

MINISTER FOR HOUSING, HOUSING MINISTERS CONFERENCE

130. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Housing:

The minister will recall outlining his lofty objectives during question time on 3 May prior to attending his first ministerial council meeting in Alice Springs. As we have not heard about this since his return, are we to assume that the minister failed to achieve those objectives?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

The opportunity to participate in the housing ministers' conference at Alice Springs allowed me to raise with Senator Vanstone this Government's concerns about the Commonwealth Government's policies that have led to a huge impost on the housing sector throughout Australia. Of course, I refer to the goods and services tax and the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, which will have a combined state budget impact of \$40 million over the next four years.

Senator Vanstone appeared to have a great sense of humour, which was a surprise to me. However, she was not a source of much financial comfort to the people of Western Australia. She did not respond to my approaches about Western Australia's expectations. Similar approaches were made by every other state minister. We all requested a commitment to an agreement beyond the life of the current Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. The Labor ministers also raised the financial difficulties facing them.

I successfully moved on behalf of Western Australia a motion urging the federal Government to tackle the issues that have flowed across Australia as a result of the HIH Insurance collapse, which has had an impact on the housing sector. I urged Senator Vanstone to draw to the Commonwealth Government's attention its responsibility as regulator of the insurance industry. The State was done proud by the work of the executive director of the Aboriginal housing and infrastructure unit, Ms Jodie Broun, who, together with her counterpart from Queensland, presented a compelling argument about why funds flowing to Aboriginal housing, in particular, should be focused specifically on need and should respond to the statistical display of need across the Commonwealth. That multifaceted indicator should be the basis upon which the Commonwealth responds to the needs of Aboriginal housing projects around the country.

The PRESIDENT: I trust the minister is getting to the nub of the question. This is not a statement or a speech.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: It is important for the member to know -

Hon Barry House: Did you get any more money?

Hon TOM STEPHENS: As a consequence of the policy being adopted and supported by the Commonwealth, additional funds should flow to Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. That will probably cause some disadvantage for New South Wales and Victoria. Interestingly, the recent federal budget indicates that additional funds will flow to indigenous housing, not in this coming budget but in the budget after as forward commitments - presumably to be delivered and hopefully improved upon by a Beazley Government.