



Murihiku Southland Housing Forum Summaries

Held 12 June 2025

Compiled from speaker presentations across three themed sessions.

These summaries reflect the key insights, challenges, and opportunities raised by speakers during the forum, using their own words where possible. Key points are listed after each summary to support practical takeaways.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Bobbi Brown – Strategy Lead, Great South

Bobbi provided an overview of the day's programme, describing the sessions as moving 'beyond the quarter acre dream' into new housing realities. She shared historic photos of Southland homes to remind attendees that housing has always changed with society. She noted that Southland has higher home ownership and less housing diversity than the national average — mostly three-bedroom homes, bigger houses, and fewer people in them. While Southland is still more affordable than the national average, house prices and rents are rising faster than local incomes, creating new challenges for locals.

Key Points

- Southland has less housing diversity and rising housing stress
- Historic housing expectations are changing rapidly
- Need for new models and responses to affordability





Session 1

Beyond the Quarter-acre
Housing Dream

Affordable Housing Models – New Zealand & Australia

Kerrie Young, Regional Director – South Canterbury/Otago/Southland, Kāinga Ora.

Kerrie opened by acknowledging her connection to Southland, her mokopuna, and her choice to live and work here. Speaking candidly and personally, she centred her talk on housing stress — defining it simply: if you're spending more than 30% of your income on housing, you're in it. She noted that this includes many in the room, including herself. Kerrie challenged attendees to think beyond the default three-bedroom house model, especially in the context of an ageing population and growing diversity of need. She highlighted the mismatch between housing stock and household size, particularly for older people, people with disabilities, and those who need live-in support.

Her key message was that housing solutions must be community planning, not just urban design — emphasising that communities are made up of people, not just zones.

She advocated for a broader mix of housing types: smaller, accessible homes; co-located services; housing for carers; and developments that support independence and connection. Kerrie also connected housing to economic development, arguing that giving people the opportunity to work and earn a living is part of the housing solution — because affordability is about more than just rent. Internationally and locally, she said, the most successful models are those that treat housing and economic opportunity as linked, not siloed.

She encouraged the audience to stop designing just for the market, and instead ask: “Who are we designing for?” Her message was hopeful but urgent — we can do better if we start thinking differently.

Key Points

- Housing stress = spending more than 30% of income on housing — many are affected
- There's a mismatch between housing stock and what people actually need
- Design for people: ageing populations, carers, people with disabilities, and workers
- Smaller, accessible homes close to services are essential
- Community planning should be people-centred, not just zone-based
- Housing and economic development are interconnected — jobs and homes go together
- Ask who we're designing for — and stop assuming the answer is always “a family of four”

In her more than 30 years' experience in Australia and New Zealand as a development advisor and Senior Market economist, Kerrie has provided property market advisory services in development and construction, property market research and forecasting and master planning from a social planning perspective. She has particular expertise in strategic planning in high growth regions, economic development and in social and affordable housing models.



Homes for our Seniors

Diane Turner, Director of the Office for Seniors, Ministry of Social Development

Diane outlined the growing vulnerability of older New Zealanders — especially renters, women, and Māori and Pasifika — and the inadequacy of housing stock to meet their needs. She highlighted declining council housing numbers,

the lack of stable rentals, and the mental health impact of insecure housing. Solutions she pointed to included community housing providers, Abbeyfield models, co-housing, and the home share pilot.

Key Points

- Older people face increasing rental vulnerability
- Ageing in place requires safe, warm, accessible homes
- Diverse models like co-housing and Abbeyfield are part of the solution
- We must avoid one-size-fits-all approaches

Diane has been the Director of the Office of Seniors (Te Tari Kaumātua) since October 2016. Diane and her team's role is to support the Minister for Seniors to advocate for the issues and interests of older people. As well as leading the implementation of the national strategy for our ageing population, Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua, the Office for Seniors is the primary advisor to the Government on the rights and issues of older people.



Highs & Lows of finding Housing Solutions for Fiordland

Sarah Greaney, Te Anau Business Owner and Councillor for Southland District Council

Sarah Greaney shared two contrasting case studies from Te Anau: the successful development of Murchison Villas, a retirement housing project, and a worker accommodation project that ultimately did not proceed. Both projects offered valuable lessons about what it takes — and what can go wrong — when trying to develop community-led housing in a rural setting.

