BACKGROUND TO
AND
FEATURES OF
RURAL LANDSHARING
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

PAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL
REFERENCE PAPERS

Assembled by Peter Hamilton
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SECTION 1. Introduction

After the Aquarius Festival in Nimbin in 1973 many participants wanted to settle in the rural areas of northern NSW.

Up to 1980 the planning legislation in NSW permitted one dwelling house per 40ha (100 acres) on rural land. Confronted with this situation many new settlers chose to build illegally while campaigning for the planning legislation to be changed.

As a result of this campaign Paul Landa, Minister for Planning, gazetted 23 properties in the Lismore City Council area as legal Multiple Occupancies.

In 1988 Bob Carr, then Minister of Environment and Planning, introduced State Environmental Planning Policy-15 for Multiple Occupancy (MO) on Rural Land throughout NSW.

In 1994 there were a total of 251 MOs in 20 of the 67 Local Government areas of NSW. Most of these MO’s are located in the north coast of NSW.

Most MOs have between 9-12 dwellings per property. It is estimated that there are now well in excess of 7,000 MO residents in NSW with the number growing as
new communities are formed and as young people, often born on the community, starting their own families. Most residents are in the low end of the economic spectrum.

In 1994 Robert Webster, Minister of Environment and Planning repelled SEPP-15 on the ground that this Policy “no longer had a statewide application”.

At the 1995 State Election the ALP made an election promise that if elected to Government they would reinstate SEPP-15. This Policy was reinstated in April 1998 with the name changed to “Rural Landsharing Communities” (hereafter referred to as “Landsharing Intentional Communities” (LIC).

Pan Community Council (Pan Com) was formed in 1987 with the primary aim of promoting social interaction between communities; assisting in dealings with councils and government bodies; fostering economic initiatives, and supporting environmental repair and enhancement.

SUMMARY
This paper summarises some of the main features of Landsharing Intentional Communities (LIC). Section 2 brings together the results of several brainstorm sessions held at various Pan Com meetings. Section 3 consists of quotations selected from the submissions made by individual LIC residents during the period when the proposed replacement of SEPP-15 was on public exhibition early in 1997.

For data on the extent of homelessness and the housing crises with particular reference to the north coast of NSW see the companion Pan Community Council Position Paper Data on Homelessness and the Housing Crises prepared for the Big Picture Show, Bangalow, 1999.

For further details on intentional communities please contact Pan Community Council, P.O. Box 102, Nimbin, 2480.

Peter Hamilton,
June 1999.
SECTION 2: Features of Landsharing Intentional Communities

The following features of Rural Landsharing Communities are based on brainstorm sessions with various Pan Community Council members. These are listed in random order and loosely grouped under several headings.

LIC House Design, Construction, Cost and Maintenance

A Multiple Occupancy intentional community:-

- facilitates low cost housing
- assists self help housing construction
- enables home construction mortgage free
- reduces cost of land by communal sharing
- enables early occupation viz. gets “rapid” roof over ones head
- provides owner responsibility for house maintenance and replacement
- facilitates composting toilets and the like, in lieu of relying on a town sewerage system
- provides communal facilities and sharing of resources eg. community building, hall, shop, school building, retreat facilities, laundry, workshop etc.
- enables low cost self help housing, particularly for those on low incomes and with little or no access to capital funds
- contributes to the diversity of the national housing stock
- contributes to the diversity of family patterns and lifestyles
- assists those on low incomes to build or purchase a home
- facilitates creative owner-builder house designs
- invites a pride in achievement
- facilitates a strong and lasting bond between the builder and the building. (It is not infrequent for a single woman to build or extend their home)
- enables “rapid” housing particularly in times of crises or urgent need
- enables early occupation prior to completion of the house
- enables sharing of building equipment, tools, assistance and experience
- enables physical support for labour intensive construction
- enables use of low cost building materials eg. on site mud for brick, round poles for construction and sawdust for cement-sand-sawdust wall panels
- facilitates pride in constructing a house as “home”
- facilitates a “life cycling” use of the house eg. occupation by a single person > couple > couple with children > grand parents

