

The Aboriginal Housing Panel Report for 1974

The Aboriginal Housing Panel, a Committee of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, was established just over two years ago, with the objective:

“To provide assistance, advice and co-ordination to Aboriginal, Government, professional and community organisations in the planning, development and construction of housing for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, taking full account of environmental, physical and social parameters in the best interest of the local community.”

The panel is presently composed of Michael Griggs (Chairman), Ken Woolley, Ron Sevitt, Kevin Martin, Ray Nagas, and Virginia Braden. It is hoped to appoint a second Aboriginal member in the new year. (Charles Perkins resigned during the year because of other commitments). During this year, two consultants have been engaged to undertake specific pilot projects. Peter Myers has prepared reports on Mowanjum and Wilcannia and will complete one on Maningrida in the new year. Laurie Virr has prepared a report on Beagle Bay. In January, 1975, Michael Heppell took up his position as Director of the Aboriginal Housing Panel, expanding the Secretariat, which consists currently of Virginia Braden, Executive Secretary, and a full-time stenographer. Regional groups of the Aboriginal Housing Panel have been formed in N.S.W., S.A., W.A., Queensland, Centralia, and N.T., to assist with projects and dissemination of information.

The Panel has assisted a number of Aboriginal communities in the planning of housing programs, and believes that it should be policy to obtain sociological and anthropological information from communities, which could be of assistance to architects. In this way designs commissioned, siting of buildings, location of services and all other details should be more in tune with communities' real requirements.

At Mowanjum, Derby, W.A., for example, Professor Derek Freeman of the Department of Anthropology A.N.U. undertook an 8-week study to ascertain the extent to which traditional customs should be taken into account when planning a housing project. Following this, Professor Freeman prepared two reports which will hopefully assist the Architect to prepare new town plans which take this information into account. Dr R. Tonkinson is preparing similar work for Jigalong, and Paul Memmott for Mornington Island.

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