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INNER
SYDNEY

VOICE

JUSTICE FOR
JAI

2005-2022



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Inner Sydney Voice is the journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Inc. We are a non-profit organisation committed to the idea of information as a tool for community development. Inner Sydney is defined as the LGAs of City of Sydney, Bayside, Randwick, Waverley, Woollahra, and Inner West.

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We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional custodians of the lands across the areas we service, particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional custodians of the land on which our office is located. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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I happened to be heading to South Eveleigh on the morning of Saturday 19 February. Every road in was taped off, with police vehicles blocking all routes. The nearest I could park was Buckland Street in nearby Alexandria. Snaking my way on foot through to Henderson Road, it soon became apparent there had been a serious traffic accident. A helicopter was overhead; media on the scene. Gawpers all around. A small motorbike lay in the middle of the Henderson/Mitchell intersection.

It would later transpire that a 16-year-old Aboriginal boy — Jai Wright — had been riding the bike. He died later that day from serious head injuries after colliding with an unmarked police car. The exact circumstances of the incident remain unknown. Family have been given conflicting versions of events.

One involved a police pursuit; the other an aborted chase. The distinction between the two is important. Scenario number one ensures Jai's death is investigated as a death in custody. The second rules out police culpability and could avoid a coronial inquest.

The tragedy echoes the death of another Aboriginal teenager — TJ Hickey — 18 years before, almost to the day. TJ was riding his bicycle in Redfern when a police car collided with him, catapulting the 17-year-old onto a

spiked metal fence. TJ died of his injuries the next day.

I lived just across the tracks from The Block at the time. The overnight riot that ensued in response to TJ's death could be heard all around. Police were pelted with rocks and bottles. Redfern Station was set alight by a Molotov cocktail. More than 40 police officers were injured, including one knocked unconscious by a flying brick. Eventually, the fire brigade arrived to disperse rioters with water hoses. Community anger had understandably reached beyond boiling point. Another young Aboriginal life senselessly lost.

According to the coroner, the police were not responsible for TJ's death. It was, he found, a "freak accident". The Hickey family vehemently disagrees with the findings to this day. As for Jai's family, they are demanding a fully independent investigation into the Thungutti boy's premature death.

All too often following incidences such as these, the police close ranks while in-house investigations are held behind closed doors. When findings are finally released, no-one is held accountable — let alone charged and jailed. It's time to change the predictable script. For the sake of the hundreds-upon-hundreds of Indigenous lives lost in custody, for the sake of the bereaved families — for the sake of Jai — it's time for truth and transparency to prevail. #JusticeForJai

After more than 40 years as a printed publication, Inner Sydney Voice has gone completely digital. Back in the day, ISV started out as a humble newsletter before gradually evolving over the decades into the professionally produced, high-quality magazine you receive today. While there is more than some sadness at reaching an end of an era, digital publications are more flexible to produce. They also open up added dimensions for readers. Hyperlinks inserted into stories offer readers an opportunity to dive deeper into the issues. In this edition, for instance, you can delve into the details of the Waterloo South planning proposals or dig deeper into research on COVID's impact on poverty and inequality. You'll also be able to burrow into the nuts of a report on housing affordability and probe further into the history of the Tent Embassy. The ISV team hopes you enjoy the digital experience and your feedback is welcomed at admin@innersydneyvoice.org.au.

Feeding mouths and building communities

When COVID hit two years ago, many people lost their incomes and suddenly found themselves homeless. In response, StreetSmart Australia designed an initiative to help.

SmartMeals was launched in March 2020 as a dual impact initiative in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Food insecurity was rising rapidly as lockdowns caused widespread financial instability and left rough sleepers housed in accommodation without cooking facilities.

It was also increasingly evident that many restaurants were fast going out of business and unable to support their staff, some of whom were not entitled to government programs such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker.

SmartMeals was launched as a way of pairing these two community cohorts — providing income and job security for the hospitality sector workers while responding rapidly to the increased need within vulnerable communities for food relief and assistance.

SmartMeals is one of a plethora of programs that exist under the umbrella StreetSmart Australia — an organisation set up in 2003 to take direct action against homelessness. “We believe no one should be without a safe and secure place to call home,”



says its mission statement. StreetSmart raises funds, then seeks out and supports smaller grassroots organisations performing vital work in local communities.

In 2021, the SmartMeals program was relaunched with a focus on partnering with food-based social enterprises to ensure disadvantaged people had the opportunity to upskill and deliver ready-made meals to people experiencing food insecurity. This new chapter of SmartMeals enabled its social enterprise partners to continue to provide vital job training and pathway programs for vulnerable people in a difficult jobs market.

While the SmartMeals program was initially an emergency response to the COVID crisis, it continued to be vital to many disadvantaged people over a 20-month period. “Every Wednesday, we delivered 80-100 hot meals for Deadly Connections to distribute in Redfern and Waterloo,” says Ravi Prasad of Parliament on King in Newtown. “There

are outcomes of this program on multiple levels, outside of just the number of meals and number of employed people, there’s beautiful community building also.”

Unfortunately, due to expended funding reserves, the SmartMeals program closed on 17 December last year. When asked by *Inner Sydney Voice* what the current

situation looked like for SmartMeals, Adam Robinson, founder of StreetSmart Australia, said: “We did close down the SmartMeals program over the past two months as we ran out of funds. During December and January we have been fundraising with the aim of continuing the program.”

Happily, the fundraising was a success and the SmartMeals team are looking to restart the program in April. Once again, the funds will be directed to social enterprise businesses to make community meals for their local areas. “We will continue this model as it was highly impactful in 2021,” said Robinson. “We will be looking to support a number of hospitality businesses across all states and we do have a couple of good partners in Sydney, including Darcy Street and Plate it Forward.”

■ If you would like to support the SmartMeals program, click or tap [here](#).

Without these meals I would have nothing to eat for lunch.

When you’re down and out like this, it’s tough. This food has kept me afloat during this particularly rough patch in my life. The meals are so good. I can’t tell you how much it means to me to be able to rely on them each day.

This food is a blessing. I don’t know what I’d do without it.

Inner West stations get makeovers

As part of a series of new upgrades in the Inner West, improved accessibility measures have been introduced at a number of train stations.

Following years of campaigning from residents, major works are being undertaken at Erskineville, Petersham and St Peters stations, with a variety of changes made to address community concerns over accessibility.

“People are thrilled that everyone will now be able to use the stations, no matter what their mobility challenges are,” member for Newtown Jenny Leong said. “The changes to accessibility are a credit to the tireless effort of the community writing letters, gathering signatures on petitions and holding actions.”

Among the Petersham station



upgrades are new male and female ambulant toilets, a family accessible toilet, CCTV surveillance and a new access ramp from the station entrance to the footbridge. Two new lifts connecting the existing footbridge to the Terminus Street entrance and the station platform have also been installed.

The Erskineville upgrade is a work in progress. Among the fixes: a crossing

and footbridge at Bridge Street, with both a lift and stairs to connect the footbridge to the platforms.

St Peters makeover will feature two new lifts, two kiss-and-ride spaces, an accessible parking space and the introduction of two canopies.

The station upgrades have been welcomed by local residents, said Inner West councillor Liz Atkins —

and there are more to come.

“Residents are looking forward to the upgrades at Stanmore Station which Transport for NSW are consulting on.”

Stanmore station does not currently meet the required standards for the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. An upgrade is currently in the planning stage.

Housing for All to tackle affordability

In February, City of Sydney council voted to create a Housing for All committee. The move follows sustained calls for more affordable housing in the city (see page 22).

Greens CoS councillor Sylvie Ellsmore said local government had a crucial role to play in solving the issue. “Affordable housing is the responsibility of all levels of government,” Ellsmore said. “The City of Sydney already has a number of strong initiatives to support the growth of social housing and a percentage of affordable housing in new developments. However, the city is not currently on track to deliver against its own targets — let alone meet the calls for stronger action from the community,” she said.

The affordable housing committee will be supported by a working group

that will partner with housing advocates, community groups and neighbouring councils.

With the cost of living soaring, Australians are feeling the squeeze more than ever. In the housing market, whether buying or renting, many inner-city residents are feeling despondent.

A recent Australian study on the impacts of the COVID pandemic found it had, through the loss of work or education, affected the hope of home ownership for many people.

Member for Newtown Jenny Leong said the current situation made the Housing for All committee all the more vital. “I congratulate the council for establishing this committee and acknowledging the needs of our community when it comes to addressing the housing crisis in our city, which makes it so difficult for many people to

pay rent or find housing that they can afford,” Leong said.

Meanwhile, Mission Australia is among a number of charities to have voiced deep concern that the federal government’s budget failed to adequately invest in social housing and affordable homes. “Addressing the magnitude of the need for affordable housing will take much greater investment from the federal government,” said Mission Australia CEO Sharon Callister.

With more than 200,000 people nationwide on the social housing waiting list, Callister added: “The scale of the problem requires national leadership. We need urgent action from the federal government to provide long-term housing solutions that will address our social and affordable home shortfall.”

Poverty and income inequality increase

Government stimulus packages introduced to cushion the financial impact of COVID in 2020 saw levels of poverty and inequality significantly reduce. However, new research by UNSW Sydney and the Australian Council of Social Services reveals the reduction was short-lived.

By April 2021, both the coronavirus supplement and JobKeeper bonus had been curtailed. When the Delta variant arrived later in the year, there was no longer any COVID support for the one million people unemployed.

When the COVID Disaster Payment was introduced in September 2021, 80 percent of those on the lowest income support payment were excluded. Subsequently, the number of people in poverty rose by around 20 percent and income inequality increased.

A few weeks after lockdowns ended,

those still out of paid work lost their COVID Disaster Payment and joined the 1.7 million people on the \$45-a-day unemployment JobSeeker allowance. The UNSW report shows that financial stress returned, as did increased reliance on emergency relief.

“The government’s decision to take away the coronavirus supplement and JobKeeper without an adequate substitute, and later, to exclude people on the lowest income support payments from the COVID Disaster

inequality during the COVID recession, they are both likely to be higher now than before the pandemic,” Treloar said. “That’s the legacy of the policy response to the pandemic.”

Meanwhile, ACOSS CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie said the COVID-19 pandemic had taught us that poverty and inequality are not necessarily inevitable. “They grow because government policies allow them to, and in many cases, directly increase them. The income supports introduced during

the first COVID wave reduced poverty by half and greatly reduced inequality of incomes,” she said. “We also showed that good social policy, tackling poverty,

is good economics. By targeting income support to those with the least, the vital help was rapidly spent on essentials, helping to keep others in jobs. Our response to COVID-19 showed we can end poverty. And when we do, it’s good for all of us.”

**GOOD SOCIAL POLICY,
TACKLING POVERTY,
IS GOOD ECONOMICS.**

Payment and prematurely end that payment, locked more people into poverty,” said Scientia Professor Carla Treloar — director of the UNSW Centre for Social Research in Health.

“Despite remarkable early progress in reducing poverty and income

Rally injects politics back into Mardi Gras

Despite the Mardi Gras parade being held once again within the confines of the Sydney Cricket Ground, demonstrators marched down Oxford Street (at right) in protest of religious discrimination and in support of transgender equality and refugee rights.

The old-school rally featured a collection of activist groups including Pride in Protest, Rainbow Rebellion and DIY Rainbow. Speakers included NSW Greens MP David Shoebridge, PiP member Wei Thai-Haynes and Tamil refugee activist Dr Lyngaran Selvaratnam.



“This is how we change the world. The world isn’t changed by a march which has the Commonwealth Bank in it — that’s not how you change the world,” Shoebridge said in reference to the corporatisation of Mardi Gras.

Thai-Haynes warned the queer community not to get complacent over the recent religious discrimination bill

win: “The bill is shelved but it is not dead,” she said. “They can bring this back up when [the Coalition] win re-election.”

Meanwhile, Selvaratnam delivered an impassioned speech criticising both Liberal and Labor governments for the deportation and mandatory detention of asylum seekers. “We have to hold every one of these bloody politicians to account!” he said.

Following the rally, protesters marched the historic route down Oxford Street towards Hyde Park where the rally culminated with a dance party. (See page 33.)

