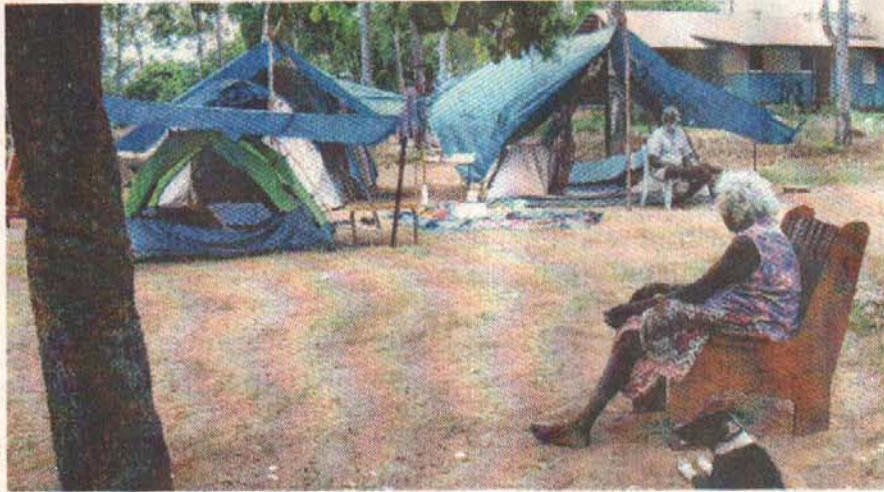


Island tent-dwellers fear the wet season



An Elcho Island woman sits outside her makeshift shelter

UP to 150 people on Elcho Island have been forced to live in tents for more than six months because of construction delays in the indigenous housing program.

Members of the Galiwin'ku community, off the Arnhem Land coast, have been living in tents or crowded houses waiting for work on a new subdivision to finish.

The Gillard government said yesterday it was aware of the situation, but the community had chosen tents as their "option for transitional accommodation".

Construction on the subdivision began early last year under the \$1.7 billion National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing.

Those living in tents are worried they will not have houses before the wet season sets in.

East Arnhem Shire Vice-President Kaye Thurlow, who has lived in Galiwin'ku for more than 20 years, said the community had asked the

Northern Territory government, which administers the federally funded program, to provide tents to those waiting for housing.

The government rejected the request because it would be required to supply toilets and showers as well, she said.

"No one has moved into the new houses in the new subdivision," Ms Thurlow said. "The issue now is people are worried because the wet season is arriving, Christmas holidays are on us and the contractors are going to pull up sticks for the next two or three weeks."

She said there had been problems connecting the 65 new houses in the subdivision to a water supply. Another 25 houses in the community have been built or are nearing completion.

But opposition indigenous affairs spokesman Nigel Scullion said the program was running well behind schedule.

MARK SCHLIEBS
MICHAEL OWEN