-2004 is limited, and therefore other sources have been consulted. These include electronic records held by ASIC, the Newcastle Herald, NSW Parliament, the State Library of NSW, and the University of NSW.

Documentary records held by the Mitchell Library in Sydney, Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Region Library, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, the NSW Federation of Housing Associations and Shelter NSW have also been reviewed.

Many insights have been gained from personal interviews with key people in Compass's development. These include:

- Greg Budworth. Chief Executive Officer of Compass from 2004.

- Sandra Calland. Tenant advocate at the Hunter and Central Coast Tenants Advisory Council, and Compass's longest serving Director (2001-14)

- Sue Dark. Compass Director (2004-10), Chairperson (2007) and Deputy Chairperson (2009-2010). Currently Compass's Disability and Homeless Services Manager.

- Chris Dodds. Newmacq's Company Secretary (1985-86).

- Lynden Esdaile. Manager, Community Tenancy Scheme (1982-85) and subsequently Executive Chairperson, NSW Housing Appeals Committee (1995-2013).

- Adam Farrar. Executive Director of the National Community Housing Forum (1996-2003) and Executive Director NSW Federation of Housing Associations (2003-12).

- Unis Goh. Director Performance Managing and Review, Office of Community Housing (2003-04).

- Therese McLean. Steering Committee member (1983-84), volunteer, then Newmacq paid staff member (1984-87).

- Wendy McKenzie. Member of Compass staff (1988-90).

- Associate Professor Vivienne Milligan. Consultant Senior Program Officer, Community Tenancy Scheme, Department of Youth and Community Services (1982-84); Manager, Community Tenancy Scheme, NSW Housing Commission (1985-86); Executive Director, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (1993-99).

- Alan Morris. Compass Director and Chairperson (2002-06. Previously an Alderman on Newcastle City Council (1974-83), and the Federal MP for Newcastle (1983-2001).

- Mark O'Dwyer. Compass tenant, and Director (2011-14).

- Lyndall Robertshaw. Compass staff member since 2004, currently Executive Director, Logan City Community Housing.

- Alma Tate OAM. Newmacq Director and Company Secretary (1985). Previously Alderman of Newcastle City Council (1977-83).

- Louise Wilde. Newmacq Director and Company Secretary (1986-88). For many years later Louise managed the Hunter Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service.

The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of people interviewed for the research or of Compass. Housing Action Network has provided consultancy services to Compass, along with 32 other Australian community housing providers since 2011.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Dr Tony Gilmour is an affordable housing consultant and researcher, with a passion for helping housing, homelessness and disability support organisations deliver high quality services. He is founder and CEO of the Housing Action Network - a leading international housing consultancy firm with 23 professional associates delivering services in all Australian jurisdictions and New Zealand. Tony has worked on diverse projects, from helping regional community housing organisations increase capacity, to Australia's largest stock transfers. He also helps promote innovations in alliancing, new forms of funding, group structures and housing options for people with a disability under NDIS.

Tony is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Swinburne University. He has published internationally on developing the community housing sector, public housing estate renewal and financing affording housing. He is co-author with Hal Pawson and David Mullins of 'After council housing: Britain's new social landlords' (2010), and sole author of 'Sustaining heritage: giving the past a future' (2007). His 2009 PhD at the University of Sydney reviewed approaches to building community housing capacity in Australia, Britain and the United States.

Helen Karathomas

Helen Karathomas is an urban geographer with a special interest in social housing. Helen's 2014 PhD at the University of NSW was concerned with how acts of territoriality have caused contests over urban space and in particular, have affected the accessibility of social housing within Sydney's inner city. The case study was of the changes to social housing in Millers and Dawes Points resulting from new financial approaches by NSW Government to social housing, and the impacts from the development at Barangaroo.

Since joining the Housing Action Network as a Research Associate, Helen has worked on behalf of community housing providers in both NSW and South Australia. Projects have included stock transfer, affordable housing developments funded through NRAS incentives, and housing policy analysis.

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