

11th November 2003

Re – Review into Rentals for Waterfront Tenancies on Crown Land

We in Australia are indeed very fortunate. Not only do we live in what many believe is the greatest country in the world, but we also live in one of the finest working democracies in the world as well. We live in a country that offers equality for all and in the country that brought the world the expression “A fair go”. And all we are asking for today is exactly that! Equality with the rest of Australia, and “A fair go”!

Yes, we acknowledge that we are able to live anywhere we choose within this great land, and yes, we believe that we were fortunate enough to choose to live exactly where we do. But should we be unfairly penalised for that reason compared to the rest of Australia, especially when we do so with the knowledge, permission and approval of our local councils, Department of Land And Water etc? For example, when you bought your house or unit you expected as your right, to be able to obtain access to it with ease. Perhaps you have a garage for your car, or at worst easy parking available outside your house for which you pay nothing. In fact if there are parking restrictions there your council will issue you with a special sticker that exempts residents from those restrictions.

Not so on the river. Having allowed us build or purchase a property that is only accessible by boat, the Bureaucrats/Government/Councils then make it almost impossible to access those homes, taking on average two years before allowing you to build a pontoon or jetty to do so. How are we then expected to bring in our building materials, move in our furniture, bring home our shopping, go to and from work etc? How easy was it for you to access your property from day one? How long did it take you to get permission to park outside your own home? And how much does it cost you to do so? You may say “But I pay council rates”. And so do we. Even for the curbs and gutters that we don’t have and that you take for granted, we pay. Please remember that for us, our boats are our cars, our pontoons our driveways, and the river is our road. If you find that you have forgotten something or have run out of something you can walk to the local shops. We cant!

And have you considered the fact that we already have to pay a not inconsiderable amount to leave our cars and our commuter boats on the opposite side of the river to where we live, before we can even begin to make our way to work, the shops, etc? Yet you don’t think that we are paying enough! We have paid application fees to build our pontoons and jetties; we pay annual licence fees with no guarantee of tenure, dependant on the whim of the Minister; we can not include or guarantee the pontoons or jetties when we sell our properties, thus reducing the value of the property to a potential buyer, as the licence is automatically cancelled at the time of sale and has to be re-applied for all over again; (Nice double dipping there!). We pay considerably more for our square meter of river bottom than does an oyster farmer who is granted a long lease compared to our annual terms, or a yacht

on a swing mooring – truly a luxury and not a necessity - and still you want us to pay even more with the introduction of this iniquitous “Wet Berthing” fee! What has happened to “A fair go”?

You say that our land values have risen, and they have. But then so have yours! Yet you don't expect to pay more for your right to park your car at home, in fact you don't expect to pay for that basic right at all. And nor should you. Nor should we. We are water access only! We do not have the luxury of choice with a car in the front and a boat moored out back. We depend on our boats and our river as much as you depend on your car, your garage, your driveway and your roadway. There is no difference. That we have chosen to live here is true and perhaps even for the same reasons as you have chosen to live where you now do. At the time of purchase it was what we could afford! Isolated waterfront communities were simply cheaper than well-serviced suburbs. If they weren't, then perhaps we would all be living in Vaucluse or Point Piper, or Mosman, etc. But we are not. The fact that they are now seen as more readily commutable distances from the city and from work is no justification to penalise us, any more than it would be to penalise commuters from the Blue Mountains because they live close to or in National Parks!

We are not “Silvertails”, big businessmen or the idle rich. We are ordinary working men and women, no different to any other cross section of Australia. In Marlow, where there are about a dozen full time residents and a dozen weekenders we have a typical mix of occupations. That's occupations, not professions! We have a Builder, an Electrician, a Labourer, Sales Representatives, a Receptionist, a Salesman, Pensioners', Unemployed, and the Aged and the Infirm. To assume or suggest that we are all living in luxury and refusing to pay our way is not true.

Our community, small as it is, is a proud community. We are proud to call ourselves Australian. We fly the Australian flag from our public wharf. On Anzac Day, our ex-servicemen are proud to join their old units and comrades to march and to remember. Coincidentally, today is Remembrance Day, the 11th day of the 11th month. Perhaps now is the time for you to show us why we joined up and what we fought for. Where is OUR democracy? Where is OUR equality? Where is OUR “Fair go”? We pay our rates, we pay our taxes, and we believe that we are entitled to be treated like everyone else. Certainly no better, but certainly no worse. That's all we ask, and when you think about it, it isn't much.

Jeff Harrison.