

Liberal MP John Alexander, when chairman of the house economics committee in the last parliament, said, "Too often we see the young couple getting beaten out at the auction and then renting out the very place that they were trying to buy".

Now out of that role, he has weighed back in, "Unfortunately the best advice would probably be to buy a lottery ticket because I think you're just locked out of the market."

Yet the Turnbull government can do no more than play politics about property investment tax breaks and pretend the problem is all about supply.

Coalition members of the stacked economics committee would not even come

Deposit Report out this week shows Australian couples would need to save for more than eight years to accumulate a 20 per cent deposit of \$214,600 to buy a median-priced Sydney home. There are half as many first-time home buyers in the market (13.4 per cent) as a proportion of total buyers in 2016 than in 2009.

A new report from CoreLogic and the Australian National University shows the proportion of household income required to get a 20 per cent deposit in Sydney has risen from 117 per cent in 2001 to 168 per

focus of the tax system should be directed towards the type of housing we need. Why should you get a tax deduction on the ownership of a multimillion-dollar holiday home that does nothing to improve supply where it's needed?"

Yet he was knocked into line by his federal counterparts and the majority of the economics committee supported the maintenance of existing negative gearing arrangements.

The main reason? They have been a feature of the Australian tax system "for

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Home affordability crisis is a time bomb

Seems to me that no amount of building will ease the housing crisis in Sydney because negative gearing will always give investors the edge over owner-occupiers ("Building bonanza not enough to ease crisis", December 22).

The age pension rent assistance is up to \$290 a fortnight for singles and \$352 for couples. With the number of people who will never own a home increasing by the day, and those people being unable to save for their retirement because so much of their income goes to paying rent, the long-term effect on the budget will be very significant.

Graeme Heine Avalon Beach

The expectation that the general public will buy the spin that the housing boom is in any way related to the housing affordability crisis and not demand for new housing by overseas investors is indicative only of too much brandy in Rob Stokes' egg nog. Cheers!

Sue Milos Marrickville

The state government can do what it likes to address affordability. The problem is our tax system. Essentially the taxpayer (you and me) are subsidising investors. They benefit. We lose. It's not a level playing field. Even worse, it diverts investment potentially from job-creating activities. So it's a double lose situation. This simply has to stop. And it's not a hard fix. You can grandfather existing investment properties with a "phase out" window to create a soft landing.

David Fletcher Woolloomooloo

Your story on Sydney's housing problems quotes two academics who pour cold water on the need for more supply of housing. Out in the real world where the

development industry is trying to build more new homes across Sydney there is a different story. The planning system is slowing down the supply of housing just at the time we need to escalate supply.

The 31,000 new homes over the last year is still nearly 10,000 less than we should be achieving in boom times. A fundamental problem is that over the past four years only 58 per cent of the homes that get planning approval actually get built according to the government's own figures. This is because councils add conditions that make projects unfeasible. The current housing completions may well be a record but they are well below what is needed. The government and councils need to fast-track the approval of housing projects without excessive conditions.

Chris Johnson chief executive,
Urban Taskforce

The need to unravel the mystery of MH370 will never

Having just read an account of the search for Sir John Franklin's 1845 Northwest Passage expedition, I cannot help but be struck by the parallels with the search for MH370 and the powerful need of families and communities to find out what really happened ("MH370 widow condemns decision to end the search", December 22).

In the former case, no less than 25 searches – including one funded by Sir John's widow – over an initial period of 35 years were undertaken by sea and overland by British and American expeditions and searches have continued right up to today.

The need to know what happened to MH370 and why it happened will not go away till we have answers.

Lawyers ruling the roost

As someone from an engineering background I have long thought the idea of negotiated compromises as favoured by lawyers is a problem when there is a clear, almost certain, physical outcome if the correct action is not taken (Letters, December 22). Action on climate change is a good example.

Science overwhelmingly agrees there is a minimum amount which must be done to avert disaster. The negotiators and bean counters settle on a lesser amount so everyone is not too unhappy. The inevitable result is disaster.

John Barry Oakdale

Michael Britt (Letters, December 22) sees a correlation between "the growing dominance" of lawyers in Parliament and distrust of politicians. Theodore Plucknett, professor of legal history at the London School of Economics, said

lawyers became "the dominant interest" in Parliament in "the middle of the 14th century". It may thus be said that the English speaking world has had government of the lawyers, by the lawyers, and for the lawyers for more than 650 years.

Evan Whitton

Michael Britt's suggestion there is a correlation between number of lawyers in Parliament and a collapse in public trust in what we lawyers call a non-sequitur.

Richard Page Oyston

A more insidious effect on the workings of government is proliferation of lobbyists with too much influence on decision made. This is particularly evident when they are ex-members of Parliament.

Michael Petersons Chesham

It is the insatiable "need to know" that makes us human and different from any other creature that has ever lived.

And that is the reason we need to know why our galaxy is moving through the universe in an unpredictable manner ("Hidden Vela Milky Way's driving force", December 22). We simply cannot abide a mystery.

Peter Thornton Killara

While it is a tragedy for those who lost loved ones, I find it appalling that so much public money has been spent trying to locate MH370. Nothing will alter the fact those on the plane are dead. Two hundred million dollars could have been

spent far more effectively on schools, hospitals, the homeless, refugees – the list is endless. One cent more should be allocated to this foolish quest.

Elizabeth Wentworth

The disappearance of MH370 was most likely an act of murder. The search is not critical for the families of the deceased but also as part of an investigation where six or seven low citizens died. For them, the government to shut down the search is not only heartless but grossly negligent and not in the public interest.

Paul Murphy Parramatta