Call for input on Indigenous cultural centre

Feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been requested by the City of Sydney on how a proposed Aboriginal knowledge and culture centre in Redfern can be best used in the inner city.

A two-storey property at 119 Redfern Street has been bought by the City after the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voiced the need for a culturally safe space to

practice and share cultures.

The City's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel has also backed the idea, saying that a "space to gather, share and practice the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in and connected to Sydney" was essential.

Buildings works include a new entry and lift installation, a reception area, two meeting rooms, and two shopfront spaces on the ground floor. The first floor will have a further two rooms, a

storeroom and an accessible bathroom. Works are expected to be completed by August this year.

The public consultation period began in March and will close on 9 May. Those who wish to provide community feedback are encouraged to attend a drop-in session or workshop, to be organised by the City.

Creating a local Aboriginal knowledge and culture centre in Redfern is one of the key action areas under the City's reconciliation plan.

Anti-protest bill passes, Labor in support

A new law has been introduced curbing some forms of peaceful protest. Introduced by the Perrottet government and passed with support from Labor, the bill introduces fines of up to \$22,000 and up to two years in prison for anyone blocking major infrastructure — such as roads, ports and rail lines.

To the outrage of human rights organisations, environmental groups and unions, the legislation has been introduced in response to a recent spate of climate protests, such as the Port of Botany blockade. Condemning the climate protests as "guerrilla activity", opposition leader Chris Minns staunchly backed the bill.

In a statement, transport minister David Elliot said: "We want to see the maximum sentences handed down because this economy cannot continue to have this sort of disruption as we come out of COVID. My message to the protesters is 'stop being dopes', you



are really doing yourself a disservice."

Despite attempts by the Greens to weaken the legislation, it passed through the upper house. Greens MP Abigail Boyd said the bill was clearly designed to muzzle protesters with particular views.

"This silencing of political views should cause the attorney-general to be gravely concerned now about the constitutionality of this bill," she said. Boyd also attacked Labor for waving through the bill, saying the opposition made "plenty of noise about

supporting the right to peaceful protest, but it's clear their solidarity only extends so far".

A string of organisations including the Aboriginal Legal Service, the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, the Human Rights Law Centre and the Environmental Defenders Office condemned the legislation.

"The Aboriginal Legal Service was born out of a protest movement in the 1970s. You would be hard pressed to find any win for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander peoples' rights that wasn't brought about by public protest," ALS chair Mark Davies said.

"The right to assemble and demonstrate in our streets, towns and cities is a fundamental cornerstone of democracy. For marginalised communities, public protests enable us to be seen and heard, even — and especially — when those in power would rather suppress our voices. We condemn in the strongest terms this government crackdown on our right to protest." (See page 32.)

Surry Hills crisis accommodation opens

The Wesley Edward Eagar Centre in Surry Hills has reopened following an extensive \$12m facelift, which included a number of extensive upgrades to help the crisis accommodation centre “gain a greater understanding of each person’s needs”.

Located on Bourke Street, the centre has provided crisis accommodation to countless vulnerable women and men since 1979 and has remained essentially unchanged since the recent works.

The upgrade features significant improvements to the rooms and facilities for clients and staff and includes restoration of the heritage-listed façade and sandstone chapel, dating back to 1847.

Wesley Mission CEO and superintendent Rev Stu Cameron said that the nearly 300 people sleeping rough on Sydney’s inner-city streets every night were at the heart of this innovative project.

“Entrenched homelessness is



complex and can involve a combination of mental illness, domestic violence, family breakdown, financial difficulties and the cumulative impact of multiple traumatic events,” he said.

“With client outcomes in mind, the centre has been redesigned to promote individual and group wellbeing. Improved privacy, security and dignity will set a new standard for crisis accommodation in Sydney.”

Award-winning architects Scott Carver created plans for soothing new spaces to significantly improve clients’ experience, replacing smaller basic rooms with larger rooms containing

ensuite bathrooms, more personal storage and natural light. Each accommodation floor has a communal kitchenette, laundry and living spaces.

A new lift will help improve accessibility, while new offices, counselling rooms and a rooftop terrace with private space for clients and staff contribute to “an empowered, trauma-informed environment”.

As part of an \$11.7m application, Wesley Mission lodged plans for the upgrade in July 2019. The plans were approved by the City of Sydney with a promise of a further \$1m for the project.

Facilities at temporary locations in Ashfield and in the city provided emergency accommodation while the Edward Eagar Centre was closed for the refurbishments.

“In every detail of our refurbished centre, we have made careful choices to communicate the value and worth we see in each person,” said Cameron. “Can a building change the way you feel about yourself? I like to think this one can.”

Renewable energy deals for 25 LGAs

Twenty-five LGAs will be powered by renewable electricity from three solar farms after signing a deal with electricity provider Zen Energy. The landmark agreement will deliver over 214 gigawatt hours of electricity a year to councils across NSW.

Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore said it was fantastic to see different councils coming together in the fight against climate change. “It’s wonderful to see so many local government organisations collaborating in order to



maximise their efforts to lower global carbon emissions,” she said.

The participating councils are Bayside, Burwood, Campbelltown, Canada Bay, Canterbury-Bankstown, Ku-ring-gai, Georges River, Hornsby,

Hunters Hill, Fairfield, Inner West, Lane Cove, Liverpool, Mosman, North Sydney, Parramatta, Port Stephens, Randwick, Ryde, Singleton, Sutherland, Tamworth, Waverly, Willoughby and Woollahra.

“With overwhelming climate research telling us that emissions need to plummet now, these are the energy agreements we need to cut the carbon emissions of local council operations,” said Moore.

The green deal begins this year and runs to 2026, with an option to run to 2030. (See page 31.)

‘We want to know the truth’

The family of a 16-year-old Aboriginal boy who was killed in a collision with an unmarked police car in the inner-city has demanded an independent investigation into his death. Christopher Kelly reports.

Jai Wright was riding a motorbike in South Eveleigh on the morning of Saturday 19 February when he collided with an unmarked police car at the intersection of Henderson and Mitchell roads. He died shortly after at Prince Alfred Hospital from severe head injuries. Described by his family as a “proud Thungutti boy” who “everyone wanted to be around”, Jai was about to start an apprenticeship to become an electrician. His adult life lay ahead of him.

The trail bike was allegedly stolen and spotted by police in Newtown 30 minutes before the incident. But how exactly the deadly crash happened remains murky as NSW Police has given the family conflicting accounts of the accident.

At first, a senior police officer told the family that officers began pursuing Jai on the motorbike, but then decided to abort the chase. Sometime later, an unmarked police car pulled out in front of the teenager and he hit the car. A second version involved “no police pursuit”. Rather, Jai hit a bump, lost control of the bike and crashed into a stationary police car.

Nathan Moran, CEO of Sydney’s Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, described Jai’s death as a “tragedy”. It struck the local Aboriginal community particularly hard, he said, as it reminded them of the death of another Aboriginal teenager, TJ Hickey, in 2004. “It happened just within a week of that commemorative date,” said Moran.

TJ Hickey died after falling off his



We have been given inconsistent information by police as to what caused Jai’s death.
JAI’S FAMILY

bike and becoming impaled on a fence in Redfern. His death sparked days of unrest amid claims that police had been chasing the 17-year-old. “This is an ongoing tragedy within the Aboriginal communities where young Aboriginal people come into contact with either the law or others and lose their lives,” said Moran.

In response to Jai’s death, the Redfern Legal Centre said: “Horrific incidents like this should not be allowed to go unchecked. We await further investigation and will continue to fight for justice for Jai by calling for transparency around this tragic event.”

The RLC also called for NSW Police to release its Safe Driving policy. Despite an identified spike in deaths during police pursuits and numerous recommendations made by the NSW State Coroner in response to these tragic incidents, the policy remains “shrouded in secrecy”, said Samantha Lee — a police accountability solicitor at RLC.

“Although we do not know the complete details of Jai’s death and whether in fact a police pursuit was involved, it stirs up memories of the tragic death of Thomas Hickey and is a timely reminder of the issues around police pursuits,” said Lee. “Accidents like this have heartbreaking consequences. It’s time for NSW Police to let the public know what policies and procedures are in place to prevent such

horrific incidents.”

The Wright family has called for an “entirely independent investigation” at arm’s length from police. “Any parent wants to know how their little boy has died,” Lachlan Wright said. “To be an independent investigation, you can’t be a police officer. You can’t be a police officer investigating other police officers,” he said.

The NSW ALC echoed the family’s demand for an independent investigation. “Jai’s family and community deserve truth and they deserve accountability,” CEO Karly Warner told NITV. “Police shouldn’t be investigating police,” she said. “There are lots of things that the family deserve, lots of questions that they need to have answered.”

Police said in a statement a critical incident team attached to Sydney City Police Area Command is investigating the circumstances surrounding the crash on behalf of the NSW State Coroner. The investigation will be reviewed by the Professional Standards Command and independently oversighted by the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission.

As for Jai’s family, they just want transparency, said Wright. “We have been given inconsistent information by police as to what caused Jai’s death,” he said. “Who do we believe now? What is the truth? We want to know the truth.”

Inner West blaze kills three

A ‘maliciously lit fire’ in Newtown exposes the difficulties of regulating boarding houses. Rebecca Benson reports.

Three people died in a fire at a boarding house in Newtown in Sydney’s Inner West. A man was subsequently charged with three counts of murder after he allegedly doused Vajda House — at the corner of Probert and

Albemarle streets — with an accelerant and ignited the fire at about 1am on Tuesday 15 March. Assistant commissioner Peter Cotter said: “We are treating this as a murder. We are treating this as a maliciously lit fire.”

Richard Hotoran was arrested later that day at Surry Hills police station following an investigation. The 45-year-old — a Newtown local — was questioned and then charged with three murders and one count of destroying property by fire or explosion.

The case was brought before Central Local Court on Wednesday 16 March. No application for bail was made. Court documents allege Hotoran “did murder person unknown believed to be Pankaj Kumar” and two others “unidentified”. Hotoran is due back in court on 12 May.

A witness told officers she saw a man running shirtless from Vajda House shortly before an explosion ignited the inferno. Investigators seized a fuel canister hidden under a car near the property.

Craig Hopper was one of the residents who managed to escape the fire. He recalled running from his first-floor room after he was woken by a “massive bang”. “I’ve never experienced a bomb going off, but



bloody hell. It was bloody smoky, it was dense. I had to hold my breath and scooch down the stairs. I ran like a bejesus.”

Hopper told reporters he saw a man lying on the ground with his pants on fire, while another man, whose room was on the ground floor, was “blown through the window” by the explosion.

The explosion also woke neighbour Dianne Gallagher who ran outside to investigate the noise. “I woke up to the bang, it was like something dropping,” she said. “It was just massive flames.” The fire quickly engulfed the two-level building. Neighbouring properties had to be evacuated at the peak of the blaze.

Eight residents fled the intense fire with some treated at the scene by paramedics. Three of them were taken to hospital, including an 80-year-old man known as Ronnie — who jumped from the first floor to escape the inferno. Unable to walk and covered in blood, locals carried him to safety until an ambulance arrived.

Ronnie was taken to Royal North Shore Hospital, where he arrived in a critical condition after suffering a heart attack. According to friend Bernie Godzik, Ronnie is a much-loved member of the community. “People will

be angry about this. For this to happen to an 80-year-old, it’s not right,” he said.

Responding to the news of the fire, head of Vinnies NSW Jack de Groot said the boarding house was “a place of last resort”. “Someone living in a boarding house is experiencing a form of homelessness,” he said. “As a community

we need to do more to protect our most vulnerable.”

Police confirmed Hotoran had been a former resident of Vajda House. Described as “cramped, crowded” and “dilapidated”, residents had previously complained to the building’s owner about the poor living conditions at the boarding house.

Former caretaker Ian Mineall, who recently visited the property, told reporters that a kitchen ceiling had caved in exposing electrical wires. “Plenty of people have been complaining about [the property],” he said. “Mostly about cockroaches and other little problems, and particularly that when it rained the roof leaked, and parts of the roof were falling in.”

