

Feathers fly in fight to save Joe



DAVID CAIRD

Joe the pigeon

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A racing pigeon named Joe may be spared the death penalty after it emerged that he is more likely a fraud than a biosecurity risk.

The pigeon was wearing a US racing band when he popped up in Kevin Chelli-Bird's backyard at Officer, in Melbourne's outer southeast, prompting Mr Chelli-Bird to conclude he was registered to a pigeon racer in Montgomery, Alabama, and had undertaken a 13,000km journey.

But after Australian quarantine authorities threatened to euthanise Joe, who Mr Chelli-Bird named after US President-elect Joe Biden, Pigeon Rescue Melbourne stepped in saying it believed Joe was an Australian pigeon wearing a "knock-off American ring that anyone could buy off eBay".

"We believe he is not an American pigeon at all," PRM said on their Facebook page.

"We've had lots of birds come through with these rings."

The American Racing Pigeon Union also expressed relief that

'Either fly home
or face the
consequences'

Virus-safe housing tops shopping list for buyers



LYNDON MECHIELSEN

Sam and April Amigo with their children Xandria, 7, and Samiya 3, at their new home in Springfield, on the outskirts of Brisbane

MACKENZIE SCOTT
JAMIE WALKER

Marsam and April Amigo are members of a new class of homeowner: they want comfort, style and value for sure, but their house also needs to be a castle, safe as it can be from COVID-19.

The virus is changing how Australians use the home, perceive it and indulge the national passion for buying and selling property.

The Brisbane nurses know all too well the threat posed by the virus and were grateful to move out of a cramped flat into their newly built home with media room and entertainer's kitchen in Springfield, southwest of the Queensland capital.

They were still settling in when the city went into a three-day lockdown last weekend sparked by fears that an infected quarantine hotel cleaner had spread the new ultra-contagious UK variant of COVID-19.

Mr Amigo, 33, said the extra space for their two children was a must, especially when seven-year-old Xandria had to be home-schooled last year in the two-bedroom unit.

His wife, also 33, said their new neighbourhood was virtually self-contained, with most amenities on hand. This was important when COVID could reappear at any time, forcing authorities to again restrict movements.

New figures from the REA Group, operator of the real-estate.com.au website, show how the pandemic was driving tree-change 2.0 — an exodus of buyers from cities under threat from the virus to regional destinations.

Western Australia's Wheatbelt recorded the biggest surge in sales

during 2020, up 76.2 per cent on the previous year, followed by Bunbury, south of Perth, with a 61 per cent increase. Sales volume in the Queensland outback rose 47.5 per cent, New England and NSW's north west was up 41.4 per cent, while Logan-Beaudesert outside Brisbane clocked up 37 per cent growth in sales.

Overall, prices in regional Australia rose 20.3 per cent last year, doubled the combined rate for capital city markets. And despite the pressure COVID exerted on the economy, REA had a record number of searches for \$1m-plus properties in metropolitan markets.

"There are definitely people who have lost their jobs that are in a worse financial condition," said group executive manager of economic research Cameron Kusher. "But for people who kept their jobs, they can borrow more, they can't spend as much potentially as they used to and I think a lot of that is flowing into the residential property market."

Commercial and residential property developer Stockland Corporation said new home buyers were demanding more flexibility in design to work from home and if need be get through lockdown. "If a design doesn't have a study or multiple spaces that people can do day-to-day work in, then it's off the shopping list," said Ricky D'Alesio, design manager of the Metricon group, another national developer.

"The biggest way home design has been impacted is by the ability to work from home. Before, a home office was never high on the agenda of people looking to buy a home, probably about 10th on the list. But now it's No 1."

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Home loan lending hits

