

## THE AUSTRALIAN

## NSW planners assess Airbnb rent fear



NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes is assessing rental affordability. Picture: Adam Yip

SAMANTHA HUTCHINSON THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM January 6, 2017

NSW policymakers have committed to looking into the effect of Airbnb and the short-term rental market on city rents and housing affordability, as residents and tenants around the country raise concerns that the practice is chewing up rental stock.

NSW Planning Minister Rob Stokes yesterday confirmed he was assessing Airbnb's implications for housing affordability as part of a response to an inquiry into short-term rental accommodation, due to report early this year.

"Any impact on housing affordability is an important consideration," a spokesman for Mr Stokes told *The Australian*.

"The effect of the online platforms, such as Airbnb, on the long-term rental market is currently being considered."

An increasing number of residents and tenants are calling for tighter regulation on short-stay accommodation to ensure their apartments are not taken out of the rental market and converted to full-time short-stay accommodation.

Data compiled by residents action group Neighbours Not Strangers and lobby group Inside Airbnb found this month that Sydney Airbnb listings spiked 75.5 per cent in the past six months, and the ratio of Airbnb listings to rental listings in some suburbs, including Bondi, inner Sydney and Coogee, is spiralling.

Airbnb has dismissed the findings, arguing most listings on the platform are single rooms in homes rather than entire houses, and are let while the residents are still there. It also says Inside Airbnb counts all listings, including inactive listings, and overstates the number of listings.

"The vast majority of Airbnb hosts in NSW share the home in which they live and use the money they earn to help pay their bills or stay in their homes," a spokesman said. "Airbnb began as a means for our founders to pay rent and, like them, Airbnb hosts in Australia are using their hosting income to pay down the mortgage and cover bills. Others list their home to pay for their own holidays away with the family once or twice a year."

But tensions continue to flare, with farming residents in the West Australian town of Kununurra the latest to speak out about unregulated short-term accommodation putting stress on regional farming areas and putting biosecurity protocols at risk.

Frangipani farmers Craig and Keeley Palmer are nervous about the effect a growing tourist population could have on their farming community in the Ord River Irrigation Area, about 10km north of Kununurra.

Changes to the town planning agreement in 2011 opened the door for low-density tourism accommodation, mainly for temporary farm and orchard workers.

However, some plots in the farming area are turning into full-time accommodation, putting pressure on surrounding farms and raising the potential for biohazards in the delicate area.

“There are lots of issues around tourist developments in farming areas and wherever it occurs conflict soon follows and the rights of farmers are generally diminished,” Ms Palmer told *The Australian*. “If you wish to operate a tourist business, buy a property in an area zoned for tourism. If you want to farm, buy a property in an area zoned farming. It’s pretty simple.”

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