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre chief executive Liz Yeo confirmed numerous complaints had been made about the property. Yeo said the tragedy highlighted the difficulties in regulating boarding houses. “You’ve got these split responsibilities between [state government agency] NSW Fair Trading and councils, and councils are not adequately resourced to be able to properly regulate these places,” she said. “There’s a place for this form of housing, but it must be safe and adequately regulated.”

WATERLOO GOING SOUTH

It was December 2015 when the NSW government announced that the largest inner-city public housing estate in Australia would undergo a major redevelopment. It took until mid-2017 — when the master planning process began — for community to begin to grasp the details of the scale of the redevelopment, which would also include a new Metro station. Fast-forward to March 2022, and plans for Waterloo South have finally been put on exhibition for all to see. It's been a long road. **Geoff Turnbull** explains how we got here.

The winter 2017 issue of *Inner Sydney Voice* magazine focused on the Land and Housing

Corporation's visioning consultation for the Waterloo redevelopment. That visioning included both the Waterloo estate and the Metro station. But in May 2018, Transport for NSW decided to split the Metro consultation from the estate, breaking undertakings given to the community that the sites would be progressed together.

In August 2018, LAHC took three options for the Waterloo estate masterplan to community consultation based on the visioning input. Only one option retained any of the existing high-rise. In January 2019, LAHC produced its preferred masterplan with none of the existing high-rises retained.

While LAHC was carrying out its consultations, the City was busy with a campaign to wrestle back planning control of Waterloo and a number of other districts in the LGA. Just after LAHC produced its preferred masterplan, Council released an

alternative masterplan retaining and refurbishing the existing towers, with a low-to-mid-rise development for the rest of the estate rather than LAHC's high-rise tower concept.

The Council campaign was successful, and in November 2019, it became the planning authority for the Waterloo estate rather than NSW's planning department. Knowing Council had a very different view about the existing high-rise, LAHC decided to remove that section of the estate from its proposal and only submitted its request for Waterloo South, with rezoning for the rest of the estate to follow.

Rather than proceed with LAHC's proposal, in February 2021, Council produced an alternative mid-rise proposal. Council was keen to get affordable housing delivered as part of the project and it increased the density on its earlier proposal to match LAHC's high-rise proposition.

LAHC and Council remained in disagreement with two competing visions for the site. Council needed LAHC agreement on community infrastructure to lodge their plan, and LAHC declined.

The planning minister set a deadline

for the issue to be resolved and when that timeframe was not met he removed the planning proposal authority (PPA) power from Council and gave it to NSW's planning department. The minister also established a three-person independent advisory group (IAG) to look at disagreements between Council and LAHC over economic viability and affordable housing.

In April 2021, the new PPA then submitted the Council proposal to the "gateway" section of the NSW's planning department responsible for checking such proposals before exhibition. With IAG advice, it requested the PPA to undertake further changes and studies in June 2021.

This work was completed earlier this year and — after sign-off from the gateway — a revised proposal from the planning department is currently on exhibition until 29 April.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS HISTORY FOR THE EXHIBITION

The documents for this exhibition are layered on top of each other, making it very difficult for tenants to know what is in the final planning proposal. All the



**From the Modified Waterloo (South)
Planning Proposal Exhibition,
March 2022**

should be the one document that explains what is relevant from all of the above, but it does not achieve this. Adding to the confusion, the documents on the planning portal are not in a logical order.

On its website, REDWatch has produced a guide to navigating the exhibition documents. It has also unpacked the land use, height, floor space and other LEP changes proposed along with an analysis on the number of social, affordable and private homes proposed, solar access and shadow impacts. You can access this information [here](#).

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT?

It is important to remember that the proposal exhibited is not LAHC's, so what LAHC will do with it is unknown. According to *The Saturday Paper*, LAHC will start a tender process in May after the exhibition ends. That process will take some time and it is unlikely we will see building development applications from a successful tender for another three-to-four years. Proposals for the Waterloo high-rise areas are likely to be even further off.

Planning controls exist until they are changed by another planning proposal, modifications to development applications or other subsequent adjustments. With the ex-head of LAHC now heading up the Department of Planning and Environment and planning minister Anthony Roberts having a different approach to his predecessor Robert Stokes, one suspects that the contested history may continue and the future shape of Waterloo South may still not be settled any time soon.

■ Geoff Turnbull is former co-editor of *Inner Sydney Voice* magazine and co-spokesperson for REDWatch community group.

LAHC support studies for an entirely different proposal are still there, but there's also addendum studies that change parts of what LAHC and Council proposed.

As the proposal is now the responsibility of the state planning department, both the original proposals of Council and LAHC have been removed to avoid confusion but also making it difficult to understand aspects of the exhibited proposal.

For example, a question about the safety of cross-block connections elicited a response from PPA staff that the element was from Council's plan and they were not asked to look at it.

This problem could have been minimised if the PPA had put all the information relevant to the planning proposal into their main planning proposal document —but they did not. For instance, this document says nothing about the floor space proposed for LAHC land and contains no solar or shadow diagrams for the proposal.

WHAT'S IN THE PROPOSAL?

The proposal delivers controls for a 3,012 unit high-density, medium-rise redevelopment with four towers and a

large park. It would replace 749 public housing units with 847 social, 227 affordable and 1,938 private units.

A planning proposal is about setting planning controls — the rules — that developers appointed by LAHC will use to create actual designs for buildings and public spaces in the precinct. This exhibition contains artists' impressions, a model and a height-by-storeys map that shows a preferred option under the proposed controls. The final design will be different.

Central to the proposal is a draft set of maps to change the planning controls in the Sydney Local Environment Plan (LEP) with an explanation of provisions that covers all the changes. A draft Infrastructure Schedule between LAHC and Council provides their agreement on construction and ownership of roads, parks and community facilities, while a Draft Design Guide on how the LEP rules should be applied acts in place of a Development Control Plan.

There are also lots of consultants' reports — 11 gateway addendums to 14 earlier studies and 12 studies that did not have addendums. Then there's a planning proposal document, which



TRAIN DISPUTE STOPPED IN ITS TRACKS

Despite the denials, the Sydney rail shutdown was a deliberate and pre-planned attempt to intimidate the workforce. **Martin Scott** reports.

Revelations in early March have demonstrated that the New South Wales Liberal-National government knew of and authorised a shutdown of the entire Sydney rail system on 21 February.


The government, the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and Transport for NSW (TfNSW) are all seeking to bury

any discussion of the rail shutdown. The move — which was intended to intimidate rail staff and to incite the public against them — backfired spectacularly with widespread anger over the provocation.

The union has responded by ending all remaining industrial action and returning to backroom talks with the government aimed at stitching up yet another sell-out deal in bargaining for a new enterprise agreement.

Government ministers, who accused rail staff of taking “terrorist-like action” on 21 February, have sought to diffuse the crisis by claiming the shutdown was nothing to do with them.

Testimony and documents presented to NSW budget estimates committee hearings in March make clear that this is a lie. The provocative move against rail workers and commuters was widely discussed in the hours and days before it took place.



TfNSW secretary Rob Sharp told budget estimates that the final decision to shut down the network was made in a meeting held between 9.30pm and 11pm on 20 February.

According to Sharp, TfNSW deputy secretary Megan Bourke-O'Neil briefed NSW transport minister David Elliott's chief of staff by 10.43pm and received confirmation that the transport minister agreed with the shutdown. Sharp placed Bourke-O'Neil on three weeks' "directed leave" on 28 February, the day before she was due to appear before a budget estimates hearing.

At 10.51pm, Elliott's chief of staff texted the minister and other colleagues warning of "massive disruption" the following morning. Sharp texted Department of Premier and Cabinet secretary Michael

Coutts-Trotter at about 11.50pm advising of the shutdown.

The official line is that Elliott did not construe a "massive disruption" to the rail network in Australia's largest city as anything that should concern the NSW transport minister, while Coutts-Trotter was asleep and did not pass the message along to premier Dominic Perrottet.

Certainly this story is extremely dubious, but the precise chronology of events on 20 February is something of a sideshow to an attack on workers that was clearly prepared days before.

Two days prior to the lockout, the Fair Work Commission heard an application by TfNSW for protected industrial action to be terminated. In accordance with the FWC ruling, the RTBU agreed to call off two other planned industrial actions, train crew working only to their "master roster" and an overtime ban, while an "altered working" ban was allowed to proceed.

In preparation for this hearing, TfNSW prepared a risk assessment, which concluded that it would be necessary to shut down the entire Sydney rail network for two weeks if the protected industrial action was allowed to continue. This document was completed on 16 February.

The Department of Education also made a submission to the FWC hearing "on the impact of potential rail disruption", NSW education secretary Georgina Harrison told budget estimates on 2 March. Harrison claimed she had not reported the request for this submission to the education minister. An estimated 55,000 students were affected by the shutdown.

The NSW government's chief economist also provided modelling on the economic impact of a two-week shutdown, while NSW Health gave evidence on the consequences for hospitals.

Employee relations minister Damien Tudehope told budget estimates he knew a shutdown was possible on 17 February. Despite this, Tudehope on 21 February accused rail workers of "industrial bastardry of the worst form" as part of a concerted effort by the NSW and federal government to claim the cancellation of all train services was the result of a strike.

While the NSW government is unquestionably in a state of profound crisis, it is inconceivable that these preparations, involving numerous departments, took place without the involvement of the premier and transport minister.

The extraordinary shutdown can only be understood in the broader context of official concerns over growing opposition in the working class. Just six days prior to the rail lockout, tens of thousands of public hospital nurses walked off the job in defiance of a ruling by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission banning the strike.

Fearful that a direct reprisal against the nurses would risk igniting a powder keg of working-class anger, the NSW government attacked rail workers

partly as a warning to the entire working class that no industrial action, however limited, would be tolerated. The fact that this manoeuvre backfired so spectacularly is an example of the extent of popular opposition.

It is under these conditions that the RTBU immediately came to the government's rescue, ensuring service resumed and the dispute was once again confined to backroom union-management talks.

On 21 February, while Elliott slandered rail workers, RTBU NSW secretary Alex Claassens was calling on him to "come to the table". The following day, Elliott offered his "congratulations and thanks to Alex" and said he was "delighted" with the outcome of a meeting with the union.

On 26 February, in a piece published in the *Daily Telegraph*, Claassens called on Elliott and Perrottet to "sit down with the list of claims workers gave them eight months ago and start making some offers to resolve them".

In other words, Claassens was issuing a clear and public promise to suppress any further opposition from workers and ram through a sell-out deal based on one or two minor concessions.

Notwithstanding the political embarrassment, TfNSW and the Perrottet government in fact achieved precisely what they set out to do. The manoeuvre was aimed at shutting down industrial action on the railways and getting back to the business of imposing a regressive enterprise agreement. This is all part of a drive towards privatisation which the union has facilitated for every other mode of transport in NSW.

The rail shutdown has underscored the need for a political movement of the working class, uniting transport staff with nurses and other public sector employees as well as workers throughout the private sector. Such a movement must be directed against the political establishment and the capitalist system, which subordinates everything to the profit dictates of the corporate elite. (See page 32.)



AFTER THE DELUGE

David Pech documents the past, present and future of disasters in the Hawkesbury.

In February, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — the IPCC — released its Sixth Assessment Report on the scientific, technical and socio-economic effects of climate change.

The 3,765-page report emphasised the increasing future likelihood of “complex, compound and cascading risks”. This presents a grim prospect for the community of the Hawkesbury, who have endured five disasters in three years.

First, there was the devastating Black Summer fires. Then in 2020,

flooding and the COVID pandemic. Then worse flooding in 2021. And early this year, flooding that even exceeded last year’s event.

PAST

Inner Sydney Voice has been working in community disaster preparedness since 2017, and in the Hawkesbury since 2019. ISV began its work in the preparedness space with the Get Ready for Flood project in mid-2019. Get Ready for Flood was a cooperative venture between ISV, Infrastructure NSW, social housing residents, community housing providers, and other key stakeholders.

Community surveys undertaken in 2018 revealed that there was a lack of awareness of flood risk and limited preparedness undertaken within social housing communities in the Hawkesbury.

