



# Red flag over Melbourne's rich suburbs

From Toorak's mansions to Malvern's blue chips, Beijing is getting away with the nation's crown jewels, writes **Frank Lee.**

Chinese communist officials, families and friends are swallowing Melbourne's prestige and top-end residential property with lightning speed.

Real estate agents are reporting property sales of 30 to 50 per cent of their portfolios to buyers from Mainland China.

To cope with the volume of sales, leading estate agents are employing Mandarin speakers for auctions and private sales, as well as advertising across the web. Others are setting up real estate offices in Chinese cities and ferrying groups of Chinese buyers to Melbourne.

"The Government opened the gates and has absolutely no comprehension just how much change this is creating," buyer's advocate Morrell and Koren director David Morrell told the *Herald Sun*. "It's frightening what's happening in some areas. We're seeing three or four Asian families, in particular, outbidding the locals and buying up."

"Many Asians are seeing Australia as the new Switzerland – a great place to park your money. They are pricing the locals out," Mr Morrell said.

Every revolution has a cause and this one is no exception.

The Federal Government announced the creation of a "special



SCOTT BARBOUR/GETTY IMAGES

**Melbourne is experiencing a Chinese investment boom that is putting up the prices and adding to the housing shortage, says one real estate agent.**

category visa" in December last year, which came into effect in March.

It allows foreign nationals to buy second-hand dwellings if they hold a temporary visa, permitting them to stay in Australia for a continuous period of more than 12 months.

Even before the ink had dried on the new law, Beijing dispatched a delegation of officials for discussions with the governments of NSW and Victoria about buying residential property and other businesses.

Soon, property writers were reporting a Chinese buying spree at auctions and private sales in Melbourne.

A Brighton estate agent returned from Shanghai recently after offering 30 of Melbourne's most expensive homes to buyers at the China International Luxury Property Show. "We've had several buy property, sight unseen, just over the Internet and phone," Nick Johnstone, a director of JP. Dixon, told *The Age*.

"A lady from Shanghai bought four

houses in Brighton from us for \$20 million... The houses just sit vacant because they are after the capital growth," he said.

A director of Jellis Craig, Scott Patterson, told the *Herald Sun* that Chinese buyers are pushing up the prices and adding to the housing shortage. "There's no doubt it's adding 15 per cent to prices and creating a shortage because the buyers are not selling out of an existing home."

## Chinese buying a sensitive issue

Top end agent Kay and Burton recently sold a new Toorak mansion for around \$7 million to the People's Republic of China, but neither the agent nor the Chinese consulate would comment on any part of the deal to the press.

For Chinese, this looks like a gift from heaven. They can buy a large, free-standing house in Australia with a clear title to the land and so many free amenities for around the price of

a small apartment with a 99-year lease in a big Chinese city.

This class of buyer is not your ordinary Chinese Joe. With such available funds, the buyers could only be Chinese communist officials or associates tied to China's one party police state. Such a system is in direct opposition to the basic values of the Australian people in respect of universal human rights, democracy and personal freedom – destabilising, to say the least!

These prestige homes have been the pride and heritage of a rich culture built on the hard work of generations over nearly 200 years.

Comments in local media indicate that it is a bitter pill for locals to see the cream of their possessions disappearing to China or anywhere else. The law requires a dwelling to be sold when a foreign national's temporary resident visa expires, but it seems unlikely that Chinese nationals will part with their freehold mansions in Australia, with some suggesting that

an internal China market could spring up in Australian residential property.

Unfortunately, an information blackout will prevent the Foreign Investment Review Board from continuing to publish annual sales of Australian real estate to each foreign country.

Australian citizens pay many Commonwealth taxes in return for services, but the equation is looking decidedly unequal for Canberra to be issuing special visas to foreigners to acquire a title to residential property when they don't pay a raft of Commonwealth taxes to fund education, hospitals, welfare, schools, health, roads, ports, transport and much more.

Some might think that Beijing is exacting a heavy price for underwriting the growing government debt in Australia.

*Frank Lee was editor of The Clerk national journal Federated Clerks Union of Australia.*

## "One million women" a starting point on climate change

**Shar Adams**

*The Epoch Times*

Governments and big business have a responsibility to address climate change, but that does not mean everyone else can wait and see what happens, says Natalie Isaacs, Australian environmental activist and mother of four.

"We have to be part of this. We cannot simply detach from it and say governments have to do it, it's all big business," she told Australia's national broadcaster, the ABC. "People have a voice and people tell their politicians what to do, so we have incredible influence in this debate."

Ms Isaacs is the initiator of a new campaign to get women involved in action on climate change by setting a target of one million women to sign up to each reduce their carbon emissions by a tonne over one year.

"The thing is, you can't be part

of the debate unless you are taking action yourself, so it doesn't really matter if action becomes before educational awareness. Just start acting. Without a doubt, action is going to lead to you finding your voice and getting involved in this," she said.

To participate, women are asked to sign up and then choose activities from six different categories – household, food, travel, shopping, flights and renewable energy.

Cutting out red meat once a week for the year and replacing it with cereals and fruit can save you 195kg of carbon dioxide and 10,000 litres of water, says the website.

Saying "no" to wasteful packaging, plastic bags and bottled water when tap water is available can save you 150kg of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Ms Isaacs said women were chosen as the target not because of a feminist leaning, but because women exert enormous influence in the market

place.

Women now make up 51 per cent of electorate, they are powerful networkers and they make around 70 per cent of household decisions that affect the size of the carbon footprint, she said. "This is not about mopping up after men's mess, we are simply trying to harness the unique strengths and influences of women," she said.

While one million tonnes of carbon sounds like an awful lot and it is (2.3 billion wheelie bins in fact), Ms Isaacs is under no illusion that the amount will make a dent in total emissions, but says it is a "starting point".

"You have to look beyond the million tonnes. Although a million tonnes is integral to this campaign, it is only the catalyst to empower people to take action on climate change," she said. "It is taking you along the journey of empowerment in human bite size chunks".



**Avoiding bottled water can be a start in taking action against climate change, says Natalie Isaacs**

Judging by the response, women are keen to take those first steps. The One Million Women campaign has already signed up around 13,500 women after only 25 weeks.

Sponsors too are serious players and include the New South Wales and Queensland state governments, the Victorian Environmental Protection Agency, BP, Telstra, KPMG and the World Wildlife Fund.

Listening to reports on the UN's climate change conference in Copenhagen and looking back at the week in Australian politics when the Government was unable to get its emissions trading scheme passed in Parliament, Ms Isaacs said: "It is enough to say grassroots programmes like this are more important than ever. People just have to get involved and take action."