

WA government's heat on Canberra over renewal of remote housing partnership

VICTORIA LAURIE THE AUSTRALIAN 6:26PM June 29, 2018

The WA government has launched a 'Don't Walk Away' campaign to try and shame the Federal government into committing to a renewal of the \$1.2 billion National Partnership on Remote Housing, which lapses tomorrow after ten years.

In newspaper and online advertisements, the McGowan Labor government says it will argue that hundreds of remote communities will be left without guaranteed funding for houses and services.

State housing minister Peter Tinley said the WA government spends around \$90 million supporting 165 communities with a total of around 12,000 residents spread from the west coast to the South Australian border, but he said WA relied on a Federal contribution to do so.

"The Federal government intends to walk away from that commitment," he said. "We will not let that happen."

He said having a home was an essential part of Closing the Gap, the Commonwealth's own initiative that had identified WA needed 1300 new houses to be built over the next 10 years.

Aboriginal Affairs minister Ben Wyatt said the Commonwealth had withdrawn itself over recent years from a longstanding commitment to funding Aboriginal communities.

"This is actually broader than a national partnership around housing, it's an agenda to remove itself from any responsibility to citizens living in remote communities."

West Australian Aboriginal Affairs minister Ben Wyatt.
Picture: AAP

The Federal Government has reached a new agreement with the Northern Territory, matching their \$500 million investment in remote housing over the next five years. But it is yet to come to a funding agreement with the WA, Queensland and South Australian governments to continue the housing partnership.

Jackie Huggins, co-chairwoman of the National Congress says she is concerned that no agreement has been reached with three states so close to the date of expiry of the

partnership.

“While the Minister’s Office is at pains to say that the actual funding does not end until September under the current agreement, we are alarmed to see no movement towards continuity of funding for this vitally important program,” she said.

“Aboriginal people’s welfare and interests must not be sacrificed in partisan political disputes.”

One of the largest indigenous organisations in the Pilbara, in WA’s Midwest, says at least 30 communities will be left high and dry in their region alone.

YMAC Co-Chairperson Natalie Parker said there was no plan for hundreds of families living in the 30 communities.

“YMAC understands the deep cultural and spiritual value that living on country holds for many traditional owners, allowing them to practice traditional law and customs as recognised under their native title determinations,” she said.

“The forced movement of Aboriginal people away from their country is well understood to cause long-term trauma, social issues and degradation of land and culture — it is completely unacceptable in 2018.”



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