The social housing sector was

identified as a “community of concern” due to the high concentration of social and physical vulnerability. Around 3,300 social housing properties were deemed to be at risk — either directly by floodwater, or by having essential services cut off.

Through the Get Ready for Flood project, social housing residents strengthened their individual flood preparedness. ISV developed resources and training in collaboration with residents, providers and key stakeholders — such as emergency services.

ISV found that the most effective way to engage residents was through group training and discussions. Community-centred emergency planning followed — and it was a success. ISV developed a facilitator guide, which is now available as a tool for other communities to strengthen their disaster readiness.

At the end of 2019, the Hawkesbury was hit by the Gospers Mountain mega-fire. It was the largest bushfire from a single ignition point in Australia's history. The fire directly impacted the outer communities of the Hawkesbury — burning up to Wiseman's Ferry in the north and Bilpin in the west.

The Gospers Mountain fire joined with five other blazes and ultimately destroyed 90 homes and burnt more than a million hectares. The fire was contained and then finally extinguished in February 2020 by rain. However, the rain brought another disaster to the Hawkesbury — flood.

Using the Bureau of Meteorology metric, the 2020 flood was rated moderate. But many people in the Hawkesbury community had not lived through similar flooding before and so, for them, the flood, while deemed moderate, was a major event. Sixty-five properties were directly impacted and 200 residents were evacuated.

In a report to a state government select committee, Infrastructure NSW concluded that had the upstream Warragamba Dam been full, these impacts would have been tenfold. As it turned out, these impacts would eventuate — the moderate flood of 2020 presaged greater flooding in 2021, and again in 2022.

By the bureau's metric, the March 2021 flood proved to be a major event. The water level at Windsor peaked three metres higher than the 2020 flood, impacting more than 400 dwellings in the Hawkesbury, as well as more than 1,400 "manufactured homes" in caravan parks.

Yet again, the Hawkesbury community was impacted by a new disaster while attempting to recover from preceding catastrophes. Recovery efforts were further hampered by the risks and restrictions of the ongoing COVID pandemic — which particularly impacted communities with limited or no internet access.

PRESENT

This year's flood exceeded the 2021

event by more than a metre, with waters reaching 13.8 metres at Windsor. The breadth of impact of the latest flood remains to be seen. Assessment of the material damage is continuing. The Hawkesbury City Council estimates that more than 10 percent of roads have been seriously damaged, and that repairs will take more than a year.

The damage will hinder recovery and reconnection in communities that are already isolated from the metropolitan centres of the Hawkesbury. Many residents who were worst impacted by the floods are the community's most vulnerable members — social housing residents, people with disability, older people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and people without access to key resources like secure housing, personal transport and the internet.

The Hawkesbury community is facing the compounding impacts of multiple disasters. These impacts are complicated by the temporal nature of disaster recovery services — supports for the Black Summer fire have been winding down as supports for the 2021 flood wind up — and now a new set of response and recovery needs are pressing.

The mood amongst community organisations is an understandable mix of determination, fatigue and frustration. In the face of increasing climate disasters, we must contemplate the possibility that disaster response and recovery is now part of "business as usual" for the already stretched community sector.

FUTURE

The NSW government has announced an inquiry to examine the 2022 floods in Lismore and the Hawkesbury-Nepean. The inquiry will investigate causes, preparation, response and recovery. It is already evident from disasters across the country — and around the world — that strengthening community and community organisations is crucial to disaster

resilience, response and recovery.

Professor Amanda Howard and Associate Professor Margot Rawsthorne from the University of Sydney collaborated with ISV to develop recommendations from the Get Ready for Flood project.

They concluded that vulnerable members of the community and community organisations must have a voice in emergency planning. Government and emergency services must collaborate with — and support — community in the face of increasing frequency and severity of disasters. Strong, empowered, well-resourced partnerships from across the community are needed to meet the challenges of an ever-worsening climate crisis.

ISV has commenced a new project to strengthen community through disasters in the Hawkesbury. The project is funded through the Department of Regional NSW's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery fund. Although this funding comes out of the Black Summer fires, the remit is broad: to develop connection and collaboration between community organisations in the Hawkesbury in the face of disasters of all kinds.

The need is clear: the IPCC projects climate change impacts — including floods and fires — will become "increasingly complex and more difficult to manage" going forward.

At the time of writing, the Bureau of Meteorology predicts another week of intense falls in the Hawkesbury with the risk of flash flooding. The complexity and difficulty projected by the IPCC is already evident and urgent in the Hawkesbury.

■ If you would like to donate to support people affected by the 2022 flood, please visit [givit](https://www.givit.org.au).

■ To engage with ISV's disaster resilience work, please contact resilience@innersydneyvoice.org.au

■ David Pech is the Community Resilience Project Officer at Inner Sydney Voice

Most Australians want to stay living at home as they age. This is demonstrated by people choosing community care over any other form of aged care. More than a million older people receive aged care at home and in the community — the vast majority through the Commonwealth Home Support Program.

More than anything else, CHSP delivers social connection for older people. In some way, every type of CHSP service provides some form of social connection — and not just through the social support services which comprise a large component of the program.

Whether it's a community nurse dressing a wound, a builder discussing modifications to a person's home or a volunteer delivering a meal, all share contact, interaction, and a sense of worth with an older person. Social connection is one of the most important contributors to older people's quality of life. Furthermore, social connection has been found to reduce the risk of a number of physical conditions including diabetes, dementia, and heart disease.

One of the successes of CHSP in delivering social connection is its flexibility and responsiveness — the government recognised this flexibility by relying on CHSP during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet unexpected needs. Market-based mechanisms — consumer satisfaction, consumer choice, market testing — are the lifeblood of CHSP. Older people won't keep going to a social activity, using a community bus, or getting meals delivered if a service isn't responding to clients' needs on an ongoing basis.

The CHSP is also the most cost-effective form of aged care in Australia. Per person, the cost of CHSP to the government is \$2,762, compared to \$17,117 for home care packages and



THE DISMA COMMUN

Aged care sector reforms will see major changes to the Com

\$50,471 for residential care. Despite the cost of residential care, older people are institutionalised in Australia at three times the rate of those in the USA.

Looking at the cost comparisons, you might imagine that aged care in Australia should be reconfigured to look more like CHSP. Yet it's CHSP that will suffer the biggest overhaul as a result of the aged care royal commission's recommendations and the federal government's reforms of the sector.

Under the reforms, an individual will be broken down into units of service need, which are matched by fixed prices according to those units of need. This means more Commonwealth control over individuals' lives in that the prices — and the classification and reclassification of a person's needs — will all be determined by government.

While the royal commission suggested major changes to CHSP, it recommended that residential care receive greater funding — despite finding that the sector was deeply flawed. CHSP is regarded as one of the most sophisticated community aged care systems in the world, so it's all the stranger that the federal government wants to dismantle it.

CHSP's predecessor — the Home and Community Care Program — was established in 1985 and packages of care and individually-directed services were trialled from the late 1980s. We know the value of community care for individuals' lives. Yet despite this history, the evidence of how this system has worked in practice just doesn't seem to translate into public policy.

For a long time, HACC was relatively



ANTLING OF ITY CARE

Commonwealth Home Support Program. **Tim Horton** reports.

current system.

What has underpinned CHSP's ability to deliver so much for older people? There are many possible answers. Block funding has been a prime mover for CHSP. Block funding allows the managers to manage — the people who know how to get results can use the funding in the most appropriate way to meet the most needs.

It could also be argued that a policy approach that favoured continuous improvement — rather than regulation — led to services that focused on older people first, seeing service barriers as challenges to be solved. Government resources were committed to supporting the sector to collaborate, innovate, and improve, including via a network of sector support and development officers.

It could also be said that the sector benefited from an approach to workforce education that favoured working for outcomes, rather than working according to a fixed model. In a sense, the aged care and education sectors trained and self-selected people who brought vision and ideas to service delivery, and who strove to focus on individuals and communities, rather than on meeting the requirements of systems.

This all begs one glaring question: why does the government want to demolish CHSP? Why would you want to get rid of the most cost-effective and valued aged care program in the country? Why replace it with a highly regulated and interventionist system when this government is committed to cutting red tape? Why tip the scales in favour of organisations with corporatised systems, rather than localised people-centred services? Where is the evidence that corporatised community care equates to better quality care?

In short, why wouldn't you just give older people more of what they clearly want?

■ Tim Horton is the CHSP Sector Support and Development Officer at Inner Sydney Voice

unregulated, putting older people's engagement with services in their own hands and mixing and matching supports without significant government intervention. In NSW at least, there was, generally speaking, no regulated cap on services available to older people, so people were receiving a level of support that was commensurate with their ability to engage with the system — and with what was available.

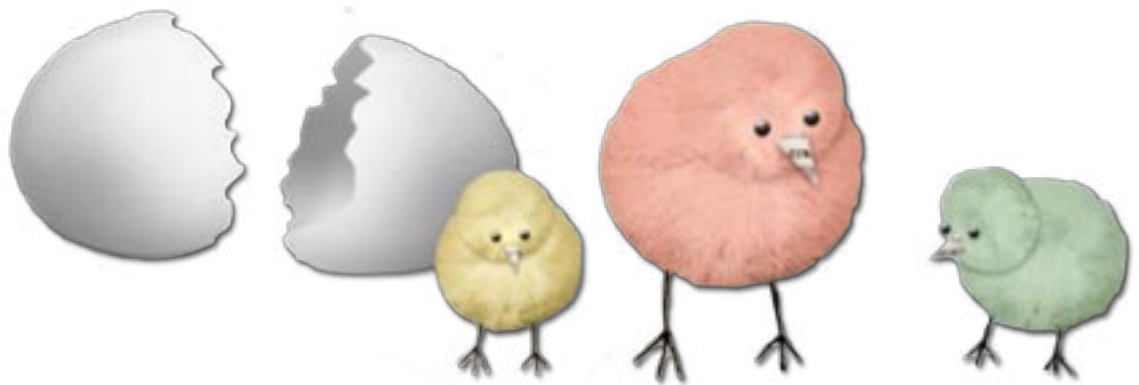
CHSP services have been provided by cross-state providers, government agencies, not-for-profits, private companies, and individual contractors. Services can be subcontracted or brokered, case managed, or provided directly. In a way, HACC/CHSP has operated like a modified free market, albeit with significant restrictions in specific circumstances due to service

availability. There is much to be learnt from this system, particularly in terms of older people's patterns of use — how they want to use care, rather than how the government thinks they should.

Admittedly, there have been potential problems of equity in the CHSP system. People's engagement with CHSP may depend on their level of education, the area in which they live, their language skills, their family supports, and their cognition. Yet these are all factors that can be studied to improve the system.

All this has been ignored, however, by both by the royal commission and by the department of health in pursuit of individually funded, regulated units of care. In fact, there seems to have been an assumption that individually funded care is the better option, without having first studied the benefits of the

DON'T BE COUNTING CHICKENS



As we go to press, the ALP is 10 points or so ahead of a beleaguered Coalition. But as political analyst **Ben Raue** reports, a federal Labor victory is by no means a shoo-in.

The next federal election is due in May, and right now the Coalition government is in a lot of trouble, with Labor in the box seat to come back to power after nine years in opposition.

Labor has led the Coalition in every recent poll, often by quite large margins. Overall the margins have

generally been larger than they were in 2019, which resulted in a surprise Coalition victory.

In addition to Labor's support, Scott Morrison's personal popularity is much worse than in 2019, trailing Anthony Albanese on "preferred prime minister" metrics, despite that figure usually favouring the incumbent, and with a majority of respondents expressing dissatisfaction.

The Coalition won 77 seats at the last federal election, one more seat than a bare majority in the House of Representatives.

One Liberal seat in Western Australia has been abolished and replaced by a new Labor seat in Victoria, reducing the Coalition count to 76, plus they have lost the seat of Hughes where the sitting MP has defected from the Liberals to the United Australia Party.

This means the Coalition has no tolerance losing more seats. They need a net gain of one seat to regain their majority. And there are a number of marginal seats across Sydney that could be in play in 2022.

