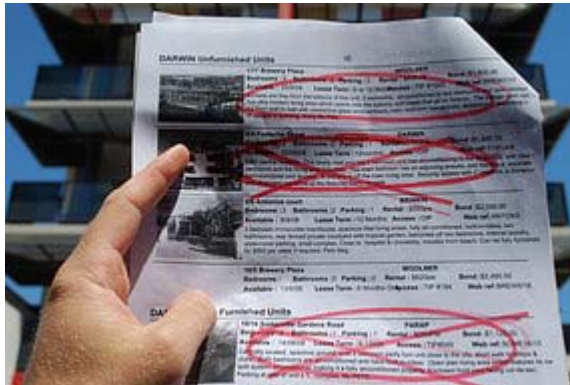


# Darwin locals feeling housing squeeze

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Darwin: Housing shortage and the slow release of land. (ABC News: Jack Kerr, file photo)

Plans to build a \$12 billion LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) plant in the Northern Territory to process gas from Western Australia, has Darwin in an economic buzz.

But it has also resulted in an accommodation crisis and some locals have been forced to live in sheds.

The resulting boom in the property market is making life difficult for those on low incomes and some Darwin families face accommodation stress not seen since Cyclone Tracy.

For Ruedina Harrison's family, it is a typical Darwin morning, the humidity is high and the mercury has slipped into the 30s.

Ruedina Harrison's flat out organising her five children all under seven.

The family is on Centrelink payments and is living in a shed in the industrial suburb of Berrimah. Ms Harrison says they were evicted from the house they were in three months ago.

"Well just the house that we were in was going up \$50 a week, which isn't much really but it is when you can't afford the price as it is," she said.

Ms Harrison says life in the shed in Berrimah can be tough, although she is glad they have a roof over their heads as the wet season approaches.

"Oh it's hard, we're all living in one bedroom," she said.

"I mean we were in a tent but it's a bit more better for the wet season now.

"But still, we've got no privacy for ourselves, the children are very unsettled."

## **Rent soaring**

Darwin residents pay the highest rent of any Australian capital, \$450 a week for a median house which is \$30 more than Sydney.

Toni Vine-Bromley, from the housing group NT Shelter, says this is linked to a housing shortage and the slow release of land.

"We see people sleeping in cars, we see people in caravan parks or in tents," she said.

"We've got vacancy rates that are at 0.3 per cent, which is the lowest we've ever, ever had. And we're not getting any additional public housing."

Fuelling the market was the announcement last month that the multi-billion dollar Inpex gas plant will be built in Darwin, generating thousands of jobs.

While Ruedina Harrison sees economic opportunities, she is worried about the housing market.

"There's going to be more people out on the streets because they can't afford, everyone's going to be asking higher rents," she said.

Construction of the Inpex plant will not start until 2010, but NT Shelter's Toni Vine-Bromley says measures are needed for the current shortage.

"Whether that's transitional housing, whether that's hostel type accommodation. But we also need the other end of the scale, we also need housing for large families," she said.

The Territory Government says it has the most expansive land release program in Australia.

Treasurer Delia Lawrie said in a statement that 7,000 new homes will come onto the market before the construction of the gas plant starts.

Those development are still months off, meaning little alternative to the shed for Ruedina Harrison.

*Based on a report by Sarah Hawke for AM on October 25.*