

National Housing Conference 2003

26-28 November

Adelaide Convention Centre

Allocating Social Housing

Terry Burke and Kath Hulse

Institute for Social Research

Swinburne University of Technology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material which forms the basis for this paper was produced with funding from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The authors gratefully acknowledge the support they have received from AHURI without which this work would not have been possible. The opinions in this paper reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Ltd, its Board or its funding organisations.

ALLOCATING SOCIAL HOUSING

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a near completed Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) project which is designed to document the state of practice in Australian social housing allocations systems and to provide ideas and data from Australia and overseas which may help facilitate reform where relevant. The final report, in addition to providing information on current practice and policy, will document the views of some 500 housing practitioners on the operation of the current system. At the time of writing, however, this data was not available. This paper therefore concentrates on outlining the objectives and forms of allocations systems and provides a framework for understanding why reform may be necessary and its possible nature. The aim is therefore to provide a context for informed debate about potential allocations reform.

The AHURI study gains its rationale from the recognition that allocations lie at the core of any social housing system. Allocations practice affects the circumstances and wellbeing of individual households, the composition and capacity of local communities, and the overall management and sustainability of social housing assets.

For the purpose of the research and the paper, an allocations system is defined as a multi-stage rationing process that includes:

- Defining eligibility: The conditions that set the broad parameters of who can be allocated housing;
- Assessing housing need: Ranking of eligible applicants according to some criteria;
- Managing the wait list: Defining administrative categories such as eligible properties (e.g. number of bedrooms for a given household type), geographical boundary of offer (degree of broad-banding) and number of offers;
- The actual dwelling allocation decision: What degree of discretion does a worker have in allocation?; and
- Reallocations: What are the criteria? What is the degree of new applicant accommodation to reapplications?

In the current systems (with variations, most notably in the community sector), people entering social housing have limited choices, particularly in relation to specific dwellings and locations. Essentially, Australian allocations systems are designed as large-scale management systems which attempt to, first, target to those in greatest need and, second, minimise 'inefficiencies' as measured by indicators such as the length of time a dwelling is vacant between tenants. Choices are therefore limited to very broad areas or stock types; in effect, the choice and flexibility offered to applicants must be balanced against the administrative needs of the system. In most public housing jurisdictions, only a limited number of offers are made (normally between one and three) and, if an offer is refused on other than prescribed grounds, the applicant risks losing their place in the queue.

The climate of change in social housing is relentless, with housing agencies both in Australia and internationally reviewing allocations and experimenting with various pilots in the hope of achieving better outcomes for clients and the social housing system. Current issues to occasion questioning of existing practices either in Australia or internationally are:

- A possible new role for allocations in helping to restore and sustain local communities;
- Ways in which greater client choice can be built into the system;
- Widening access to attract a broader range of applicants, particularly where there are dangers of excessive concentration of certain household types or where there is under-utilisation of stock;
- Providing localised allocations systems, rather than ‘one size fits all’;
- Sending signals about inappropriate social behaviour by increasing exclusions, that is, punitive rationing; and
- Linking of allocations to potential mutual obligation outcomes.

2. THE POLICY CONTEXT

Public and community housing exists in all advanced industrial countries because the private sector cannot provide housing that is affordable or appropriate for all households. All agencies providing social housing require some form of allocations system. The nature of an allocations framework is specific to the attributes of each country’s social housing system, including its size relative to the entire housing system. As *Table 1* shows, Australia has one of the smallest social housing systems, and this has implications for the nature and direction of allocations policy.

Table 1: Percentage of Social Housing in Total Housing Stock, Early to Mid-1990s

United States	5
Australia	6
New Zealand	6
Canada	6
Belgium	6
Ireland	14
Denmark	18
England	22
France	23
Germany	25
Netherlands	40
Sweden	40

Sources: OECD (1994, 1997, 1998); NZ Census Statistics (1996); Boelhouwer (1999: Table 1)

2.1 The Demand for Social Housing

In 2002, there were approximately 223000 households on official wait lists for public housing in Australia, compared to 99,000 in 1981. New South Wales had the largest absolute and relative number (over 93,000, equivalent to 75 per cent of stock) (see Table 2). More than half of the applicants nationally were single persons or sole parents.