The inner-Sydney region has never had many marginal electorates — the typical Labor vs Liberal contests have always been more common on the urban fringe and in regional areas, with places like central Queensland being more likely to include seats that are decisive in federal elections.

This changed in 2018, when independent Kerryn Phelps won the previously safe Liberal seat of Wentworth, before narrowly losing in 2019 to Liberal candidate Dave Sharma.

Phelps isn't running in 2022, but her mantle has been taken up by independent Allegra Spender. Spender is one of a large number of independents contesting conservative electorates. These independents are mostly women, and tend to be running on a number of policies including action on climate.

The 2019 election saw a trend where Labor gained ground in areas with higher education and income levels, with the Coalition gaining ground in other areas, producing an overall stable result. If this trend continues in 2022 — in conjunction with the strength of independents in seats like Wentworth — that could see the Liberal Party having to defend previously safe seats in places like the eastern suburbs and north shore of Sydney.

Every other seat in the inner-Sydney region is safe for Labor. Labor holds Kingsford Smith in south-eastern Sydney by an 8.8 percent margin, and holds Barton in the inner south-west by a 9.4 percent margin.

Grayndler and Sydney cover areas where the Greens poll strongly, but are not currently a serious chance to win. Both seats are held by senior members of the opposition: Anthony Albanese in Grayndler and former Labor deputy leader Tanya Plibersek in Sydney. The

Greens hold a number of state electorates in this area, but haven't performed as strongly at recent federal elections.

More broadly across Sydney, there are numerous other races worth watching.

The Liberal Party holds a number of seats in the middle of the city that are very multicultural and has been held by Labor in the recent past: Banks in southern Sydney (6.3 percent), Reid on the south side of the Parramatta River (3.2 percent) and Bennelong in the Ryde area (6.9 percent). None of these seats are at the top of Labor's list of potential gains, but if Labor wins a big victory these seats could be in play.

There are also a number of marginal seats in Western Sydney. The Liberal Party holds the Penrith-area seat of Lindsay by a 5.0 percent margin. Labor holds the Blacktown-area seat of Greenway by a 2.8 percent margin, and also holds Parramatta by a 3.5 percent margin.

On the outer fringe of Sydney, the seat of Macquarie is Labor's most marginal seat, covering the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury regions.

On the North Shore, there are a number of Liberal-held seats with serious independent challenges. In North Sydney, independent Kylea Tink is challenging Trent Zimmerman, while independent Sophie Scamps is challenging Jason Falinski. Both seats border Warringah, where independent Zali Steggall unseated Tony Abbott in 2019.

There are also a number of other marginal seats elsewhere in New South Wales. The seats of Dobell and Robertson on the Central Coast are both very marginal, as are Eden-Monaro and Gilmore in the south-eastern corner of the state.

Even if Labor wins power, it's likely to face a difficult Senate. The Senate currently has a strong lean to the right. The Greens won't hold the balance of power in their own right unless Labor and the Greens gain four seats between them. While there are strong

prospects of Labor or Greens gains in Queensland and South Australia, the last two seats are hard to see.

If Labor gains a seat in South Australia and the Greens gain a seat in Queensland, Jacqui Lambie would be able to provide a 38th vote — but that would not be enough for a majority. The other prospects for crossbench partners are Nick Xenophon, who is returning as an independent four years after leaving federal politics for a tilt at state politics, and Tammy Tyrrell, who is running on Lambie's ticket in Tasmania.

The Morrison government's victory in 2019 has been followed by a number of emergencies which have focused attention on the government's response to natural and health crises.

The Black Summer bushfires in 2019-20 badly hurt Scott Morrison's personal credibility, with his absence during the bushfires drawing a lot of attention. The government's position began to be rebuilt at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While most of Australia's state governments saw stratospheric popularity ratings, the improvement for the federal government was more modest, with more criticism directed at the Morrison government's role.

Things started to go downhill for the Coalition in the middle of 2021, when the vaccine program experienced serious delays amidst outbreaks that eventually led to lengthy lockdowns in Australia's two largest states.

The recent flood disasters in New South Wales and Queensland have brought to mind the bushfires from early in this parliamentary term, with a slow and clumsy federal government response drawing a lot of criticism of the government.

While Labor is in a strong position on current polling, we are yet to see if the pollsters have regained their accuracy after all predicting a Labor victory in 2019. While it appears that Morrison and the Coalition are running out of time to turn things around, it would be foolish to call this election before the votes are counted.

FIXING AFF

Australia's housing crisis has
and the problem is particular

Home ownership rates are falling fast, halving over recent decades for lower-income earners aged 24-34, from 57 percent to 28 percent. This runs the gamut from people experiencing homelessness and in crisis accommodation, those in community housing, and people seeking market rental and home ownership.

The latest Committee for Sydney's annual [Life in Sydney survey](#) showed concerns about housing affordability and cost of living back in force as fears about COVID-19 and its economic impacts subside. To solve this, we need to pull together on a range of solutions — people affected are in different life circumstances; some policy changes will help one group more than another. So we need more than one solution.

CREATE AN OWNERSHIP SOCIETY

The rate of home ownership in Sydney, as in the rest of Australia, is declining. In 1961, approximately 72 percent of those in their 40s owned their home, compared to 63 percent in 2021. Over a long period, housing costs have risen faster than wages, which means young households have to save for more years for a down payment. If these trends continue, Sydney will become a

place where home ownership is increasingly only available to those lucky enough to inherit wealth from their parents — profoundly undermining the core Australian values of giving everyone a fair go.

Home ownership matters because — without a much larger social housing sector (desirable but unlikely in the short term) or strong rent control in the private market — it is the only way to have a secure retirement in Australia. It is naïve to wish this fact away. We should be doing everything possible to create an ownership society, where people who work hard are able to get into the housing market.

If we are serious about broadening access to home ownership, we need to give the advantage to home buyers for their primary residence, rather than to people who are buying homes as an investment or as holiday/second homes.

THINGS THAT WOULD HELP

- Reset the capital gains tax discount for proceeds of private rental property sales — as recommended by the Grattan Institute and others, this should be cut from 50 percent to 25 percent, reducing the excess incentive for private landlords to bid up property prices.
- Equalise the age pension assets test for renters and owners — capping the value of homes that can be excluded from the test

and/or giving renters an equivalent value of non-real estate assets that are excluded from the test.

- Eliminate stamp duty and replace it with an annual land tax to reduce transaction costs.
- A down payment assistance program, if narrowly targeted to first time home buyers, could help, although it may also have a countervailing impact on increasing prices. Another version of the same idea is National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's 'build to rent to buy' program.
- And, while we know neither major political party is currently willing, something that would help is limiting negative gearing for private landlords — specifically, only applying investment business losses against other investment business income, not against wage and salary income.

In addition to broadening opportunities for home ownership, reforms like this will tend to channel investment into productive parts of the real economy, rather than real estate speculation.

MAKE RENTING MORE SECURE

Renting will, of course, remain a big part of the housing system in Sydney.

THE PROBLEM OF AFFORDABILITY

pushed the dream of homeownership – even just of decent shelter – out of reach for many, especially acute in inner Sydney.

Right now, renting in the private market often involves a lot of insecurity for tenants. Most leases are for a year, sometimes less, then convert to monthly leases. Renters are forced to move often — and worry about it even more.

For young people, for people who may need to move for work, and for people who can't afford to buy a home, renting should be a better option.

THINGS THAT WOULD HELP

- Amend tenancy laws to give more security of tenure, perhaps by following Victoria's lead to specify a limited range of grounds (e.g., needed for occupancy by the landlord him/herself, property sale) on which a landlord may re-possess their dwelling.
- Reform property tax settings under both federal and state/territory government control to attract institutional investors to develop build-to-rent housing as a product type.
- Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments that have been artificially suppressed because of being uprated according to the consumer prices index rather than according to actual rent levels.
- Bring back a reworked version of the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

INCREASE SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

For lower-income households who can't afford housing in the market, social and affordable housing is essential. As well as this direct benefit for renters who can access affordable dwellings, there is a larger benefit for the broader economy via increased participation, productivity and social cohesion — the latter something that pre-COVID might have seemed soft and fuzzy, but is increasingly central in considerations — with a greater diversity of households more evenly distributed.

Currently, about 4 percent of Sydney's housing stock is social and affordable, and this number is declining. Again, thinking about the housing continuum, there are multiple issues at different income levels, and this one is need of serious attention.

The development program would rely on a combination of government, market rate developers and the strong network of community housing providers. Generally, the global best practice is to have ongoing operations and tenant management in the hands of community housing providers.

Note that increasing the supply of social and affordable housing will add competition to the bottom part of the housing market, which will help stabilise prices there as well.

THINGS THAT WOULD HELP

- Government should set a goal of

increasing the stock of social and affordable housing to 10 percent and then design a program to get there, factoring in affordable housing development contributions secured through the planning system as well as direct government funding.

It's clear we are not going to solve the housing problem without supply being part of the solution. No one is arguing supply is the whole solution, but it is part of it. The very high cost of land in Sydney, when compared to other capital cities, is one piece of evidence.

In a liberal development market, developers have many options of sites that are buildable, so landowners are not able to charge such high prices to developers. A well-functioning planning system enables a flexible housing production market, which can create units in proportion to demand in a timely and predictable way.

It also delivers good design and place outcomes — essential for maintaining the social licence to develop. We need to be creating new buildings and new neighbourhoods that will be loved by future generations of Sydneysiders.

There are many more ideas like these that need to be tested and explored. With a problem this big, it's worth trying a lot of things.

■ Courtesy Committee of Sydney

Religious discrimination bill binned

The trans and rainbow community celebrated a welcome victory when the Religious Discrimination Bill was withdrawn in February.

Alex Bainbridge and **Rachel Evans** report.

The Religious Discrimination Bill purported to defend people against discrimination based on their religious beliefs. However, its real aim was to mount a political counterattack against the successful marriage equality campaign.

Its main function was to arm right-wing bosses with an enhanced “sword” to discriminate against workers and students in faith-based schools and other organisations.

The recent attempt by Citipointe Christian College in Brisbane to force parents to sign an enrolment form describing homosexuality and free gender expression as “sins”, alongside bestiality, incest and paedophilia, shows just how much was at stake.

Scott Morrison also wanted a political wedge to trap Labor in the context of plummeting support for him and the Coalition.

His plan backfired when the Senate decided not to debate the amended bill, which five Liberals crossed the floor to support. Morrison withdrew the bill after the Australian Christian Lobby announced it was no longer fit for purpose. ACL declared the amended bill had been “completely undermined” as the right to discriminate against trans students had been removed.

Labor is claiming responsibility for putting the bill onto the back burner. It

claims its tactic of speaking against the bill and moving amendments worked.

Given opposition leader Anthony Albanese had promised, in advance, that Labor would vote for the bill even if its amendments didn’t get up, this claim does not stack up. It was independent MP Rebekha Sharkie’s amendment to abolish the right of religious schools to discriminate against gay and transgender students that received support.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Greens, the Law Council of Australia and the LGBTIQ+ community, among others, mounted a last-ditch campaign calling on Labor to reject the bill. The Uniting Church, the NSW Buddhist Council and the Australian Federation of Disability Associations called for the same.

Jonathan Hunyor of PIAC described the bill as “vandalism of our federal discrimination framework”. He said the “statements of belief” provisions would have meant “women, LGBTI people, people with disability, single parents and even people of minority faiths [would] be exposed to derogatory comments as they go about their daily lives, in workplaces, in education, in health care, in public transport, in shops, cafes and restaurants”.

The question remains: why is Labor giving any support to religious discrimination?

Labor apologists argue the party could not risk losing support from “faith communities” who support a religious discrimination bill. But supporting such a bill completely ignores the reactionary context in which this bill was proposed and developed. Accommodating this conservative pressure can only strengthen the political right.

Large majorities had already opposed key elements of the bill. *The Guardian* reported on 3 February that 77 percent of voters oppose the

“statements of belief” clause and 64 percent said it should be against the law for religious schools to expel gay and trans students. Similar numbers opposed the ability of schools to sack gay and trans teachers.