For the Murchison Villas, Sarah explained how a strong governance structure and local buy-in were key. The land was transferred from Southland District Council for \$1, and funding came from a carefully structured loan from Community Trust South. The trust also established a separate company to handle development, since the charitable status wasn't possible for a trust acting as a developer. Community preference shaped the model: leasehold was rejected in favour of freehold unit titles, with covenants to ensure occupancy and long-term community living (e.g., no short-

term rentals, a minimum 9-month occupancy per year, and an age threshold of 60+). Legal and financial flexibility allowed residents to move in before titles were issued, helping to cashflow the build. Over time, the units became fully self-managing.

In contrast, the worker accommodation project failed to progress, despite early interest. Designed in partnership with Fiordland Business Association and Genius Homes, it proposed a leasehold village of 30 relocatable units for seasonal workers. However, community discomfort with leasehold tenure, lack of investor interest, and concerns about what would happen after the 20-year term led to its indefinite pause. Sarah reflected that requiring all units to be built at once may have been a misstep — a staged approach might have drawn more support. Despite the outcome, the project raised awareness about housing needs and inspired others locally to explore affordable build options.

Key Points

- Community preference for freehold ownership is strong — leasehold models face resistance
- Legal structures matter — trusts acting as developers may need separate companies
- Upfront occupancy flexibility can help with cashflow
- Investor support is often required for projects to allow the community to visualise what they are getting.
- Retirement housing needs good planning, community leadership, and adaptable models
- Worker accommodation requires clarity around tenure, management, and long-term use
- Failed projects still have value — they generate discussion, surface barriers, and inspire new ideas

Sarah was elected to the Te Anau Community Board where she served 3 terms and in 2022 to the Southland District Council. Sarah became involved in the Fiordland Retirement Housing project which saw the successful building of 23 retirement housing units in Te Anau. This unique project was supported by Southland District Council and a special group of trustees who managed the project.



Living in a Tiny Home

Dr Ella Lawton, Tiny Home Owner

Ella shared her experience building a tiny home as a low-cost, flexible housing solution. Ella emphasised the importance of individuals being in control of how and where they want to live as fundamental to their wellbeing. With a budget of \$100,000 and a short four-month timeline, she partnered with a small eco-building company and took a hands-on approach — relocating to Motueka to work alongside the team during construction. The result was a 30m², two-level tiny house built on a trailer, using natural materials, reclaimed timber, and low-toxicity finishes. It was designed to be fully off-grid, running on 12V and 24V solar power with space heating from a small wood burner.

The layout prioritised adaptability, with flexible living spaces and built-in storage, while meeting her core goals of simplicity, sustainability, and affordability. Although originally designed for mobility, the home was only moved twice.

Ella noted that the trailer-based build presented weight and design trade-offs and, in hindsight, a relocatable but non-wheeled foundation may have been more practical.

She emphasised the importance of good planning, a clear vision, and builder collaboration — particularly in ensuring compliance, insulation, and ventilation suited to New Zealand's conditions. The tiny home allowed her to re-enter home ownership without a mortgage and with minimal operating costs.

Ella advocated for tiny homes as part of a broader housing strategy, suggesting long-term tiny home villages with shared services like composting toilets, laundries, and micro-renewables could meet a real gap in the market. These would be especially useful for those seeking small-footprint living, lower-cost ownership, or transitional housing options.

Key Points

- Tiny homes offer affordable, sustainable housing with lower ongoing costs
- Strong collaboration with an eco-builder ensured a quality outcome
- Design choices should consider climate, mobility trade-offs, and compliance
- Shared-facility tiny home villages could meet growing demand for smaller homes
- With planning support, tiny homes can expand housing diversity and resilience

Ella has experience as an elected member and working in local government. With a PhD in Architecture, she embarked on a journey to build Wharariki Home, an off-grid transportable happy healthy tiny home. Alongside a team of experts, she has been able to construct a new build that reflects her personal and professional values and given her the flexibility for her life journey.



Papakāika Housing Presentation

Corey Bragg & Cyril Gilroy - Papakāika Housing

Cyril opened the session with warmth and humour, expressing pride in the completion of the new papakāinga housing development. He reflected on the long journey and community effort it took to get to this point. Corey Bragg spoke on behalf of Awarua rūnaka, acknowledging the role of key partners in funding and research. He noted the support from HUD, input from Kāinga Ora, and the collaboration with researchers and local contractors. The homes are warm, modern, energy-efficient, and co-designed with whānau input. The location next to the marae, early childhood centre, and other services is intentional — this is not just housing, it's a living, intergenerational community.

