

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, HOME OWNERSHIP SUBSIDY SCHEME

816. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Housing and Works:

I refer to the minister's recent announcement of the home ownership subsidy scheme for government employees. Are the metropolitan and major regional urban areas excluded; and, if so, will the minister name these exclusions?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

I do not know of many government employees who live in the metropolitan area and who would be eligible for accommodation under the Government Employees Housing Authority program. The residents of Government House, or the Governor, might -

Hon Barry House: Your media release does not explain it. That is why I asked the question. It is completely lacking in information.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The initiative I have taken is one of which I am particularly proud. It will be available to government employees who would otherwise be eligible for GEHA accommodation.

Hon Barry House: Are major urban areas in the regions excluded?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: Major urban areas such as Bunbury, Busselton and Albany have been excluded from the operations of the Government Employees Housing Authority for some time.

Hon Barry House: It is a real Clayton's offer.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The decisions of the previous Government removed GEHA as an authority that provided accommodation for government employees in those centres that I have just mentioned. I have not yet been able to establish an alternative program to respond to the needs of government employees in those towns. However, in future, government employees in those locations where GEHA is currently available could, at the discretion of their departments, gain access to a mortgage assistance program up to a maximum of \$175 per week, instead of taking up the opportunity of a Government Employees Housing Authority house. That would reduce the cost to the taxpayer of providing such accommodation to government employees. More importantly, it would provide in a small way an additional incentive to attract professionals to local and regional communities, where they might otherwise not be attracted, on the basis that they can link themselves to the economic future and prosperity of that town and perhaps be encouraged to stay longer in those centres. In that way, they accept responsibility for the maintenance of the gardens even when they are away on holidays. It is their home and their investment. They will take the risk that the property might rise or fall in value when they want to move on from that employment in that town. However, it is an initiative to which Cabinet agreed and of which I am the architect. It has been pushed through at my insistence. It seems to be one that will be of use to government employees in towns that are currently able to utilise only GEHA programs or nothing. Now they have the GEHA program or the opportunity to take up mortgage assistance at the discretion of their departments.