This reservoir of support for LGBTIQ+ students and teachers is an important legacy of the marriage equality campaign, which was actively waged for more than a decade. It decisively shifted public opinion in favour of LGBTIQ+ rights.

This is the reason Liberal MPs decided to cross the floor, not Labor’s parliamentary games. Indeed, Labor refused to support Sharkie’s amendment to remove the right of religious organisations to discriminate against staff and students in schools.

Three moderate Liberals “came over for the repeal of the whole of section 38 [of the Sex Discrimination Act], to protect teachers and students, but that failed because Labor didn’t support it,” Sharkie told *The Saturday Paper*. Labor only supported removing section 38 (3), which applies to students, not staff.

Further, shadow home affairs minister Kristina Keneally said Labor would bring in its own Religious Discrimination Bill if it wins government this year. On ABC’s *Insiders* she refused to rule out allowing schools to sack gay and trans staff.

Labor has a long record of capitulating to Coalition wedge tactics, including on refugee rights (2001), same-sex marriage rights (2004), the Northern Territory “intervention” (2007) and Morrison’s tax cuts for the rich (2016), to name just a few examples.

This record makes it difficult to accept Labor’s line that its support for the Religious Discrimination Bill was, primarily, about tactics.

Progressive politics is about building support for progressive ideas, not parliamentary manoeuvres that give space to conservatives and reactionaries to compromise hard-won rights.

Delivering rainbow healthcare

Sydney is to become home to Australia's first LGBTIQ+ specific health centre.

Brandon Bear reports.

In a never-before-seen commitment to the health of sex and gender diverse communities in New South Wales, health minister Brad Hazzard launched the first ever NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy.

The launch — held at the Kinghorn Cancer Centre in Darlinghurst on 16 March — was accompanied by the announcement of a \$4.2m investment in a health centre specifically catering to the needs of LGBTIQ+ populations.

The centre will be the first of its kind in Australia, bringing together healthcare, health promotion and research, and working to reduce the stigma and trauma many sex and gender diverse people experience when accessing healthcare services.

Support from both sides of government and the involvement of many LGBTIQ+ community members culminated in an initiative that was described by Hazzard as a “breakthrough health strategy which aims to address long-standing health inequities”.

Speaking at the launch, deputy CEO of ACON Karen Price reflected on the breadth of the strategy. “It’s broader than our community. It’s for our families and our friends,” she said.

Price welcomed the investment in training and education for frontline staff in public and private healthcare. “If there is one thing COVID has taught us, it is that health is a fundamental pillar for our society,” she noted.

Mardi Gras ’78er and vice president of InterPride Robyn Kennedy spoke on the potential impact of the policy. “The



strategy is timely given the ageing of the LGBTIQ+ community,” she said. “Many older LGBTIQ+ people are the first generation to have lived their entire adult lives out and proud. Previous generations did not have this opportunity. The implications for the healthcare system are significant — we are afraid to lose our identities in aged care services — identities we have worked hard for.”

Kennedy shared her experiences with the healthcare system, echoing the experiences of event host, Associate Professor Anthony Schembri — CEO of the St Vincent’s Hospital Network Sydney. Both highlighted past experiences of their sexuality being assumed by clinicians, forcing them to make constant decisions about the impact of coming out time and time again in healthcare settings.

“As a fierce advocate, I never let the assumption sit,” said Kennedy. “It meant I had to psych myself up, not just for the physical impacts of my treatment, but also the emotional impact.”

The LGBTIQ+ Health Centre is a project, which has been advocated for by ACON and key partners for many

years. Planning for the centre will now move into overdrive, with a project team at ACON set to identify a suitable location based on information about the prevalence and health of LGBTIQ+ communities.

On the vision for the centre, Price said: “We aim to directly improve access to healthcare that is appropriate, inclusive and responds to the particular drivers of poorer health outcomes for our communities,” she said. “We will provide access to a wide range of services all within the same service and with peer support.”

The strategy also provides significant funding to other community groups and organisations working in the LGBTIQ+ health space, including \$3.4m annually for a specialist service to support trans and gender-diverse youth and adults; \$2.65m to support workforce education and training activities delivered jointly with on-the-ground community organisations; and \$1.78m to ACON and Twenty10 for mental health and suicide prevention initiatives.

■ Courtesy Sydney Sentinel



THE TENT EMBASSY

The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on 26 January 1972 was one of the high points of the Aborigi

In 1971, a Supreme Court challenge by the Yirrkala people against the Nabalco mining company ended with a ruling that Aboriginal people had no rights to their land under the law. Then, on the eve of Invasion Day in 1972, Liberal prime minister Billy McMahon refused to recognise land rights through legislation.

The next day four Aboriginal activists, Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Bertie Williams and Tony Coorey, travelled from Sydney to Canberra in a car driven by photographer Noel Hazard. They planted a beach umbrella on the lawns

of Parliament House and held placards that read “Land rights now or else” and “Legally this land is our land. We shall take it if need be”.

Originally this was intended as a protest stunt. But when they arrived they discovered that a legal loophole allowed camping on the parliamentary lawns, and began erecting tents. The Tent Embassy became a central rallying point for the Aboriginal rights movement.

After the 1967 referendum extending citizenship to Aboriginal people, campaigners had hoped conditions in Aboriginal communities would improve.

But little changed. The government continued to revoke Aboriginal reserve land, forcing families into the cities. Aboriginal people lived in squalid

housing and segregated communities, encountering daily police violence.

The failure of the Yirrkala court action and McMahon’s subsequent rejection of land rights showed many people that neither parliament nor the legal system would end the discrimination they faced.

The Tent Embassy drew inspiration from the student and working class radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, including widespread strike action, the movement against the Vietnam War, anti-colonial struggles across the world and the US civil rights movement.

Demands for land rights had become central. In 1966, over 200 Gurindji on a cattle station in the NT began a three-year strike against virtual slave



50 YEARS ON

Aboriginal rights movement. It showed how protest could put Aboriginal rights on the agenda and win real changes.

conditions. White unionists toured Gurindji people around workplaces nationwide to speak about their struggle and raise funds.

The Gurindji not only won equal wages but, eventually, ownership of their land. Their strike put land rights on the political agenda. The movements of the 1970s brought real gains for Aboriginal people.

The Tent Embassy's demands included an Aboriginal controlled state in the NT; legal title and mining rights to all reserve lands, as well as the land around capital cities; the preservation of sacred sites; and compensation for lands lost including a \$6 billion down payment.

Underlying them was a desire for an

end to the policy of assimilation and a demand for self-determination and Aboriginal control over their land, communities and lives.

The Whitlam Labor government rode to power at the end of 1972 on the back of this period of ferment. Whitlam abolished assimilation as official policy, creating the first Department of Aboriginal Affairs. His government also drew up the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (eventually passed under the subsequent Liberal government), finally giving the Gurindji and many other Aboriginal communities in the NT back their land.

These steps showed the power of political protest to win gains. But the government never fully delivered self-determination or the compensation for

dispossession that the movement demanded. In the decades since, many of the gains around self-determination and Aboriginal control have been wound back, seen most starkly in the takeover of Indigenous communities through the NT intervention.

Rates of Indigenous imprisonment are the highest in the world, record numbers of Indigenous children are being removed from their families, very few Indigenous people have meaningful rights over land and constantly see their country destroyed by development.

We need a return to the protest politics of the Tent Embassy today if there is going to be any serious progress for Aboriginal rights.

VOICES FROM THE EMBASSY | 30 JULY 1972

The Tent Embassy stood on the lawns outside Old Parliament House in Canberra until July when the Liberal government passed a new law, making camping there illegal. Without warning, 100 police descended on the Embassy on 20 July and violently removed the tents, arresting eight people. Three days later, demonstrators tried to re-establish the embassy without success.

Then, on 30 July, the movement organised a 2,000-strong march including students, unionists and workers from across Canberra led by at least 250 Aboriginal people who travelled from as far as Brisbane. It was the largest land rights demonstration in Canberra's history.

Below are excerpts from three speeches delivered on the day.

Chicka Dixon

WHARFIE, UNIONIST AND ABORIGINAL ACTIVIST

In 1968, if my memory serves me correct, we marched for land rights here, from the university —three Blacks and about 200 university students. Why are there only three Blacks? Because they were too frightened. They were frightened of the establishment. They were frightened to stand up and be counted.

Now, because of what occurred here on Thursday and last Sunday, when the Gestapo [the police] came in and used boots and everything to suppress our people, we've got Aboriginal people here from every state — these are Black people that care that our people were being hammered over the principle of land rights. For six months we've had a Tent [Embassy] here in [an act of] passive resistance. Then all of a sudden in come the powers that be and rip down the tent.

The reason why the Tent [Embassy] was put up was because on so-called Australia Day, the prime minister brought down a decision on land rights as far as the Liberal Party were concerned. Every other Indigenous race of dispossessed people in the world have been given land rights. Land is our major concern.

And if the people allow the government to move in heavily on passive Aboriginal people [to disperse the Tent Embassy] that is an indictment on the Australian people. The most vital thing as I see it is that if you're not going to become part of the solution, then we'll have to consider you part of the problem.

Bob Pringle

NSW PRESIDENT, BUILDERS LABOURERS FEDERATION

As far as I'm concerned, the police force that I saw here last weekend were just a mob of racist, fascist pigs. I disagree that it's just their job. Because the Builders Labourers in New South Wales have been asked to do a lot of jobs, like pulling down buildings that have historical value, like building on kids' playgrounds, like tearing down the last bit of scrub land left on the Parramatta River — and we refused. So, if these thugs have got any real guts, they ought to refuse [to disperse the Embassy].

And as far as saying that a change of government is going to assist the [Aboriginal people], I think that it will be because of the action of you people here today, that's put pressure on this government and any other government that's going to be [formed].

We are a racist nation and unless we face up to that fact then we're having ourselves on. If it wasn't for actions like this, the Labor Party wouldn't take any more action than the present government. We've got to fight.

Today we have struck a blow. We've stood by and let our governments enact a policy of genocide against the [First Australians]. And I believe that Aboriginal people in Australia are worse off than Blacks in South Africa, because in South Africa the Blacks are the labour force — so at least the government's got to keep them healthy. But because the Aboriginal people in this country are only two percent of the population, they're not a big section of the labour force.

So the policy that this government is enacting [is designed to see them] wiped out slowly. I believe that it's

worse than Apartheid [in South Africa] and unless we stand up and are prepared to fight it's going to go on.

There are eight union officials here today. I got up on the Labor Council floor in New South Wales last Thursday night and put forward a motion that the Labour Council should support this Embassy going up here today. I got 20 votes out of 106.

It's only pressure from the people that's going to change things. It's the power of the people that we've got to be looking for.

Ken Brindle

ABORIGINAL ACTIVIST

I was up in Kempsey on the far north coast [of NSW] when I saw [the Tent Embassy] on television. There were about 15 or 16 young Kooris watching television with us. They were a bit shocked by what they saw, but also elated and very, very proud that Aboriginal people were proving to the world that they were prepared to fight for what was theirs.

And they weren't just going to watch their white mates go and fight for them but were going to fight for themselves. This is what this is all about today.

This will be world news, but it's not so important for the people around the world to see this as it is for Aboriginal people that are living in huts and shacks and shanties in places like Menindee, Bourke, Collarenebri, Toomelah, places right out of sight of the government.

The government's policy towards Aboriginal people is that they [will do nothing for them, claiming they] can't build houses for them because there's no work there for them there.

This Embassy doesn't only stand for Aboriginal land rights; it stands for Aboriginal equality. Aboriginal people need more than land rights — they need the opportunity to be given a decent education and to be able to stand up and take their place in society.

■ Explore the history of the Tent Embassy [here](#).

■ Courtesy Solidarity

The dangers of being young and black

Gamilaroi/Ngarbal man
Ashburn Dahlstrom
describes growing up in
Redfern.

My Mob have lived in Redfern since the rise of the Aboriginal civil rights movement in the 1960s. Now that I am older, I can appreciate how lucky I am to have grown up in the birthplace of Indigenous activism. However, when I was growing up, life was not easy. Our community was over-policed. Some of us were beaten, had weapons pointed at us, and routinely stopped and searched without reason.

