Submitted via e-mail: committees@parliament.act.gov.au

Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Inquiry into the proposed Appropriation (Loose-fill Asbestos Insulation Eradication) Bill 2014–15

Submission by Stephenson
Mr Fluffy Home Owners

The Committee Secretary

Standing / Select Committee on Public Accounts

This letter forms our personal submission to the Inquiry into the legislation you are now considering.

As owners of a 'Mr Fluffy' house we simply wanted to make you aware of our circumstances and how this terrible situation has affected us. We also want you to know that from our perspective there is a simple solution that, as far as we can tell, has not yet been considered by the Taskforce or the Government.

Our suggestion on the offer
To ensure you read this, before we move onto our personal circumstances, we state it here.

> For home owners who have large amounts of debt still owing against their properties or renovations that are unique or particular to their life circumstances, and therefore can't possibly come out of the current Government offer financially even or ahead, we ask the following:
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> That the Government opt to buy the home for market value leaving the title and ownership of the land for the current owners. This will enable the current owners the option of rebuilding in the same spot, using this money once the block has been remediated.

We understand this is some way from the Government strategy of complete buy-back, but due to circumstances beyond our control (debt and renovations particular to our lifestyle and business) there is simply no way we can agree to the current terms without consigning ourselves to a lifetime of debt that cannot be recovered.

Our circumstances
So, to our circumstances - so that the Committee might have some perspective.

We currently live in a four bedroom house in Over the past few years we have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars undertaking extensive renovations on our home. This has become our home where ourselves and two young children live and intend to for a very long time. We do not want any more than what we have now. Our four bedroom house in suburban with an extra large shed is our perfect abode, and we certainly do not want to lose anything that we have.

Just before we got our registered letter (the first we had heard about having a Mr Fluffy house) we had just finished adding a new $50,000 shed to our property to house all of our equipment need to run our family business from home, such as; truck, ute, trailers, tools etc with a workshop on the side.

The consequence of having to move is drastic. Not only do we lose our home and the work we had done to it; We lose our community and also our business. For us, there is no way we can store all our equipment 'somewhere else'. This would be an added cost to a business that only just makes ends meet now. It is simply a cost of business we cannot afford.

We totally understand that the house must come down and we would never want to do anything that could potentially harm our children. We feel bad enough for having our kids in the house already. We never would have bought the house if we knew of this issue. Who would?

We currently still have a mortgage of around $250,000.00. We want to keep the block we have now and the size that it currently is, it is close to the children's schools, all after school activities, family, friends, all our business clients also around this area. We purchased this property years ago with our future in sight. Suddenly our future is being stolen from underneath us.

The simple fact is that if we had to leave the block, or buy back half of our block because of sub-division, we would be worse off. There are no other houses to purchase in our suburb to the same quality to what we have now. The paper quoted there are 103 Mr Fluffy houses in and only houses for sale in . We have been looking everyday and most houses are three bedrooms and run down and old inside – exactly the kind of house we had BEFORE we invested in making it what it is today. We are being punished by the government for improving our house, supporting local businesses in doing our improvements and working extra hours to try and pay off our mortgage early. The government is literally leaving us in more debt, with no home, no family business and no vision for our future.

We are simply looking for a fair go.

We cannot afford to be out of pocket to the extent the current offer would have us. We believe the government should replace exactly what we have now and we should be no worse off. Understanding this is unlikely to happen. We believe the Government should give us the market value for the house only, not the land. We should be able to keep OUR full block of land which is only 756m - the government then pays to remove our Mr Fluffy house and we can build a new house with the money we received for the market value of our old house. This way we can keep the external shed we just put up and be able to keep our business going. **This would work out cheaper for the government and give us some hope for our future and our children's future.**

As it is now, if we go with the governments offer, we will lose our block. It will get split in half, which will be tiny, and we would be offered to buy back half a block! This wasn't our intent years ago. How dare the government decide what we want. This will result in being hundreds of thousands of dollars out of pocket AND having no room to put our shed for our business, or for the kids to play.

The cumulative effect of the situation

One further thing that we need to stress to the Committee is that our response to the Mr Fluffy situation isn't an isolated event. We don't think the Government understands how there are a range of financial and personal decisions that this situation affects.

As mentioned previously, the situation will lead to the end of our business – not due to some kind of false emergency payment cash flow, but because of the loss of physical infrastructure that our family business invested in on our property.

On a personal note, we are facing personal medical decisions that will be affected. One of us is facing a planned surgery that must go ahead and will cost over $18,000. Even with rebates we will be significantly out of pocket – and we don't begrudge anyone that – but this surgery will now need to be put off until we have certainty. We have no doubt that the resulting trip for emergency surgery will have a far greater impact on the Government's finances. We don't want to be a burden but this offer will put us in this position.

How does that make any sense when you consider the costs on the health system that will be incurred – but of course we know that those costs will be hidden from the Mr Fluffy costs.

Our dealings with the Taskforce
Currently we are extremely upset about our treatment during this process.

We aren't a family in Forest with their mortgage paid off years ago and extra money for legal fees. We are a landscaper, shift worker and loving Mum and Dad in l , working hard seven days a week to get nice things for our kids. We have worked so hard to be where we are today, knowing we didn't want to be 70years old with a mortgage. 7-days a week of work – time away from our children, and the government wants to drag everything from underneath us.

We believe that we should not be any worse off financially through no fault of our own.

We have brought our babies into this mess and potentially harmed their health. It is more than likely that our family business of fourteen years will be wound up. And yet, we can't even get a reply to an email.

We sent an email requesting assistance to the task-force on the 19.11.14 asking for a nominated task-force contact to help us. Other Mr Fluffy owners we know have told us they all had a contact. We have still had no reply.

We are obviously quite stressed about this situation. We wonder how we will be able to afford a deposit for a house, let alone a mortgage. How do we afford a rental property when we will still be paying a mortgage for something we don't even own anymore. Do we drag our kids out of their out of school activities? Do we now attend the schools breakfast club because everyday bills will now be a burden?
We are just so sad and devastated as we have both worked so hard, all for it to be taken away from us, due to no fault of our own.

We are honestly out of our depth with this situation and feel that the Government is taking advantage of this and trying to 'con' us into a decision that we shouldn't have to make.

We know this is a difficult situation – made worse by the Federal Government not meeting its responsibilities and turning its back on all of us, but we really need the Committee to highlight that one size doesn't fit all – and we need some flexibility in this situation from the Taskforce and the Government.

Thank you for your time.

Yours respectfully
Stephenson
25 November 2014