Table 2: Social Housing Systems in Australia, by State, 2001-02

	Public housing stock	Households on public housing wait list	Applicants as percentage of available stock
NSW	127,754	96,045	75
Vic	64,656	45,517	70
Qld	50,157	26,797	53
SA	49,134	32,694	67
WA	32,551	14,340	44
Tas	12,656	2,772	22
ACT	11,154	3,,271	29
NT	6,062	1,854	31
Australia	354,124	223,290	63

Source: Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (2003)

These numbers represent an enormous increase in demand over the last two decades, despite a narrowing of eligibility and the fact that only a minority of potentially eligible households actually apply. The rationing task is thus one of fitting 223,000 applicants into approximately 40,000 vacancies (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/ State Service Provision 2003). These figures illustrate why various rationing methods are required to select those households who are to gain access to public housing.

In the community housing sector (i.e. crisis, transitional and long-term accommodation), there is a similar rationing task, as well as some others resulting from its smaller size and different client groups. Few applicants are on wait lists, with most entering through some form of priority access, i.e. where access is accelerated because of special needs. Across jurisdictions, the degree of integration between public and community housing allocations can vary markedly, ranging from effectively no integration, through common wait lists, to an integrated system (e.g. Victoria) where allocations into the public sector increasingly come from the community sector in the form of crisis or transitional housing, rather than from the conventional wait list. The latter system thus sees social housing as an exit point for emergency and medium-term accommodation, rather than for low income households in the private rental sector. This illustrates how the form of allocations policy depends to a large extent on what the government of the day sees as the role of social housing.

The 1990s were a period of review and experimentation as State Housing Authorities (SHAs) began to develop new strategies to meet the emerging needs. At the same time, community housing agencies were grappling with issues as to what system would best meet their requirements. The very low proportion of social housing in Australia makes the rationing or allocation task even more difficult, as there is a structural inability to ever meet the level of demand. This may mean that some initiatives in other countries will have only limited application here.

Whether private, public, or community based, any housing agency that has more demand for its services than vacancies available has to introduce some form of rationing system. Essentially these systems all boil down to two broad forms, either by price or by some administrative process.

3. RATIONING BY PRICE

In most situations where commodities are consumed, price is used as the mechanism to allocate them to the many consumers. Price determines, for example, which consumers can afford a car at all and what type of car they can afford (new or second-hand, model, size, features etc.). Private housing, whether owned or rented, is allocated according to the price mechanism, just like any other goods. Home buyers or private renters have only limited capacity to negotiate on price, except in times of dramatic economic downturns. They do, however, make trade-offs which reflect their inability to influence price. A buyer may compare a newer, larger house in an outer suburb with an older, smaller house in a more conveniently located area. They will choose a 'package' of housing benefits most suited to their need within their price range.

The major problem with allocation through price is that some people do not have the income to pay it. This may not be a problem for non-essential goods, but it is a problem if these are goods such as health, housing and education that are essential to people's wellbeing. If people cannot pay the market price for housing, then homelessness, overcrowding or squalid living conditions are very likely outcomes, and few civilised societies find this tolerable. The solution in most advanced industrial countries is various forms of subsidised social housing allocated on non-price criteria. Thus, administrative rationing mechanisms have been set up where rationing by price does not operate or is undesirable. These aim at distributing a scarce resource, such as public housing or hospital beds, according to need.

However, some form of price rationing in social housing is not out of the question, and the Industry Commission (1993) explored the possibility of some form of differential rents whereby tenants – or their family and friends – may have to pay a premium for certain locations or larger dwellings. We believe that it is time to revisit this notion. It is commonly used in social housing provision in Europe in recognition that certain locations provide differential economic and social advantage to households allocated there and it is inequitable, vis-à-vis other tenants, to not have that reflected in the rent. For example, a tenant in an amenity rich inner urban environment may have travel and other search costs that are \$30 a week less than another tenant in an amenity poor outer suburb. Should they both pay the same rent? A survey of 2,232 wait list clients conducted as part of this study found that 84 per cent were willing to pay more for a property of high quality and good condition, with 83 per cent willing to pay more for higher levels of security. At present there is no way that these preferences can be met, but allocations systems could be created which give an element of choice, e.g. public housing plus (where there was a rent premium, e.g. \$10 a week), public housing normal (most of the existing stock) and public housing economy (where there is a rent reduction because of poor location or quality). Applicants could apply for all or one of the three segments depending on their circumstances.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE RATIONING

Administrative rationing is fraught with difficulties for both suppliers and consumers, and comprises both formal and informal mechanisms. The discussion here is largely in terms of public housing because of its historical importance. However, the principles also apply to community housing.