Chinese proverb “When you stop building your house you die.”
Environmental Impact

Intentional Communal Living facilitates and encourages:-

- restoration of flora and fauna habitat and environmental enhancement
- weed eradication
- soil erosion control
- soil quality enrichment
- forest regeneration
- wood lots as a fuel and for building purposes

Reduction of Demand on Public Facilities and Services

Landsharing Intentional Communities reduce the demand on public facilities and services by:-

- the use of composting toilets in lieu of town sewerage
- the supply of own water in lieu of reticulated town water
- the use of solar energy (solar panels, wind and water generators) in lieu of town (fossil fuel) generated electricity
- reducing the demand per head on public roads due to shared transport and clustered settlement
- providing bushfire fighting facilities in remote locations
- dispersing wastewater facilities in lieu of loading town sewer facilities
- providing facilities for the aged in lieu of the need for retirement homes or special villages
- not requiring farming subsidies as is provided to the sugar and other industries
- facilitating viable quality rural settlement thereby reducing the “drift to the cities”
- contributing input into youth education such as pre schools, primary and secondary schools thereby reducing the demand on the state to provide additional facilities
- by engaging in home birthings thereby reducing the demand on hospital facilities
- by providing home burials thereby reducing the demand on public cemeteries
- facilitating communal health and healing in lieu of reliance on state health services and facilities.
- not calling on State funds for house maintenance costs or replacement of buildings
- by providing appropriate, accessible and affordable housing
Social and Economic Attributes

Some of the Social Attributes of Intentional Communal Living

Landsharing Intentional communal living:-

- facilitates home grown produce and orchards thereby reducing food costs
- facilitates income generating pursuits viz. self employment such as:-
  # pottery, woodwork, building and the like
  # cooking (e.g. tofu, jams, cheese etc.)
  # art work, needle work and the like
  # various business and commercial “venture” projects
- supports employment pursuits off the property e.g. academic and departmental welfare agencies, teaching etc.
- encourages and supports continuing adult education
- provides a support base for community work in the local, regional, national and global arenas
- facilitates and encourages a three generation family lifestyle
- supports personal growth and facilitates disputes resolution
- supports and enables members to balance their economic budget not so much by acquiring more income but by reducing the cost of living through sharing land and resources.
- enables and contributes to individuals relating to each other as an “extended family” (which for some includes adopting the use of kinship terms).

Sundry Features

- The existence of the former SEPP-15 has facilitated the self housing of well over 7,000 persons in NSW some of whom were on the Housing Commission waiting list.
- Supportive intentional communities may be contrasted with a “citizen isolate” lifestyle in highrise city units
- Many MO residents have served as Councillors in their local council area. (In the case of the Lismore City Council there have been a series of councilor from MO’s providing continuity of representation since the mid 70’s). In one Shire the Mayor is an MO resident. Currently there are two members of Parliament who are MO residents.
SECTION 3: Selected quotations by LIC residents

Selected quotations from the PAN COM file of individual submissions made by Multiple Occupancy residents in support of the reintroduction of SEPP-15. (The then term “Multiple Occupancy” is here retained in view of its currency of use at the time these submissions were made.)

“I am convinced that as a single parent with two children Multiple Occupancy offers me the optimal living situation for myself and my children.”

“I have in the past experienced first hand the poverty and stress associated with trying to maintain a decent standard of living whilst renting in the private housing market.”

“I receive a supporting parent’s benefit and am studying for a university degree. Rather than living in poverty and being a burden on the council, health and welfare systems I am able to maintain a relatively high standard of living whilst on a low income.”

“I participate in community gardening days which provides me with my fresh vegetable needs. Bulk buying of staples allows me to save on my food bill.”

“I appreciate the established infrastructure pool of garden and building tools etc which I could not possibly afford to buy myself at this stage of my life.”

“I am able to participate in sharing childcare and be part of a supportive physical, financial and social environment.”