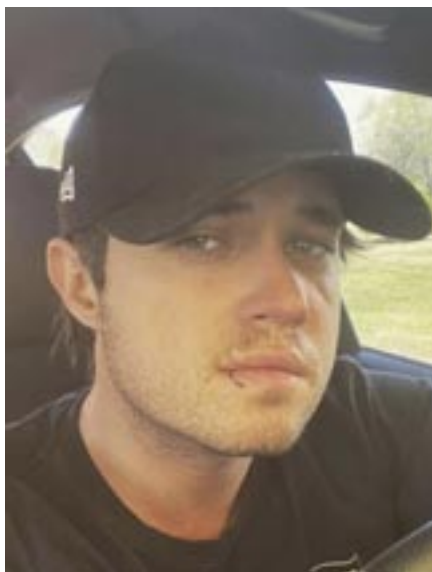
And when I tell people these stories of my childhood, they are shocked because now, when people think of Redfern, they think of their favourite café or cocktail bar. They don't think of the decades' worth of Black rights that Indigenous People fought for on the streets of the suburb they now live in — they see convenient living and prime real estate.

I was ten years old when a police officer gave my cousins and me a move on order when we were standing around yarning. Our mothers and aunties always told us to be home before dark. When asked why, we would all get the same answer: "It's dangerous being young and Black walking around at night time".

Being young and Black during the day was also dangerous. We were routinely stopped by police officers who would ask where we had been, what we were doing and where we were going. If it wasn't the cops, local business owners followed us around in

stores; people would change paths or clutch their handbags when we walked by.

As I entered my teenage years, my experience with racism whilst living in Redfern only got worse. When I was 13, I was riding my bike with my cousins



I was only allowed to go out if I was with [my mum] or one of the aunties or uncles to keep us safe — not from criminals but from the people who are supposed to stop criminals.

along Riley Street in Surry Hills when we were stopped by police and asked numerous questions about why we were in the area.

We were all getting frustrated as we just wanted to go about our day. One of my cousins, who was getting visibly frustrated, asked the police: "Why the f**k did you stop us for?" and threw his

bike to the ground. The police officer then pulled his gun out and told us to get on the ground. We then had our bags searched one by one. When they couldn't find anything, they told us to get up and get going.

When I was 15, I was walking the streets, listening to my iPod. It was frigid that day, so I was wearing my hood up. During my walk, I had a cop on a bicycle stop me and ask me what I'm doing walking with my hood up. I told him it was because it's cold. He responded by telling me to take my hood off as people might get the wrong idea.

When people hear this, I am met with "I didn't think that kind of stuff happened around here", which surprises me as it was only 18 years ago that riots broke out in Redfern in response to — not just the rising tensions between Indigenous People and the police — but also the death of my cousin TJ Hickey, who died on February 14, 2004 whilst being pursued by police.

I remember being told to stay inside no matter what when the riot began. I could hear the sounds of sirens, banging of shields, and glass shattering, which lasted the entire night. Post-riot, my mum would not let me leave the apartment on my own for weeks. I was only allowed to go out if I was with her or one of the aunties or uncles to keep us safe — not from criminals but from the people who are supposed to stop criminals.

Perhaps you were unaware of Redfern's history. You live in an area where — apparently — it is a crime to be Black and wear your hood up on a cold day; you live in a place where Indigenous blood continues to be spilled due to police violence. You are living in the heart of our struggle. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

Joining the circular economy

If you have items you no longer need or use, you can make a bit of extra cash by selling them online — or make someone's day by giving them away! Whether it's furniture, handbags or your old wifi box, it's surprising just how quick and easy it is to list and rehome your stuff. While you watch your bank account grow, you can also feel great about helping the environment. Giving your items a second life is much better than sending them to landfill. Before you start, these handy hints will help you get your unwanted items out the door in a flash.

FIND THE RIGHT PLATFORM

There's plenty of free platforms to sell your stuff but it's hard to look past Facebook, where users are spoilt for choice. You can list items on Facebook Marketplace, which provides a simple form to fill out and connects you with buyers in your area. It's free to list but you have the option to boost your ad for a small fee. You can also hide your listings from your friends. This is a great option to sneakily resell unwanted gifts.

Facebook has many swap and sell groups. It also has buy-nothing groups where you can offer your things to the local community. After you join the group, it's as simple as creating a Facebook post and responding to comments.

If you're not on Facebook, online marketplaces like Gumtree and eBay may be your best bet. Freecycle is great for giving things away. You'll need to register for an account before creating a listing on all these platforms.

PRICE IT RIGHT

Do a little research before you list your item. See what price other similar items are going for nearby. Price it just under the average and be willing to negotiate to sell it quickly. If you just want it out of your sight as soon as possible, offer it free. You'll be surprised what people will take.

TAKE MEASUREMENTS

People will want to know what size your item is, especially furniture. Don't forget to give width, height and depth dimensions. Putting these in your listing will save you time answering questions later.



POST MORE THAN ONE PHOTO

If a picture's worth 1,000 words, five good pictures will make your listing pop. So, get out your phone, put on the flash, and take photos of your item from different angles. Bend down so your item is at eye level and takes up most of the frame. Make sure there's no clutter in the background. If it's clothing or jewellery, a photo of you wearing it will help potential buyers visualise it on themselves. Take close-ups of any damage to the item so your buyers know exactly what they're getting.

BE HONEST ABOUT ITS CONDITION

If your item has seen better days, it's best to declare that up front. Detail any stains, cracks, holes or broken bits so

there are no nasty surprises for your customer. Some people seek out fixers-uppers to flex their repair skills and grab a bargain. Likewise, if it's new, or never been used, you may be able to ask for a higher price.

TELL A STORY

Everyone loves a good origin story. Sharing some history about your item may spark interest and reassure shoppers. When did you buy it? Which brand is it? How has it been used? Why are you now parting with it?

Items you're giving up reluctantly are much more desirable. Like that big designer lounge that doesn't fit into your new apartment. Or the treadmill you don't use because you now go for walks with your new puppy.

BE SAFE

Most platforms have a messaging system you can use. There's no need to communicate by

text or WhatsApp and share your personal phone number; in fact, Gumtree warns against it on its homepage!

Don't give away your bank details. Cash is the most secure payment method if you meet in person. Online marketplaces, such as eBay, often have online payment systems for a small fee.

If your item is being picked up from your home, have a friend or family member with you, just to be safe.

STILL NO TAKERS?

If you've done all the steps above and you still don't have any offers, you can avoid putting it in landfill by donating to a charity, Reverse Garbage, Bower Reuse and Repair Centre or Pyrmont Cares.

■ Courtesy City of Sydney



Small players challenge Big Three

Recent years has seen a renewable revolution with a shift toward smaller eco energy providers.

Jake Kendall reports.

The release of the **Green Electricity Guide in February by Greenpeace with the support of Surry Hills-based Total Environment Centre, reflects significant changes in the electricity market.**

“The latest results show a real changing of the guard,” says Mark Byrne, TEC’s energy market advocate. “In each of the previous guides, Powershop took the top spot. Now that mantle has been taken by Enova Energy, a small, community owned retailer based in Byron Bay.”

Powershop dropped several places

because it is now owned by Shell, one of the world’s largest fossil fuel producers, which degrades its green power reputation.

Small energy retailers such as Enova, Diamond Energy, Energy Locals and others are challenging the Big Three providers — Origin, AGL and EnergyAustralia — with their commitment to source only renewable energy for their customers.

“These new retailers are introducing improved ways of serving their customers, including tariffs that allow people to buy from and sell to the grid at times that suit them,” says Byrne.

They are also committed to working with communities to ensure that the power and profits stay local. “Some, like Enova, are investing in innovations like community scale batteries to make the most use of rooftop solar energy exported to the grid,” says Byrne.

However, as Byrne emphasises, there is still a long way to go. “We

mustn’t lose sight of the end point of the energy transition — which is a zero-carbon energy system.”

After all, Australia’s electricity grid is still about two-thirds powered by coal and gas. “We need to pick up the pace, by quitting coal and gas and investing in renewables and energy storage, to have the best chance of staying within the global goal of 1.5 degrees of global heating,” says Byrne.

To this end, TEC is considering formally proposing a change to the National Electricity Rules that would require all retailers to calculate and publish the emissions intensity of their sales to customers.

“There is only one source of the electrons that flow to your home or business,” explains Byrne. “But retailers have choices about where they buy their electricity from. Unfortunately, at present that information is very difficult to obtain. We want to make it mandatory and transparent.”

Time to take action

By switching to greener electricity providers, together we can force dirty coal and gas out of the grid and bring more renewable electricity in, sending a clear message to electricity companies that it’s time to get serious about tackling climate change.

Greenest providers

- 1 Enova Energy
- 2 Diamond Energy
- 3 Momentum Energy
- 4 Energy Locals
- 5 Indigo Power

Biggest climate polluters

- 36 Origin Energy
- 37 EnergyT Australia
- 38 Powerdirect
- 39 ActewAGL
- 40 AGL Energy



Now is the perfect time to demand fair wages

With cost-of-living pressures increasing and wage growth stagnating, it's time to go on the offensive says

Sue Bolton.

Following two years of a global pandemic, wage growth for workers is at an all-time low.

Meanwhile, the cost of living for ordinary people is steadily increasing.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, wages have only grown by 2.3 percent in the past year, compared with previous decades when nominal wages grew 2.5 percent or more a year.

The situation worsens when you consider prices for consumables have risen 3.5 percent over that same period. Fuel, housing and transport costs are up by 32.4 percent, 21.7 percent and 12.5 percent respectively. (Now that Australia has joined the ban on Russian oil imports, fuel costs will soar even more.) Vegetables, beef, childcare and medical costs have risen from 4.2

percent to 8 percent.

The Reserve Bank of Australia predicts wages will remain stagnant and that households can expect inflation to outstrip wages until at least the end of this year. Economists say the impact of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 will further slow wages growth. Meanwhile, corporate profits soared by more than 13 percent last year.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions said workers are “copping the worst real terms pay cut in 20 years” and “any recovery from the pandemic relies on real wage growth so working people can keep up with the rising cost of living”.

The federal government is refusing to address cost-of-living pressures and wage stagnation. While federal treasurer Josh Frydenberg acknowledged the pressures, he said they would be addressed by tax cuts.

But tax cuts cannot compensate for the losses in overall income due to wage stagnation and they do little to directly address the immediate issues of low wage growth and higher costs of living. This is because most workers are not in the income bracket the tax cuts will mostly benefit. Frydenberg's

tax cuts will also likely be paid for by cuts to services and welfare.

The government is bragging about the country's 4.7 percent GDP growth, saying it is leading the world. This wild reading ignores the fact that the wages share of GDP has dropped to below 50 percent.

Australia has some of the most draconian industrial relations laws in the OECD. Legal industrial action is highly restricted and this intimidates workers. This has left many workers languishing on award wages without the benefit of collective bargaining agreements. Meanwhile, bosses have the power to take industrial action against workers, such as locking out workforces — as recently evidenced in Sydney when the NSW government shut down the rail network and CityRail workers were effectively locked out (see page 14).

The only way to lift wages is if unions go on the offensive and build confidence among workers to take industrial action — legal or illegal. Workers should not be made to pay for the global pandemic. Unions need to organise to demand fair wages, and a good time to do that is before a federal election.

Homage, pilgrimage and protest

This year's Mardi Gras was once again a self-contained affair. As **Clifford Lewis** and **Kevin Markwell** argue, it's time the parade returned to the streets.

In 1985, calls for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade to be cancelled in response to concerns about HIV/AIDS were successfully countered by the organisers. The parade is now recognised as an important way of creating awareness of safe-sex practices, reducing the social stigma of HIV/AIDS and being a living memorial to those who died from it.

In 2020, like many other major events, the Mardi Gras parade became a victim of another virus: COVID-19. In consultation with public health experts, the parade moved to the Sydney Cricket Ground in 2021 and took place there again on 5 March.

This radical decision is a testament to the resilience and spirit of Mardi Gras that — despite calls for its cancellation at various points within its 43-year history — the show continues.

But at what cost? Taking it away from its homeland on Oxford Street and containing it within the boundaries of the SCG challenges its status as a protest, reducing its ability to disrupt.