4.1 Formal Rationing

Formal rationing is carried out by way of written policies and rules. For SHAs these are found in acts of parliament (such as legislation governing eligibility for social security payments) and statutory regulations, as well as those which give SHAs their charter to operate. They are also found in intergovernmental agreements such as the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement which sets out the broad parameters to be used in determining who gets rental

housing (Recital D). Policies may be provided either as a set of determinations by a commission or board or as a consolidated policy document. Usually there are procedural manuals, or at least a series of operational instructions, for workers involved in implementing policies. Acts, manuals, directives and the like provide the skeleton of a rationing system. The transparency of formal rationing is not as great in the community sector.

4.2 Informal Rationing

Informal rationing (for example, priority systems that allow discretion in interpretation) is widely used in public housing and is particularly prevalent in community housing. It can lead to sensitive and appropriate allocations at one extreme, and to abuse and corruption at the other. It is affected by the personal views of staff and by unresolved conflicts in the agency's objectives, for example, between meeting the greatest housing need, pressures for efficient property management, and community pressures to maintain viable neighbourhoods.

One of the issues of debate in implementing an allocations framework is the appropriate balance between formal and informal rationing. If a system allows only minimal discretion, housing managers and workers may be unable to adapt allocations to needs that are unusual or complex, but too much discretion can lead to potential abuse and corruption.

5. FRAMEWORK FOR ALLOCATIONS

There are three distinct stages in allocating social housing:

- Strategic planning: Determining broadly what are the agency's aims and objectives and then creating an allocations system that reflects these;
- Primary rationing: Assessing housing needs, that is, who gets into the system and in what order; and
- Secondary rationing: Allocating dwellings fairly, for example, who gets what in public housing.

5.1 Strategic Planning

A social housing agency – particularly a large SHA – can have many and varied roles. While today we tend to think largely in terms of affordability and appropriateness as the goals of housing agencies, their past history, and the importance of housing for individual and community wellbeing, suggest many others. Table 3 reviews a number of objectives which could provide strategic directions or drivers of change and which could structure the form and direction of an allocations system.

Table 3: Possible Objectives of Social Housing Agencies

Providing affordable housing
Providing appropriate housing
Facilitating client choice
Alleviating poverty
Administrative ease
Providing crisis accommodation
Maximising the efficient use of stock
Facilitating employment, education and health outcomes
Ensuring there is housing in certain locations
Addressing areas of low demand
Building local community
Maintaining housing quality
Meeting diverse cultural needs
Empowering tenants
Potentially resolving homelessness
Potentially helping those in greatest need
Facilitating social mix
Overcoming discrimination
Creating the potential for sustainable communities
Sustaining tenancies through support

A number of these might be simultaneous objectives, while some could actually be conflicting. This is the dilemma in designing an allocations system. It may be expected to meet diverse goals, but cannot do so, and therefore will be criticised by tenants, workers and external stakeholders who may not appreciate the fundamental problems. For example: Is targeting consistent with sustainable communities? Is client choice consistent with social mix or with addressing the problems of areas of low demand? Can cultural needs be met at the same time as achieving efficient use of stock? Can an agency simultaneously provide crisis accommodation and facilitate a long-term exit point to affordable housing?