Key Points

- Housing must be grounded in kaupapa Māori and built in place with whānau
- Co-design and cultural connection strengthen long-term outcomes
- Strong partnerships and kaupapa-aligned funding are essential
- Papakāika housing models are scalable and replicable across the region

Cyril Gilroy - Kaiwhakahaere/Chairman of Waihōpai Rūnaka

Cyril has overseen the recent Murihiku Marae redevelopment and Papakāika projects and has been an integral part of several projects in our community. Currently a Director on Te Tapu o Tane, Te Kupenga Tiaki Taoka Board, Waihōpai Alternate Representative on Te Ao Marama and Kaitiaki Roopu, Waihōpai NZ Police local mana whenua Committee representative.

Corey Bragg (Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu), Project Manager for Awarua Rūnaka

Corey leads various projects focusing on whānau housing, research & development, and marae-based activities that achieve outcomes for Awarua whānau and the wider community.



A modern, two-story house with a grey corrugated metal upper level and a lower level featuring large glass doors and a red wall. A clothesline is set up on the lawn in front of the house. The house number '18' is visible on a grey pillar. The sky is blue with scattered clouds.

Session 2

Spatial Planning,
Regulation and Housing

Spatial Planning and Housing

Vibhuti Chopra, GM Strategy and Partnership, Southland District Council

Vibhuti provided a high-level but insightful overview of spatial planning, positioning it as a critical long-term tool that aligns land use, infrastructure, and community aspirations. She emphasised that building more houses alone won't solve the housing crisis — we're not just building houses, we're building communities. To do this well, we must plan for where and how people live, work, learn, and play.

She described spatial planning as both visionary and pragmatic. It captures what people value, maps constraints and opportunities, and identifies where future development should happen — alongside what supporting infrastructure will be needed (schools, parks, roads, water, broadband, etc.). Southland's plan will work at two levels: individual community plans that reflect local nuance (e.g., Te Anau vs Riverton vs Winton), and an overarching district-wide spatial plan that brings it all together over a 30-year horizon.

Vibhuti explained that spatial planning involves mapping hazard areas, preserving valued environments, and making room for change. It enables councils to be proactive rather than reactive — to say “here's where we want growth” rather than scrambling to accommodate it. She gave examples from other parts of New Zealand and overseas, including how rapidly growth occurred in parts of Hamilton once land was zoned and enabled — faster than expected.

She also showed how spatial plans can clearly signal land release areas and help forecast infrastructure needs, including areas where 1,000+ lots may be developed. This supports better decision-making around investment, infrastructure, and policy. Finally, she noted that spatial planning won't deliver houses tomorrow — but it lays the groundwork for sustainable, coordinated, well-served growth.

Key Points

- Spatial planning aligns housing, infrastructure, and community values over 30+ years
- It identifies future development areas and necessary supporting services
- Localised planning captures the distinct needs of each community
- Maps of hazards and environmental priorities help guide resilient development
- Spatial plans provide certainty for councils, developers, and communities
- Success requires strong community engagement and clear implementation pathway

Vibhuti has been working in the local government sector for over 22 years. In her previous role at Upper Hutt City Council she was responsible for economic development, among other portfolios, and worked on housing enablement and investment within the city. She was also part of the senior staff group in the regional spatial planning project (Wellington Regional Growth Framework). In her current role, she is leading the team working on developing the spatial plan for the Southland District.



Understanding the Rules to Build our Future Homes

Christine McMillan, Divisional Manager Planning, Bonisch

Christine gave a practical overview of the regulatory landscape in Southland, drawing on her work across Invercargill, Gore, and Southland District Councils. She noted that Gore District Council through their proposed district plan and Invercargill City through their upcoming changes to residential zone rules are working to address the need for medium density housing and smaller lot areas, particularly to encourage infill development.

She outlined the key changes around minor residential units (sometimes called granny flats), which will allow up to 70m² without needing a separate title, provided certain criteria are met. However, she cautioned that these can't be added to every site — even with the new rules — due to lot size, site coverage, privacy, and infrastructure requirements. While the changes are positive, they're not a silver bullet.

