



# Sprawl crawl as buyers look to greener pastures

**Catharine Munro**

SYDNEY'S urban sprawl has sprawled a bit more this year thanks to the first-home buyers grant for new homes.

Project-home builders are reporting a boom in new house sales in parts of Sydney that were until recently green pasture.

At Spring Farm, south of Camden, lots for new houses stood empty because there was little interest in buying new.

Vanessa Legovic, 30, this week became the third resident of the first release of land, Banksia Rise, after paying \$483,000 for a four-bedroom house with her partner Benjamin Fullham. The 1½-hour commute to the city to work as a legal secretary was a concern, she said, but "we were willing to travel to get our foot in the door". "We bought new because under the first-home owners grant you got more [if you bought new]."

Department of Planning figures show new building on the city's fringe this financial year making up just under 20 per cent of all construction, compared with

10 per cent in 2005-06.

Cornish Group, a developer, says turnover is 10 times that seen last year. A hillside of new homes has sprung up accordingly.

"We might have 30 blocks left out of 330 blocks," said Colin Lake, the company's sales manager for the new suburb at Banksia Rise. Over the next eight years 4000 lots will be put on the market at Spring Farm.

The incentives also prompted movement from second- and third-home owners, such as Gavin and Kerry Searle, who sold their smaller home in Prestons to first-home buyers after having it on the market for two weeks. The Searle family became the first residents of Banksia Rise.

Buyers returned to the fringe last October after the Federal Government announced the first-home buyers grant. Combined with other aid packages for buying a new house, the incentives could add up to about \$30,000, Mr Lake said.

Cornish Group also slashed the price of its land packages by

up to \$40,000 and divided 24 lots into 90 to better suit the first-home market. As a result, it made 250 sales, most for packages of about \$380,000. "In October we made more sales than in the six months before," Mr Lake said. "In January we had 53 sales; in the year before [2008] we had 20 sales."

At Sydney's newest suburb, the Ponds, near Kellyville, in the north-west, the interest has been just as strong. But in both areas first-home buyer interest receded this month.

The state land developer Landcom has reported monthly sales figures are at least double that of the same month last year. The big developers Mirvac and Delfin Lend Lease said buyers had returned to all markets, not just on the fringe.

A spokesman for the Urban Development Institute of NSW said the government boost was insufficient and further cuts in stamp duty were needed to stimulate the market after the first-home buyers grant ended in December.



We bought new because under the first-home owners grant you got more" ... Vanessa Legovic, who bought a four-bedroom home in Banksia Rise, part of the Spring Farm development near Camden. Photo: Steven Siewert