There is not the space to go through each of these possible objectives in detail, but it is important to mention some of the threads of change that may prompt new directions in allocation. These include:

- The re-emergence of community or estate renewal as an objective. Renewal projects recognise that a combination of property deterioration and negative social behaviours, vandalism harassment, crime and withdrawal from the community have created problem estates or areas. Some of the problems have been associated with over-concentrations of particular client groups, e.g. sole parents, unemployed and high needs clients, which in turn is a function of allocations policy. In the interests of the sustainability of renewed estates, this would suggest a local area allocations policy which recognises their specific qualities. Several SHAs are piloting local area variations around community renewal at present;
- The growing diversity of tenants and their needs, and the problems of reconciling these needs with ‘one size fits all’ housing practices. When the social housing stock was

predominantly detached housing and virtually all applicants were low income families who wanted a detached house, then matching stock with client needs was a relatively simple process. Greater diversity of tenants with many different needs means that reliance on administrative allocations process is much more complex. One solution is to provide greater ability of applicants to choose their dwellings;

- The recognition of client choice as a potential issue. This concept largely grew out of the new managerialism of the 1990s where commercial principles from the private sector were applied to social housing management. A greater emphasis on clients was one focus of such reform and gave rise to questions of how client choice could be approximated in social housing management. The first pilots of a client choice model within the framework of what is essentially a bureaucratic rationing system were set up in the Netherlands in the 1990s and a number of agencies around the world now have such models. We have not yet gone in that direction in Australia and we can therefore ask, why not?;
- The growing diversity of social housing areas or estates in terms of demand and their relationship to the wider housing market. The restructuring of the Australian economy and the unevenness of market processes means greater variation in local housing markets in terms of demand for stock. Social housing in areas of decreasing demand have a problem of high vacancies, while other areas (the majority) are experiencing intense demand and wait lists of years. Like the diversity of tenants' needs, this suggests the desirability of more tailored local allocations programs;
- The growth of homelessness, and the need to provide exit points from crisis and transitional accommodation in order to prevent a process of recycled homelessness. This in turn begs questions, as highlighted most strongly by the Victorian experience, as to the degree to which social housing should be an exit point for the homeless or a more general housing affordability system. This strategic planning decision will shape every stage of the allocations system from point of eligibility through property allocations to policy on re-allocations;
- Administering allocations systems is resources intensive, with considerable staff time going into issues such as determining eligibility, monitoring the wait list, matching people to properties and reallocating tenants who want transfers. If there are multiple providers, e.g. public and community agencies, there will be duplication of the tasks across multiple allocations systems. This raises questions about ways of changing allocations to reduce costs, e.g. streamlining the eligibility process, removing redundant applications from the list, and common housing registers shared across agencies; and
- The growing acceptance of notions of mutual obligation, for example, perhaps attaching the allocation of a social housing dwelling (for certain tenants) to a requirement that they attend an educational program or involve themselves in some form of tenant participation. The latter, while not seen as a mutual obligation process, has been practiced in the rental cooperative housing sector for years.

5.2 The Rationing Process

Table 4 reviews the primary rationing and secondary rationing stages in terms of both formal and informal rationing processes. Each of these requires a policy decision by a housing agency. Thus, primary rationing requires policy decisions about who is eligible, whether some applicants should be given priority over others, how the wait list is to be managed, and the relationship of transfers to allocations. Each of these stages could be part of any allocations reform. Secondary rationing requires another set of policy decisions.

Table 4: Stages of the Rationing Process

	Formal rationing	Informal rationing
Primary rationing (assessing need)	Eligibility criteria Ranking applications according to need Wait list management Transfer eligibility criteria	Information/assessment of eligibility Information on needs assessment Diversion to another housing agency Segmentation of wait list Treatment of changes to circumstances Attitudes to rehousing ex-tenants Treatment of transfer applications
Secondary rationing (matching households)	Guidelines on type of housing for which households are eligible Local guidelines for allocation of households to specific projects or estates	Information to inform customer choice Selection of customers for less desirable stock Assumptions re tenant requirements Treatment of offers and refusals