A PILGRIMAGE

Since 1978, the parade has followed roughly the same route on Oxford Street in the heart of Sydney's "Gaybourhood". That first parade ended in brutal riot instigated by the police. By following the route of that first night, the parade pays homage to

the brave people who created that first parade, now known as the 78ers.

For some, the parade acts as a form of pilgrimage and a place to express and affirm one's sexual and/or gender orientation. It is a moment in time when a minority is publicly celebrated and when differences are embraced, albeit temporarily.

For others who may not be out, the parade provides a visual representation of what being LGBTIQ+ is. It helps break down barriers that prevent LGBTIQ+ people from living their authentic lives, displaying a community that will embrace them.

The success of the parade has inspired similar ones in other regional communities around Australia.

These public displays challenge mainstream expectations of sexuality and gender, drawing attention to the diversity of LGBTIQ+ communities. Oxford Street provides the parade and its exuberant participants with a connection to what is arguably Australia's LGBTIQ+ imagined homeland — and the struggles and celebrations of past generations.

THE SHIFT TO THE SCG

It is not surprising the shift to the SCG in 2021 was not accepted by all LGBTIQ+ people. Several hundred people marched down Oxford Street following an exemption granted by the NSW minister for health.

Apart from honouring the 78ers, people marched to protest contemporary issues like the religious freedom discrimination bill and Black deaths in custody. They felt protest could not be effective within the walls of the SCG. (See page 7.)

The importance of Oxford Street relates then, not only to the origin of the parade, but to the fact that it disrupts public space and, by doing so, garners public attention for important issues.

Indeed, a protest is only a protest if it disrupts the everyday routines of public life. The blocked roads and traffic diversions expose the public to the parade, regardless of whether they intend to participate. These disruptions help remind the public of the LGBTIQ+ communities and their place in Australian society.

The shift to the SCG changes the nature of the parade and its relationship with onlookers. It becomes a ticketed event, and those attending can no longer maintain the anonymity afforded on a crowded street. Ticketing limits access to the event to Mardi Gras members (who each receive two free tickets); those who can afford tickets; and those lucky to get one of a limited number of spots.

Lastly, the SCG, with its fencing and security, is spatially contained within boundaries that prevent the public gaze on the street, potentially consigning the politics of Pride away from the public sphere to within a private space.

The fact that the Mardi Gras parade has been able to take place each year across its 43-year history, in the face of protests from some religious groups, ill-founded concerns about HIV transmission, horrible weather and now, COVID-19, is a show of defiance and strength.

However, shifting the parade from the street where it emerged, with such strong historical connections to the development of LGBTIQ+ Pride does come with some costs.

It remains to be seen what happens in the future with World Pride 2023 set to be hosted in Sydney.

Will the parade come out of the stadium as planned? Will it still call people out of the bars and onto the streets? Or will it morph into an entertainment spectacle, sanitised and contained within the boundaries of the SCG?

opinion



‘Society handicaps me far more than my disability’

Here, people with disabilities talk of social exclusion and a lack of community participation.

Societal attitudes have not developed in isolation from the ways that we have historically responded to people with disabilities. Nor can they be adequately addressed without changing the way we continue to respond to people with disabilities. It can be argued that negative attitudes, myths, stereotypes are both the cause and result of social exclusion for people with disabilities through service practices that segregate and congregate people with disabilities.

The greatest barrier facing people with Down syndrome is not their intellectual disability but confronting negative attitudes, overcoming outdated stereotypes and challenging the limitations placed on them by others. What they lack is not ability but opportunity.

I do not expect to get access to the pyramids or Uluru but I do want to get into all of the library and all of the community centre.

There are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about people with a disability. These include that they are a danger, a burden, and a threat. It is not uncommon to hear people express the view that people with a disability would be better off in institutions with people of their own kind. There also appears to be a common belief

that people with a disability are not able to make a significant contribution to the community, and that they are somehow not of equal value as human beings and members of the community.

If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses, and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which handicaps me, far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have a disability.

People with a disability want to live in a society where they are treated with respect, dignity and importantly with equality, and not as ‘poor things’ nor merely as recipients of services. Additionally they do not want to be segregated as ‘people with disabilities’.

The gym offered a separate class for kids with disabilities. I asked one of the teachers whether it would be possible for my daughter to attend one of the other mainstream classes. She frowned and looked concerned and said that was why they had created the separate class. I said she was perfectly capable of joining in with the other girls. She said: ‘Well that’s OK for your daughter but if we let her in we will have to let

everyone else in’. These are not elite gymnasts. They are little girls jumping around in leotards having fun on a Saturday morning.

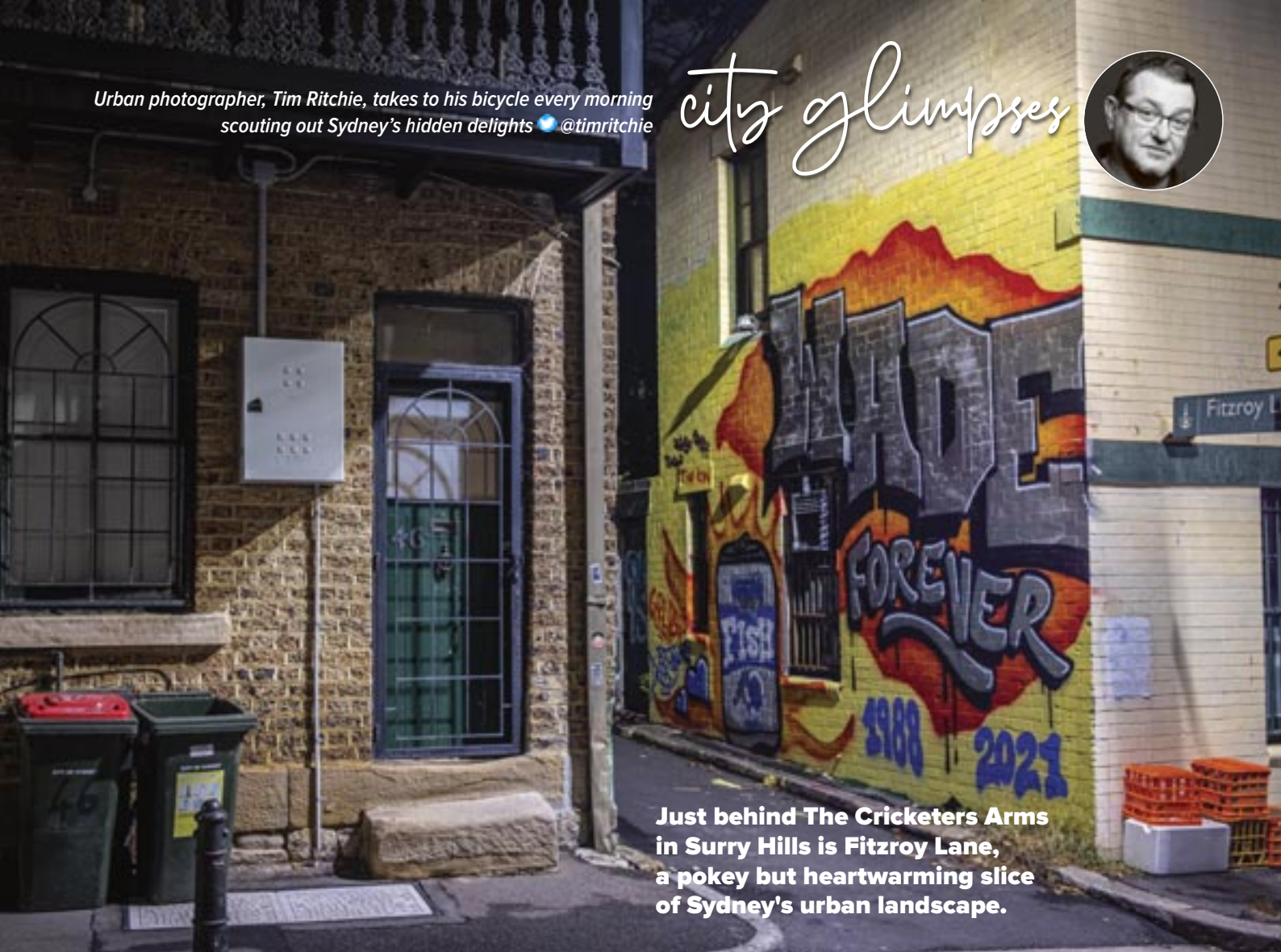
More often than not, people with disabilities are seen as recipients of services and a burden rather than equal members of the community.

Until the concept of disability disappears and is replaced by a society that is structured to support everyone’s life relatedness and contribution — until that day my life and opportunities and the lives of every other person who carries the label ‘disabled’ depends on the goodwill of people in the human service system. Goodwill is no substitute for freedom.

Persons with disability are subject to multiple and aggravated forms of human rights violations, including the neglect of their most basic survival-related needs. These human rights violations do not only occur in far off places that lack enlightened legislation and policies, or the resources needed to meet basic needs. They occur every day, in every region, of every state and territory in Australia. Virtually every Australian with disability encounters human rights violations at some points in their lives, and very many experience it every day of their lives.

Urban photographer, Tim Ritchie, takes to his bicycle every morning scouting out Sydney's hidden delights 📸 @timritchie

city glimpses

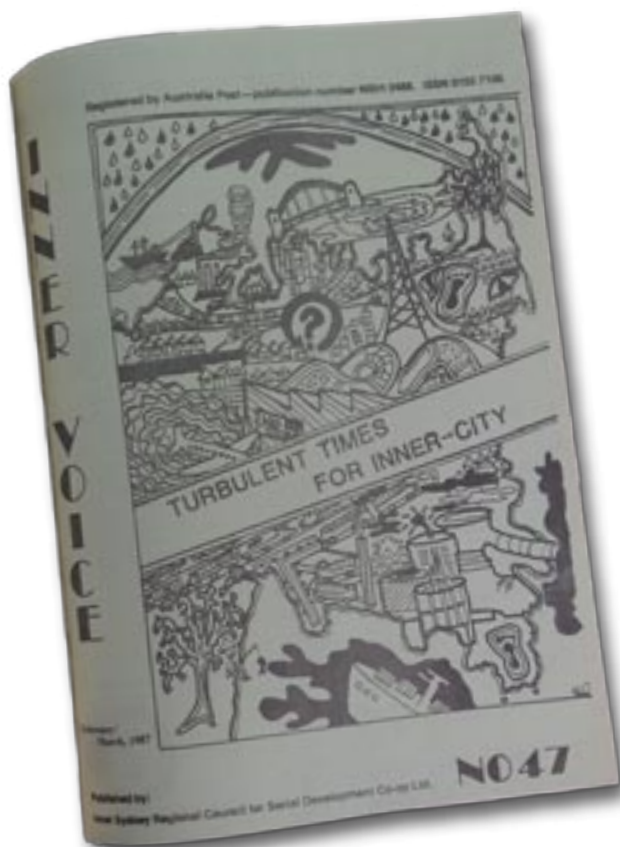


Just behind The Cricketers Arms in Surry Hills is Fitzroy Lane, a pokey but heartwarming slice of Sydney's urban landscape.

FROM THE VAULT AUTUMN 1987

This “feeling of déjà vu” from 35 years ago is eerily familiar . . .

There is a real feeling of déjà vu in the inner-city today. Development, in its most unbridled form, is rearing its head everywhere we look. And people, after the first shock/horror, are engaging in the wishing game — wishing that sanity will prevail and our ever-so out-of-kilter eco system will return to the balance. Seemingly anything goes on the grounds of the economy without any thought of what is being left in its wake and what we are doing in the long-term. The regulators are busy deregulating and believing their own rhetoric that self-regulation and the market will sort everything out. The hard-won Environmental Planning Act has been made just another piece of paper — and we all know what you can do with that! But there's another world out there — money is drying up fast, poverty is growing apace and the all-important house is not even a glimmer at the end of the tunnel. It's time to take this madness head on.



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We have been given inconsistent information by police as to what caused Jai's death. Who do we believe now? What is the truth? We want to know the truth. Lachlan Wright