Christine also flagged the evolving national planning context. Government proposals around property rights and simplified zoning could lead to a single regional plan, which would

bring consistency but could reduce flexibility. Changes to National Policy Statements and the RMA Reforms is likely to lead to increased development opportunities. Changes are happening at pace and she encouraged developers and community groups to engage early with planners — especially for sites with hazards, overlays, or unique contexts — to avoid unnecessary costs and delays.

She emphasised that the perception is often that rules within District Plans may prevent development however, good advice and early discussions with a planning professional can make a big difference to project opportunities and viability. Christine's overall message was one of cautious optimism: Southland has more room to move than most regions, but it still requires smart, informed navigation of the system.

Key Points

- Minor residential units (granny flats) up to 70m² are allowed, but not on all sites
- Lot size, coverage, and site-specific constraints still apply
- Southland's district plans are relatively permissive compared to other regions
- Early engagement with planners helps avoid costly pitfalls
- National planning changes may impact local flexibility in future
- More communication is needed to shift public perceptions of what's possible

Christine is the planning manager at Bonisch Consultants Limited, a land development firm whose head office is in Invercargill. Christine specialises in subdivision and land development in Southland and throughout NZ and has been providing resource management advice to clients for over 18 years.



Medium Density Housing enabling Inner City Living

Roger Beattie, Managing Director, Beattie McDowell Architects

Roger Beattie spoke about the potential of medium density housing (MDH) to contribute to both housing supply and urban vibrancy in Invercargill. Roger shared a well-researched case for why diversity of housing types is critical — and why Invercargill needs to do more than just build three-bedroom homes on quarter-acre sections.

He explained that MDH is not a silver bullet but one part of the solution. What's lacking is choice: for first-home buyers, retirees, smaller households, and those who want to downsize but stay in their communities. While infill and greenfield subdivisions have dominated recent development, Roger suggested the inner city offers an underused opportunity — it's walkable, already serviced, and well-connected to education, shopping, recreation, and transport.

Increased urban density enhances the efficiency and economic viability of infrastructure investment. Public

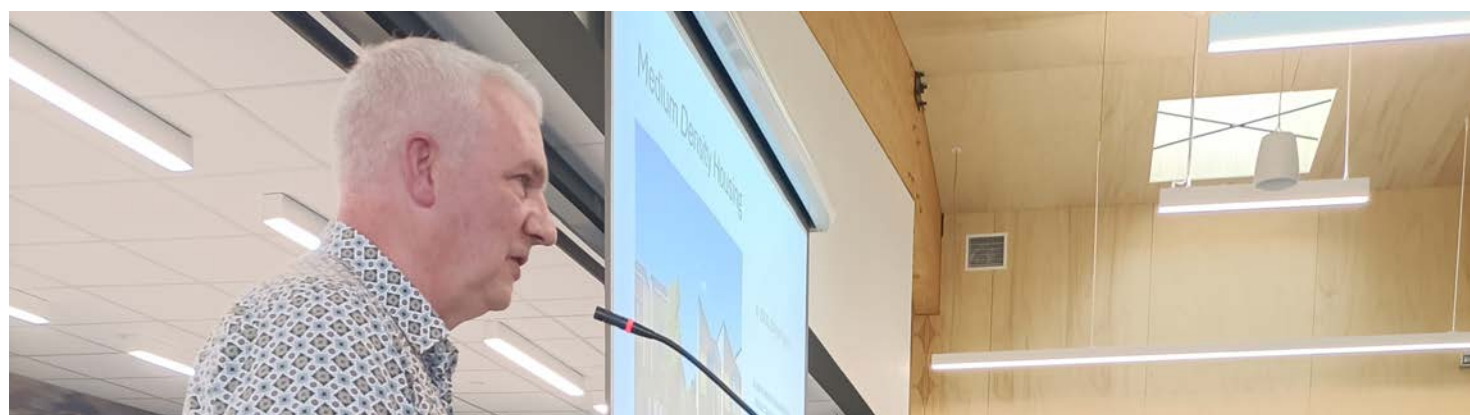
transport, road networks, utilities, and community services operate more effectively and at lower per-capita cost in higher-density environments. Concentrated development allows for the reuse and upgrading of existing infrastructure, which is typically more cost-effective and resource-efficient than creating new low-density infrastructure while maintaining aging systems elsewhere. Prioritising densification can therefore reduce long-term public expenditure and support more sustainable community services.