6. ASSESSING HOUSING NEED: PRIMARY RATIONING

In terms of primary rationing, all countries with bureaucratically administered housing systems have to make a choice of basic models. One is broad or universal access with no or minimal eligibility criteria (a minimum age limit and residency may be the only criteria), where all individuals and households, or those in a particular local government area, can apply. A wait list and time are the major rationing methods. These models tend to operate in societies which have a ‘tenure neutral’ policy strategy and large social housing systems, e.g. Sweden and the Netherlands (Boelhouwer 1992, 1999; Harloe 1994; McCrone and Stephens 1995; Oxley and Smith 1996).¹ The alternative is some form of targeted allocations process where rationing criteria are determined by the perceived need of the housing system and, more generally, the employment and income support system. Thus it can be wider or narrower in its targeting, depending on objectives. In the first three to four decades of social housing, Australia had a system which was not tightly targeted in terms of income (as it was aimed at working families) but was targeted to exclude households that it was believed could not sustain tenancies – precisely the groups that are targeted for inclusion today. This system was designed to assist with employment and family cohesion objectives, as much as affordability (Hayward 1996). Like the postwar United States and Canadian systems, the Australian allocations system has since tended to become a targeted welfare system.

If a system is to be targeted in some way, a primary step for housing agencies is to define the pool of households who can potentially access housing. They are making administrative decisions to limit their market. All agencies have statements of eligibility. The main components of eligibility testing are income, assets, residency and minimum age. These seem straightforward. There are, however, some interesting judgements behind these criteria, and areas where discretion comes into play in applying them.

¹ ‘Tenure neutral’ countries tend to have housing assistance in the form of income or housing supplements that can be spent in any tenure.

6.1 Eligibility Criteria and Use of the Wait List

Housing agencies may check eligibility at the time of application, regularly while households wait, prior to housing being allocated, or sometimes at each of these stages. This is time consuming for both agencies and applicants, and may create an atmosphere of antagonism. In focus group discussions conducted as part of this project, several public housing workers suggested that the time involved in checking eligibility at the time of application was unnecessary for those who were to go on the general wait list as in most regions their circumstances were likely to have changed by the time they were allocated a property. One solution suggested was for SHAs to have an ‘expression of interest’ wait list where people nominated based on the existing eligibility criteria but with no assessment process. These applications were taken on face value until they reached a certain point, e.g. six months or a year from allocation of a property, and at that stage were then checked and interviewed for eligibility. They would then go on to what was the effective wait list for actual allocation.

7. ASSESSING HOUSING NEED: RANKING APPLICATIONS

Despite the difficulties discussed above, devising and applying eligibility criteria in order to establish a wait list is straightforward compared to assessing the relative need of eligible households to determine the order in which they will be offered housing. Table 5 shows the main strategies by which public and community housing agencies order who gets housed, and a summary of the characteristics and benefits and costs of each. Some are obviously more appropriate than others in a particular context, e.g. an emergency housing service, by definition, requires a priority or merit system, whereas SHAs with much more stock and broader objectives may find a date order system more appropriate. One of the major policy debates of the last decade has been the relative emphasis given to wait list allocations versus priority, with the trend being towards greater emphasis on priority.

Details of the issues associated with the systems summarised in Table 5 are outlined in the full AHURI paper and are not reproduced here. However, the paper will comment on the choice based system of advertising, as this is the one for which there is yet no practice within Australia.

Table 5: Assessing Housing Need: Alternative Strategies for Ranking Applications

Strategy	Characteristics	Benefits	Costs
Merit	Each application is unique and must be considered on its merits Some applicants may never be housed	Can be most sensitive to individual household's need May be of value for small-scale projects	Scope for bias and value judgements No clear guidelines and lack of accountability Cannot deal with high volume applications
Date order	'First come, first served' Everyone who is eligible will be housed	Simple and least costly Most predictable for consumers Can estimate waiting time	Needs not assessed at time of application No account taken of difference in need or urgency of need Segmentation of wait lists dilutes date order
Date order plus priority	Main system is 'first come, first served' Some have needs assessed at time of application and may go to the top of the list Everyone who is eligible will be housed	Flexibility to deal with urgent need Maintains a predictable system for most consumers	Only some applicants have needs assessed at time of application Priority guidelines often general and hard to interpret Scope for bias and value judgements in interpretation of priority guidelines Constant pressure on priority access system
Priority	Relative needs of all applicants assessed at time of application Some applicants may never be housed	Attempts to rank all needs Needs can be reassessed at any time	May be complex and hard to understand Subjectivity in determining priority
Lottery	Everybody to have equal chance and no special needs	Simple to administer All applicants have equal chance	No ability to take into account housing needs
Targets	Some allocation to each target group	Agency control over priorities	Less sensitive to individual household need
Persistence and luck	Requires contacting at regular intervals in the hope a vacancy occurs at the point of contact	Administratively simple Rewards those whose actions (persistence) suggest greatest need	'Luck of the draw' determines who gets allocated
Advertising and ranking by some criteria	Vacant properties are advertised, and applicants who respond are chosen according to designated criteria (the Delft system)	Transparent Provides element of consumer choice Property matches tenant's needs Administratively simple Works best with high number of vacancies	By itself, would mean no priority allocation Requires criteria for choosing among applicants Benefits those who have house-hunting skills

