

22 March 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of Protectors of Public Lands Victoria Inc., a coalition of 80 environment, heritage and community organisations dedicated "to keeping public lands in public hands" and to protecting and conserving environmental and heritage sites of significance.

Our organisation would like to make a statement on the "Options Paper on Foreign Ownership of Residential Real Estate" but realise that it is a late. I hope you can accept the submission.

Here it is:

1. The proposed penalties are unlikely to deter illegal purchases of residential real estate by foreigners. The penalties should be much greater.
2. The proposed improvement in the capability in Treasury to monitor, measure and enforce foreign ownership of real estate should be introduced as soon as possible.
3. It is unlikely that foreign investment in residential real estate in Melbourne has significantly increased the stock of housing.
4. From observation and from newspaper reports we know that significant purchases of residential real estate are actually not occupied or not occupied on a regular basis. This can be observed in Boroondara by the overgrown and neglected gardens of houses in street after street. (Sometimes these houses are occupied temporarily by overseas students.)
5. Much of the stock of housing that is being redeveloped is being replaced by quite hideous residences out of character with the area. In Boroondara the overseas nationals who are the purchasers of houses favour when they rebuild - after knocking down the original house - either the massive look-alike French Provincial Chateau style or a Greek colonnaded portico/entrance on a concrete block. (The front entrances are not generally used as the houses have a basement car park and a lift/lifts to the upper storeys.) The new houses are built boundary to boundary of the block of land and trees are removed often with the consequence of flooding and silting up of entrances and the street. Given the extensive tree removal this real estate development is causing a significant blow out of green houses gases and increase of heat island effect in suburbs plus removal of wildlife corridors. I am attempting to make a photographic record of these mansions.
6. Note the house in Kew in which former Prime Minister, the late Gough Whitlam was born, has been purchased by a foreigner who is seeking to have the house demolished (Note that foreigners are otherwise prohibited from purchasing existing residences unless they are deemed uninhabitable). Our group drew public and media to the site until then then Victorian Planning Minister Matthew Guy took out an injunction to stop the work. Boroondara Council applied to have the place included on the State Heritage Register.

I would be grateful if you could accept our statement.

Yours faithfully

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