“This community offers me support I would simply not otherwise have.”

“I have emotional support, companionship and stimulation.” (LIC single parent)

“My children live in a healthy, rich and safe environment as part of an extended family where the adults provide role models, and the other children provide close and lasting relationships.”
It is tremendously fulfilling to participate in the ongoing adventure of living in a community which aspires to ecological sustainability providing a stable and innovative way of life, offering many solutions to health, social, environmental and housing problems.”

“It is imperative in our democratic society that landsharing intentional communities be available for single parents as well as for young people and others.”

“MO offers families the best option for a fulfilling life with a good standard of living.”

“I, like others who live on Multiple Occupancies, are far less reliant on the full spectrum of social services because up to three quarters of our income is not going into rent.”

“I applaud the re-introduction of a planning policy intended to promote and encourage rural settlement based on communal ownership and trusteeship/stewardship principles.”

“This form of development is to be encouraged, promoted and facilitated for its environmental benefits and the considerable benefits to the wider community, to the economic and cultural life of rural villages and towns, to the opportunities it offers for low-cost housing and socially and environmentally useful activities for the young and unemployed.”

“The Multiple Occupancy policy has enabled us to be highly self sufficient in food production.”

“We see ourselves as an extended family which means there is a great deal of love and support for each other.”

“We reap many social benefits from living communally.”

“We see that because of prejudice, parochialism and misinformation local councils have consistently refused to enable MO in their planning instruments when they have had the sole responsibility to do so. It is for this reason that we believe it to be essential that there be a state-wide
policy ensuring Multiple Occupancy communities will be available for those people who want to live in a way that ‘protects the environment and does not create a demand for the unreasonable provision of public resources’.”

“There is no greater gift one can give to their child than that of personal safety in his/her environment. If my child is not with me, I have total trust that he is being cared for and looked after. He has the privilege of growing up with a very extended family which love and care for him.” (Multiple Occupancy sole parent).

“In 1984 when I applied successfully for a sole parents pension my income increased 300%. Yet I had secure housing, access to transport, a high quality diet and lifestyle, access to shared tools and equipment. I was learning new skills and the experience of others was freely available. I was meeting people from all over the world. I had access to childcare and the benefit of cultivating communally owned land. It provided the safest, healthiest most stimulating and high quality social lifestyle I could imagine for my child.”

“I note that the young adults and teenagers on my community and other local communities, lead rich and stimulating lives. They have a sense of continuity, and a strong interest in the future and are already thinking about how to provide housing for themselves.”

“I have observed that social problems which are magnified by poverty and involvement in crime, are not evident in stable local communities of 20-40 people.”

“I have lived in this community for fourteen years. I live with my seven year old son in a simple but comfortable home that I built eleven years ago.” (Sole parent Mother)

“It’s a joy to not have to lock my home and unlock my car when I go out.”

“Multiple Occupancies provide real support for single parents and an alternative to citizen loneliness and social isolation.”

“Multiple Occupancy has enabled me through sharing the cost of the land to build a council approved house without the burden of a mortgage.”

“Multiple Occupancy communities have a long record of creating and maintaining educational institutions such as pre-schools and primary schools.”
“Children, single parents and older people make a special contribution to our community and also receive many benefits, mainly in that they are never isolated or alienated here.”

“This community provides a high ‘quality of life’ that in my opinion has the potential in the long term, to be a model for achieving ecological sustainability.”

“Social surveys have revealed that Multiple Occupancy residents have an above average incidence of tertiary educational qualifications.”

“Many MO residents are involved in mature age educational courses.”

“I prefer to build and live in a modest house on shared land than have to wait over six years for Department of Housing rental accommodation.”

“Undivided ownership of the land has meant that we have been able to do a great deal of restoration on what was degraded land.”

The DUAP “RURAL SETTLEMENT” Manual provides “best practice” models for rural settlement.

• The Multiple Occupancy model is listed as one such “best practice” for rural settlement.