7.1 Advertising: The Choice Model

This is known as the Delft system, after the city where it was introduced in 1990. Now used by one-third of municipal housing agencies in the Netherlands, the system is one where agencies advertise vacant properties to those who have registered for a property in that local government area. The property can be inspected and only those interested in that particular property apply for it. Where there are multiple applicants, some criteria are needed to choose between them. In the Netherlands, selection is often by age, with the oldest applicant receiving preference. The system may be segmented, with some properties advertised as available for transfer only, others for new tenants. It typically does not operate alone, but in parallel with some form of priority system. In some municipalities, private landlords add their listings, which can also be inspected by those registered for social housing. This choice is facilitated by a housing assistance scheme which is portable across sectors. The components of the Delft model are:

- Newly vacant properties are advertised in the local press;
- Eligibility conditions are established for each property, e.g. aged applicants preferred;
- Advertised properties are 'labelled' to signal these eligibility conditions;
- In seeking a property, the onus is on the applicants, not on the housing agency;
- House hunters apply for a specific advertised property;
- Applicants view the property, and are prioritised according to eligibility conditions plus factors such as length of time on wait list; and
- Allocations outcomes are published.

Not only is the property advertised, but the newspapers also report (after some weeks) on the address of the property that has been allocated, the type, the number of bedrooms, the birth date of the person allocated the property, and the total number of applicants. Kullberg (1997) has done several evaluations of the scheme. While there were some problems, the general view is that it works much better than the former system, which was a variation on our wait list plus priority system. Perhaps the most interesting element is its potential to bring an element of client choice to a bureaucratic system. However, both in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom where there are also a number of agencies using the system, it needs to be acknowledged that they operate where the social housing stock is much larger than in Australia and where demand is less intense. The areas piloting these schemes in the United Kingdom also appear to have high rates of 'vacants', suggesting they may be best used in areas of relatively low demand, perhaps, in the Australian context, certain regional locations.

7.2 Common or Shared Wait Lists

Over their twenty or so years of parallel housing management, the Australian public and community sectors have retained separate wait lists and allocations systems. Canada has recently moved to a common wait list for both sectors. In 2000 New South Wales made steps towards a common system for the public sector and the housing associations, with the latter able to draw their clients when needed from the SHA's area wait list. An area office might provide the top six on the list, and the association chooses the tenant most appropriate to its needs.

The common wait list has developed because the long-term public and community sectors have become much more closely aligned in their roles and therefore in the pool of clients they draw from. SHAs originally catered largely for low income families requiring few support needs, while the community sector, as it developed, focused on special needs groups. Greater targeting by the SHAs through changes to eligibility and allocations has meant that they now house broadly the same client groups. Computerised systems also enable agencies to share client information more easily. Why not then have the same wait list and save on administrative costs, particularly in the community sector?

Like any policy or administrative change, the idea has both advantages and disadvantages. For the community sector it means reduced costs, as they do not need their own eligibility criteria and wait list database. However, it also involves some loss of autonomy, including to some extent the 'community' rationale for their existence. For the SHA it means access to more housing and eliminates any fears of community housing creaming off the easier clients, leaving public housing to manage the more difficult ones.