Roger also noted that New Zealand cities are extremely low density by international standards — and that if Invercargill wants to welcome 10,000 new residents in coming years, it needs to start building differently. He emphasised that successful MDH must feel safe, connected, and livable, and not simply be a “box-ticking” exercise of fitting more houses onto a section.

Key Points

- Medium density housing offers a middle ground between detached homes and high-rise apartments
- Invercargill lacks housing diversity — especially for singles, couples, downsizers, and older people
- Inner city areas offer a well-serviced opportunity for higher density living
- Good MDH design includes privacy, safety, storage, accessibility, and street connection
- Increased urban density enhances the efficiency and economic viability of infrastructure investment
- New Zealand's housing model is extremely low-density by international standards
- MDH is most successful when guided by strong design principles, not just regulation

BMA is committed to fostering greater diversity in housing and raising the standard of residential design in their hometown of Invercargill. They believe that diverse, high-quality housing is essential to creating a more vibrant, liveable city - one that everyone is proud to call home.



District Plan Changes to enable different Housing

Jonathan Shaw, Group Manager for Consenting and Environment, Invercargill City Council

Jonathan noted current regulations often don't help solve housing problems. He outlined three changes ICC is pursuing: enabling papakāinga, reducing minimum lot sizes, and simplifying consenting processes. He also noted upcoming changes to the Building Act and the potential for more private consenting authorities.

Key Points

- Councils must shift from gatekeeping to enabling housing development
- Simplifying rules on density, lot size, and design can unlock supply
- Building Act reform may speed up processes and add flexibility
- Regulation should support innovation, not stifle it

Jonathan has been in this role for the past 2 years and before that he was the Planning and Building Manager for 3 years. He will be talking about district plan changes that ICC have underway as well as the future direction of regulatory function and the drive to enable housing.



Residential Use in Inner City Buildings

Nic McGilvray, Commercial Property Owner and Phil Orr, Director and Lead Designer, ArchDraught

Phil and Nicola shared their experience developing inner-city residential spaces by repurposing heritage and commercial buildings — including the Tuatara Café and hostel, the old nurses' hostel on Dee Street, the Tower building, and others. Their presentation offered a grounded, practical view of what it takes to make city centre living viable in Invercargill.

They explained that despite strong walkability, existing infrastructure, and untapped demand for central living, the rules and building code interpretations have often been a barrier. That is starting to shift, with new medium density planning rules and more flexible building code compliance pathways making conversions more feasible. Projects often require working closely with planners, fire engineers, and building inspectors to show how performance standards (e.g. for fire safety or access) are met — even if not in a textbook way.

Nicola emphasised that budget constraints and risk perception are still significant challenges. Earthquake-prone labels and heritage protections can scare off investors, and every building is different — requiring bespoke solutions. However, she pointed out that guidance, collaboration, and perseverance can lead to great outcomes. For example, their project at 43–45 Dee Street will repurpose long-unused upper floors of a retail building into modern apartments, while keeping the shop below operating.

They advocated for embracing heritage fabric rather than bulldozing it, and for flexible thinking in how residential reuse is approached. Their work demonstrates that with early planning input, cross-sector cooperation, and good design, inner-city housing is not only possible — it's vital for vibrancy.

Key Points

- Invercargill's inner city is highly walkable and ready for more residential use
- Heritage and commercial buildings can be converted into homes with the right approach
- Medium density planning rules and flexible code interpretations help unlock opportunity
- Early engagement with planners and engineers reduces delays and cost blowouts
- Budget and risk are major barriers — but can be managed with the right team
- Adaptive reuse supports vibrancy, sustainability, and community connection

Nic - Together with her partner Chris, they have been buying undesirable properties and giving them a new lease of life. Their first big commercial project was fixing up the Tuatara Backpackers and their next projects are to breathe some life back into the old nurse's home on Leven Street and to convert an original property on Dee into inner-city apartments.

Phil – Phil Orr is the Director and Lead Designer at ArchDraught, an architectural design firm based in Southland. He specialises in residential and mixed-use projects, with a strong focus on adaptive reuse and inner-city revitalisation. Phil is passionate about creating meaningful communication pathways between designers and councils to achieve practical, compliant, and community-minded outcomes.



