

Desal rent trap

By Matt Dunn

THE Wonthaggi Desalination Plant has forced up the price of local rental properties for good, Community Housing Limited's Steve Bevington believes.

"It certainly distorted the private rental market. My general view is once prices rise they don't come down that much. Rentals tend to keep going up and don't go down again," the managing director of the not for profit housing provider said.

The organisation is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary in Gippsland. It is at the coal face of the housing crisis, managing 4000 properties Australia wide, with 58 properties in Bass Coast shire, including Wonthaggi and Inverloch.

Mr Bevington knows the next decade is shaping up to be even busier than the last.

He has also echoed the sentiments of a recent Salvation Army report that found single parents pushed on to the NewStart Allowance were struggling to make ends meet.

"Like the Salvation Army, we provide services for the homeless. The people on NewStart are up against it most. They have not seen the compensatory rises people on pensions have," he said.

"It's all well and good if the employment options are

available. If they're not available all you're doing is creating greater constraints for families to survive.

"It puts greater pressure on organisations like CHL to provide housing options for those people. If you don't have the means to put that little bit of money aside, people's expectations in life decline. Their overall optimism to approach the future reduces."

Mr Bevington believes the situation will create "a generation with difficulties".

"These problems are often intergenerational. To turn that around is a challenge that faces us as a nation," he said.

"Generally, in the marketplace, there has been a sharpening in the divide between people on high and low incomes. It's become tougher.

"Everyone's got to find somewhere to live, but the proportion of people's incomes spent on housing has been pushing up to 50 per cent and beyond."

He said people without work or those on the pension were pushed in to situations where they "can't meet their basic needs, including being able to eat".

Inverloch's Dennis and Rhonda McMahon, who live in an 18-unit over 55's development built by CHL, couldn't be happier at the help they've received.

Pushed out the market by escalating rental prices, Rhonda said she and Dennis were "just so lucky" to have found accommodation.

"We thought we'd won Tattsлото when we were told we had a place. We really love where we are," she said.



Loving it: Dennis and Rhonda McMahon were helped by CHL and now live in a unit development in Inverloch.