

Block being sold out to 'little rich white kids', warns Munro after push for a massive increase in student housing



The AHC blamed a significant increase in the commercial aspects for the redevelopment of The Block in Redfern on a lack of alternative funding. (AP Photo/John Pryke)

The Federal Government has disputed the Aboriginal Housing Company's claims that a \$5 million grant has stalled, after the AHC blamed funding delays as the reason for a major increase in the size of the Pemulwuy project.

By

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The Federal Government has rejected claims by the Aboriginal Housing Company that funding for the Pemulwuy project in Sydney has stalled, saying the Aboriginal Housing Company has not attempted to access \$5 million in funding allocated to the project.

Earlier this week the AHC blamed a significant increase in the commercial aspects for the redevelopment of The Block in Redfern on a lack of alternative funding, saying it had to ensure the project was commercially viable for it to proceed.

Activist and Wiradjuri Elder Jenny Munro who started the tent embassy at The Block in 2015 and led the fight to guarantee Aboriginal housing would remain as part of the redevelopment of The Block has criticised the push for more student housing.

"I think it just demonstrates more greed," she told NITV News.

"There's a real problem with the mix of social housing and students – little rich kids, whether they're little rich white kids, or rich overseas kids they're going to outnumber the black community."

Last month it emerged the AHC applied to the NSW Department of Planning to massively increase the size of the development from 6 to 16 stories with housing for 500 students, up from 150, without any increase in new social or Aboriginal Housing which remains at 62 homes.

The AHC has blamed a lack of government funding as a key reason for the dramatic increase in the scope of the development.

However, NITV News has been told by the office of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, that the AHC has not attempted to access a \$5 million grant offered by the Government last year to cover the cost of 62 affordable homes.

"The Minister has not received any requests from the AHC to progress this grant, but remains committed to working with all stakeholders on this project," the spokesman said.



The \$5 million was put on the table to end a standoff between Indigenous activists and the AHC over the future of the development, with activists claiming the AHC had sold out the local community to increase profits, something the AHC has strongly denied.

AHC Chairperson Alisi Tutuila said the organisation had been in regularly contact with the government in relation to the \$5 million grant.

“At our last meeting with the Minister’s advisor late last year, the Minister’s office presented the terms of the grant to the AHC. However, the AHC proposed for grant to be released once we have obtained certificate of occupation on completion of the project, which minimises the risk on the Government,” she said in a statement to NITV News.

“At this stage, the terms of the proposed government grant have not yet been agreed to.”

In a release put out about a community meeting to be held tomorrow Ms TuiTuila said: “We are committed to providing the community with a clear understanding of the project and why the model we have proposed enables the AHC to continue to deliver on its core business objective of delivering affordable housing to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community,” she said.

Ms Munro would not be drawn on whether the tent embassy would return to The Block in response to the increased student accommodation.

“We’ll just see what happens at the meeting tomorrow night, and see what the response is from the floor.

The community meeting will be held tomorrow night at The Block from 7pm at the Redfern Community Centre.