A photograph of a modern building with solar panels on the roof and a group of people gathered outside. The building has a dark grey roof with several solar panels. The walls are made of red vertical slats. A group of people is standing in front of the building, and a red car is visible in the background. The sky is overcast.

Session 3

Housing as an
Economic Enabler

Update on Te Puāwai Housing Development (Invercargill)

Don Moir, Ralph Moir Limited

Don Moir shared insights from the long-running Te Puawai subdivision project in Invercargill, highlighting the complex, multi-stage process required to bring new housing to market at scale. The project, which has been over a decade in development, is ultimately expected to support up to 1,000 homes, including a mix of residential densities and commercial activity.

Stage 1, currently underway, includes 35 standard sections, but Don made it clear that the bigger vision is about long-term, managed growth. A major focus has been on stormwater — not just managing runoff but integrating

dual-use stormwater reserves that double as green space. He showed diagrams of how overland flow paths and attenuation basins have been engineered into the subdivision to meet current environmental and planning requirements.

He noted that access to capital, not land, is often the biggest constraint — and that public perception of medium and higher density housing also needs to shift. Don called for more enabling zoning that supports mixed-use development, and better financing models to help private developers bring diverse housing to market, especially during early stages.

Key Points

- Te Puawai is a long-term, staged development that will ultimately support ~1,000 homes
- Stormwater management is integrated into green space via attenuation basins and flow paths
- Zoning changes and protected land classes limit where new housing can go
- Stage 1 includes 35 lots; future stages will include greater density and mixed-use zones
- Infrastructure planning is guided by 30-year growth targets
- Biggest barriers are capital access and community acceptance of density
- Successful development requires alignment of planning, infrastructure, and funding

Don is a land surveyor with forty five years experience based in Invercargill. As a specialist at Ralph Moir Limited, he focuses on land development engineering, with particular expertise in stormwater management and wastewater-system design for both urban and rural projects. In his spare time, Don pursues his passion for motorcycling, embarking on holidays through the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe to explore new landscapes and cultures.





Panel Discussion

Welcoming Sharks Basketballers to the Region

Jill Bolger, Operations Manager, Southland Sharks

Jill Bolger spoke from her role managing the Southland Sharks basketball team, offering a unique but important perspective on the role housing plays in attracting and supporting short-term professionals — particularly athletes. Each year, the Sharks bring in players from outside Southland (including overseas), most of whom stay for the duration of the season and require safe, quality housing for around four months.

Jill explained that finding appropriate accommodation has become increasingly difficult. The rental market in Invercargill is tight, and landlords are often hesitant to lease to short-term tenants, particularly groups of young men. The Sharks have had to become creative — leasing homes year-round even when they're only needed part-time, relying on relationships with property owners, or renovating properties

themselves. She stressed that this is not just about shelter: having a good home environment supports player wellbeing, performance, and connection to the community.

She also pointed out that this housing need is not unique to sport. Many sectors rely on transient, short-term, or seasonal workers — from teachers to medical staff, tradespeople to festival organisers. Jill argued that housing systems are not currently set up to support these groups, and that flexibility and diversity in housing supply is essential if Southland wants to attract talent and fill essential roles.

While her example came from sport, the broader implication was clear: short-term housing is part of the economic development conversation, and cities that can't offer it will miss out on people who want to contribute.

Key Points

- The Sharks require short-term housing for 4–5 months each year for athletes and support staff
- Short-term rentals are increasingly hard to find, especially for groups or international tenants
- Stable, welcoming housing improves wellbeing and helps with performance and community connection
- Many sectors need flexible housing for temporary workers — not just sports
- Cities need to plan for short- and medium-term accommodation as part of their housing strategy

A proud Southlander born and bred, Jill has a deep love for the region and its people. With a background that includes 20 years as a tutor at SIT and five years with the Probation Service, Jill has been the General Manager of the Southland Sharks since 2010. Passionate about sport, she has served on the BBNZ Board, NBL Board, Advisory Board, and national selection panels, and is also a BBNZ Senior National Referee Trainer.



Housing our Future Aquaculture Workforce

Mogana Manivannan, Head of Operations, Ocean Beach

Mogana shared the remarkable journey of Ocean Beach, a once-derelict coastal site near Bluff that has been transformed into a multi-business aquaculture hub. He described how the site has evolved from “nothing” into a thriving cluster of ventures that now employ over 70 people, with expectations for significant workforce growth in the near future.