8 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a growing literature on allocations systems, largely because this is a vexed issue for many housing agencies internationally and because there is considerable questioning, review and piloting of new methods. The literature is broadly of two types: policy reports and evaluations by agencies as they conduct their own reviews or change the nature of their allocations system; and research reports which analyse, critically evaluate or raise conceptual issues. Both forms of literature have been used to inform the research undertaken for this study. The following section offers a very brief overview of the international literature and what it might suggest for reform within Australia:

- There is a sea change of thought in terms of needs based allocations systems. The general view is that they have significant social disadvantages (notably in worsening the problem of hard to let and low demand areas), are cumbersome to administer and – from a client's perspective – are not very transparent;
- There is greater recognition of locality specific allocation policies, ranging from quotas on certain household types, to giving preference to local people or those who are employed, to punitive rationing for those with any record of anti-social behaviour;
- There is growing experimentation with client choice models, but in a way which complements administrative systems. Even these require an administrative element as some criteria have to be used to select between multiple applicants for a property;
- Reallocations are given much greater policy attention in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the countries undertaking major allocative reform, being seen as a way of meeting client needs, optimising stock use and addressing issues of sustainable communities;
- In many respects, despite the language of client choice, the systems – and Australia is no different – have become more coercive in the sense of greater restrictiveness of numbers of offer;
- The allocations practices and procedures of public housing agencies are much more researched and understood than those of the community sector;
- Anti-social behaviour is given more attention as a management issue internationally, with many agencies in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands restricting access to those considered responsible;

- Common wait lists and assessment tools are prominent in reforms in Canada and the United Kingdom, while there have been a number of pilots linking allocations with mutual obligation in the United States, but the latter has received little attention elsewhere; and
- Many of the problems of the social housing system are intractable, as they derive from structural processes and funding constraints in the wider society, and no amount of allocations reform will resolve them.

9. CONCLUSION

Allocations systems are at the heart of social housing management and administrative practice. Major reforms occurred in the 1990s, with greater targeting as the main thrust. There are no constants in social housing, however, and new issues and new problems are creating a context for further allocation reforms. This paper has provided a framework to understand this context and what it might mean by way of reform. How much reform is possible within a small and highly pressured system is debatable.

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bacon, N. 2001 'Model choice', *Roof*, Jan./Feb.
- Bisset, H. 2001 *Social Housing: Building a New Foundation*, Department of Human Services, Melbourne
- Blandy, S. and Parsons, D. 2001 Housing a divided city, paper presented to 'Managing Housing and Social Change' Conference, City University of Hong Kong, 16-18 April
- Boelhouwer, P. 1992 *Housing Systems in Europe*, Delft University Press, Delft
- 1999 'International comparison of social housing management in western Europe', *Netherlands Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, vol. 14, no. 3
- Bolan, P. 1987 *Alternatives in Decentralised Housing Management*, Working Paper no. 68, School for Advanced Urban Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol
- Borland, J., Gregory, B. and Sheehan, P. (eds) 2001 *Work Rich, Work Poor: Inequality and Economic Change in Australia*, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne
- Chartered Institute of Housing 2001 *Sustainable Lettings*, Good Practice Briefing no. 20 <<http://www.cih.org/>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Clapham, D. and Kintrea, K. 1984 'Allocation system and housing choice', *Urban Studies*, vol. 21
- 1986a 'Rationing, choice and constraint: The allocation of public housing in Glasgow', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 15, no. 1
- 1986b 'Housing choice and search strategy', *Environment and Planning*, vol. 18
- 1991 'Housing allocation and the role of the public rented sector', in Donnison, D. and MacLennan, D. (eds) *The Housing Service of the Future*, Longman, Harlow, UK
- Cole, I., Iqbal, B., Slocombe, L. and Trott, T. 2001 *Social Engineering or Consumer Choice?: Rethinking Housing Allocations*, published by the Chartered Institute of Housing for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation <<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=371>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975 *Poverty in Australia: First Main Report*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra
- Cope, H. 2000 *Flexible Allocations Policies and Local Letting Schemes*, National Housing Federation, London

