

Homing in on housing

A NEW Housing Classification Policy (NHCP) will change the way off-base Service residences are classified.

It will be phased in over the next 10 years, but the new policy will not affect members until they move house.

Defence Minister Brendan Nelson announced details of the new policy on March 22. The policy is effective from July 1.

"It is also important that the Defence housing stock reflects current community standards and meets the needs and expectations of today's military workforce and their families," Dr Nelson said.

"Defence's new housing classification policy will enable Defence Housing Australia, as the provider of housing for ADF members with dependants, to progressively deliver a greater variety of housing types."

CA Lt-Gen Peter Leahy said reclassifying Service residences on change of tenancy "avoids any unnecessary increase in contributions for members".

"Moving to a rent band system will still mean there is only one Group Rent Scheme (GRS) contribution for each rank group, wherever you are posted in Australia," Lt-Gen Leahy said.

The ADF's current amenity-based housing classification system reflects housing standards of the early 1990s and has become outdated.

Under NHCP, the minimum standard for Service residences will be raised to mirror current community standards, providing improved housing for junior ranks in particular.

Defence will continue to subsidise 50 per cent of the Members With Dependants rent bill. The subsidy is tax-free in the hands of ADF members and the value of the fringe benefit is not reportable on members' income payment summaries.

Member contributions will not change during the current tenancy, except for the annual adjustment.

The improved minimum standard and better quality housing stock over time will result in slightly higher than usual member rental contribution increases for personnel at or below corporal.

The Transitional GRS contribution will progressively close the dollar gap between the Group A and Group B1/RB1 contributions.

Currently, the Group A contribution is \$131.75 a week, and the Group B1 contribution is \$157.85 a week for Service residence or rent allowance properties with three or more bedrooms.

To reduce the financial impact on members at or below corporal introduction of the transitional GRS contribution will be deferred for two years.

For an extended article on this subject visit <http://www.defence.gov.au/news/armynews>

OLD AND NEW

The key differences between the NHCP and existing housing policy are:

- ▶ there will be a new, higher minimum amenity standard for Service residences;
- ▶ off-base Service residences will be classified based on market rent; and
- ▶ as a result of the improved housing standard, contributions for members at corporal or lower rank will gradually increase over 10 years, with the Transitional Group Rent Scheme (GRS) Contribution planned to start in the 2009/10 financial year.

Some parts of the current system will remain the same:

- ▶ the amenity-based system for on-base housing;
- ▶ GRS contributions according to rank; and
- ▶ the policy on sharing the MWD rent bill 50/50 with members.

CHANGING STANDARDS

Current minimum standard:

- ▶ Three bedrooms, storage, kitchen, dining, lounge, bathroom, toilet, laundry and car accommodation (carport).

New minimum standard from July 1 will include the current minimum standard plus:

- ▶ Ensuite, lock-up garage instead of single carport (except Darwin) and security. From July 1, 2009, covered outdoor areas and a minimum size fenced yard of 25 square metres in the Sydney posting location and 35 square metres for all other posting localities will also apply.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- Visit <http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/pac/> or <http://intranet.defence.gov.au/pac/> and click: 1) Guide to ADF Pay and Conditions, 2) Permanent & Reserves (on CFTS), then 3) Housing and relocations
- Call the Defence Service Centre on 1800 333 362.
- Information sessions will be held in all major Defence installations from May.
- Defence Housing Australia remains the primary contact for relocations and housing allocation support.
- Visit <http://www.dha.gov.au/>, your local Housing Management Centre, or phone the DHA Customer Service Line – 1800 249 711.



In tune: Cpl Melody Neilsen at the Sydney Harbour Bridge's 75th anniversary celebrations where she performed with the Australian Army Band-Sydney. Photo by Cpl Neil Reeves

Sisters band together

By Cpl Mike McSweeney

SISTERS Tara and Melody Neilsen, both corporals with Australian Army Band-Sydney, performed for a massive crowd when the Sydney Harbour Bridge turned 75.

Tara, who plays trumpet, and Melody, who sings and plays clarinet, said the energy of the crowd added to the band's performance.

"It shows on their faces. When you're singing you look out and there's people singing along with the words or dancing. It was a really good vibe," Melody said.

"When it's a happy vibe and the crowd's getting into it we feed off that and it's a lot more exciting for everybody."

The band gave two performances at Observatory Hill during the March 18 celebrations, which included a display by the Red Berets.

"Having just moved to Sydney, I still get a bit of a buzz when I see the bridge in the morning when I come to work," Melody said.

"So to have that view on that day, and seeing what it meant to so many people, it was really exciting."

Tara said that after cross-

ing the bridge, spectators took advantage of the food stalls before heading up the hill to enjoy the band's performance.

"We have been rehearsing pretty intensely for it, because it's a high profile job with thousands of people," Tara said.

The sisters, whose father was also an Australian Army Band musician, said performing in a band with each other on such a historical event was fantastic.

"We get along really well. It's like having a really good friend there," Tara said. "The crowd really enjoyed it and it's always wonderful to play when they're really getting into it."

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