The presentation focused not on the fish, but on the human infrastructure behind the success — particularly housing. Mogana was clear: “Housing is not a social issue. Housing is business infrastructure.” He explained how Ocean Beach has had to invest in short-term staff accommodation, including container conversions and portable buildings, to ensure new workers had somewhere to stay. In addition to housing, they provide pastoral care — offering support, transportation, and wraparound wellbeing to help new hires settle in.

Looking ahead, Mogana projected that upcoming development could require housing for 200 to 300 workers, many of whom won’t have existing ties to Bluff. Without proactive housing planning, he warned, this growth could stall. He urged attendees to see housing as part of the economic development toolkit, not something to be fixed only by councils or social agencies.

He also touched on workforce dynamics — that people will come for jobs if the housing exists, and that the reverse is also true. Mogana called for a systems approach, where housing, business, and social wellbeing are planned together. Ocean Beach is already seeing this need up close and has had to act independently to avoid bottlenecks.

Key Points

- Ocean Beach has grown from derelict land to a major employer in Bluff
- Housing is essential business infrastructure — not an afterthought
- Ocean Beach provides short-term accommodation and wraparound support for new staff
- Future expansion will require housing for hundreds of additional workers
- Without housing, workforce development will stall
- A systems approach is needed: housing, jobs, and wellbeing must be planned together

With a background as a marine scientist, Mogana deeply understands the balance of our ocean ecosystems and brings that same thoughtful approach to managing the systems, infrastructure, and strategic direction that support Ocean Beach’s diverse and pioneering aquaculture community. Mogana plays a critical role in creating an environment where innovation can thrive.



Healthcare and Workforce

Karl Metzler, CEO Gore Health Ltd

Karl Metzler, CEO of Gore Health Ltd (GHL), shared practical insights into addressing workforce housing needs in a rural healthcare setting. GHL is a community-owned, not-for-loss health facility employing around 160 staff, including hospital, primary care, allied health, and specialist services.

Over his 17-year tenure, Karl has seen the evolution of the housing challenge — from scrambling to find furnished rentals for short-term locums to now managing a tailored housing portfolio. GHL currently owns four staff houses with 14 bedrooms, and rents five high-quality long-term homes, giving flexibility to meet diverse staff needs. One property, gifted by SIT, also doubles as a community meeting space.

While this has partially solved the issue, staff preferences have changed — many now prefer not to share, especially across genders. To respond, GHL is exploring a partnership with local charities to build three single-room tiny homes on-site, offering privacy and flexibility.

Beyond bricks and mortar, Karl emphasised the wraparound welcome package: 12 weeks of free rent for new staff,

a stocked fridge, handwritten welcome notes, firewood, flowers, and chocolates — all designed to make people feel at home from day one. He estimates this approach saves around \$100,000 per year compared to using short-term accommodation like motels or Airbnbs.

Crucially, great housing is part of Gore Health's recruitment and retention strategy. The organisation has very low locum reliance, consistently attracts quality staff, and boasts an average medical staff tenure of 8.5 years. Housing sends a message — not just about comfort, but about values, care, and belonging.

Karl's learnings underscored the importance of reputation, relationships, and investing in people: treating landlords with respect, resisting the temptation to fill homes with donated second-hand furniture, and recognising that supporting staff means supporting their whole family and life transition.

Key Points

- GHL owns and rents housing to attract and retain rural health professionals
- Four owned homes (14 bedrooms) and five rented homes provide housing flexibility
- Tiny homes are being explored to address privacy and sharing challenges
- Staff receive 12 weeks' rent-free housing and a thoughtful welcome package
- Housing is part of a broader recruitment and values-based retention approach
- Strong tenant reputation helps secure housing before it even hits the market
- Investing in staff housing reduces churn and sends a powerful organisational message

“He oranga ngakau, he pikinga wairua”

Karl is passionate about the Hokonui community and being part of the locality's healthcare delivery. As CEO of Gore Health Ltd, he is responsible for leading the delivery of a range of health services, from hospital, primary and oral healthcare to Molemap across the wider South Island. He is privileged to serve the nearly 160 incredibly dedicated staff that choose to work at Gore Health.