- Department of Family and Community Services 2002 *Housing Assistance Act 1996: Annual Report 1998-99* <<http://www.facs.gov.au>> (last accessed 18 June 2002)
- Harloe, M. 1994 *The People's Home? Social Rented Housing in Europe and America*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Hayward, D. 1996 'The reluctant landlords: A history of public housing in Australia', *Urban Policy and Research*, vol. 14, no. 1
- Henderson, J. and Karn, V. 1984 'Race, class and the allocation of state housing in Britain', vol. 21
- 1987 *Race, Class and State Housing: Inequality and the Allocation of State Housing in Britain*, Gower, London
- Hitselberger, K. 1996 'Within reach: Pinellas village gives new hope to single parents', *Units*, vol. 20, no. 8
- Housing New Zealand 2002 *Social Allocations System* (copy received via email)
- Hulse, K. 2002 *Demand Subsidies for Private Renters: A Comparative Review*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne
- Industry Commission 1993 *Public Housing*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2001 'New approaches to social housing allocation', *Findings* <<http://www.jrf.org.uk>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Kearns, A. and Malcolm, J. 1994 *Housing Management Among Scottish Housing Associations* Scottish Homes Glasgow
- Kullberg, J. 1997 'From wait lists to adverts: The allocation of social rental dwellings in the Netherlands', *Housing Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3
- Lidstone, P. 1994 'Rationing housing to the homeless applicant', *Housing Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4
- London Housing Unit 1999a 'Allocations: Reconciling needs and sustainability', *London Housing News* <<http://www.lhu.org.uk/>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 1999b *Allocations for Successful Communities* <<http://www.lhu.org.uk/>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- McCrone, G. and Stephens, M. 1995 *Housing Policy in Britain and Europe*, UCL Press, London
- National Housing Strategy 1991 *The Affordability of Australian Housing*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra
- OECD 1994 *Occasional Paper*, no. 14, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris
- 1997 *Social Statistics*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris
- 1998 *Occasional Paper*, no. 33, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris
- Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2000a *Guide to Social Housing Reform* <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/business/SHT/report_ext-e.pdf> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 2000b *Coordinated Access to Social Housing* <<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/inthnews/backgrnd/20001012-6e.asp>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Oxley, M. and Smith, J. 1996 *Housing Policy and Rented Housing in Europe*, E. & F. Spon, London
- Pahl, R. 1975 *Whose City?*, Penguin, London
- Pawson, H. n.d. *Pilots Cleared for Take-Off* <<http://www.housit.org.uk/articles/pilotext.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)

- Pawson, H. and Mullins, D. 2003 *Changing Places: Housing Association Policy and Practice on Nominations and Lettings*, Policy, London
- Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000 *Final Report: Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra
- Rex, J. and Moore, R. 1967 *Race, Community and Conflict*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea 1998 *Housing Allocation Scheme*
<<http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/Housing/Movinghere/has.pdf>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Smith, R. 2000 'Allocating social housing: Trends, proposals and prospects', in Wilcox, S. (ed.) *Housing Finance Review 2000/2001*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 2003 *Report on Government Services 2003*, AusInfo, Canberra < <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/2003/index.html> >
- UK Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions 1997 'Local authority housing allocations: Systems, policies and procedures', *Housing Research Summary*, no. 74 <<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/hrs/hrs074.htm>>
- 2000a 'LA policy & practice on allocations, transfers and homelessness', *Housing Research Summary*, no. 139 <<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/hrs/hrs139.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 2000b 'Statutory homelessness and the allocation of local authority housing', *Housing Factsheet*, no. 4 <<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/factsheet.homeless/index.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 2001a 'Promoting choice through lettings in social housing', *Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All: The Way Forward for Housing*
<<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/statement/main/index.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 2001b 'Housing and housing policy', *The Housing Policy Statement and The Housing Green Paper* <<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/index18.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- 2002 *Pilot Scheme to Test Choice Based Housing Lettings Approaches*
<<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/cbaselet/index.htm>> (last accessed 7 June 2002)
- Victorian Office of Housing 2001 *Review of Public Housing Eligibility*, Melbourne
- Yu, S. M. 2001 Housing and social integration in Singapore, paper presented to 'Managing Housing and Social Change' Conference, City University of Hong Kong, 16-18 April