



tas talk

Newsletter of Tenants Advice Service (Inc)
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Editorial Message

Rob Spinks (Executive Officer, TAS)

Welcome to the new electronic version of TAS Talk. In 2006, under the guidance of Michelle Burgermeister and Mia Jeffrey, TAS Talk was re-jigged to more effectively fulfil its role as a publication of relevance to those who work or have a strong interest in the field of tenancy law.

While that format is maintained, we've moved toward saving some trees and printing costs, by distributing TAS Talk electronically. This version is distributed in a summary form by email with a link to the full version which is in PDF on the TAS website.

We will be evaluating this form of distribution over the next two issues, and feedback will be welcomed at any time. If you, or your organisation, does not wish to receive TAS Talk please email us to this effect at tas@taswa.org.

Scrapping of letting fees - a win for renters!

Michelle Burgermeister (Community Legal Education Coordinator, TAS)

The Premier, Alan Carpenter MLA, announced on Sunday 4th March that letting fees would be scrapped. This has been long awaited and is good news. It is only now that the Government has had the courage to make a decision in favour of tenants rather than the powerful lobbying interests of real estate agents and owners.

Letting fees are the non-refundable cost borne by the tenant for the owner using a real estate agent to let the property. It is different to the option fee. Only real estate agents can charge a letting fee, so those who rent directly from the owner will not be affected. The Government's goal is that this will come into effect by 5th April 2007.

Under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (RTA) (s86) real estate agents can ask for up to 2 weeks rent as a letting fee, however the general practice is to ask the tenant to pay for one week of this and the owner pays the other week. With the amendment to the RTA 1987 this fee will have to be totally covered by the owner.

Rob Druitt, President of REIWA stated in the media on the Sunday 4th March that he believed the decision to scrap letting fees was not a good idea as it would lead to increased rent costs to the tenant. WA is the only State in Australia where letting fees are charged. TAS believes rents are influenced by supply and demand and there is no evidence that removal of a one-off commission will translate into higher weekly rents.

TAS believes that the cost of using a real estate agent is an upfront business expense that the owner should bear. Getting rid of letting fees will provide significant relief for many trying to get into a rentals, because it will take away one of the barriers to accessing rental accommodation.

Currently, with the average rental price being more than \$250 per week, a tenant needs to find the equivalent of 7 weeks rent, equating to \$1750 to enter a lease. With tenants not having to pay the letting fee, this will provide some relief to those tenants who are not receiving 'boom' type wages, in this very

tight rental market. This is a welcome step towards providing solutions to those affected by the current rental crisis.

The Government has announced this reform will be implemented on April 5 when it re-proclaims an amendment that was de-proclaimed by the Government of the day in 1995.

The Carpenter Government has also stated it will be looking into scrapping option fees and mechanisms for controlling spikes in rent increases. All of which are included in the four demands the '*No Room in the Boom*' Campaign has been lobbying for!

The Impact of Welfare Reform on the Rental Crisis

Lynn MacLaren (Senior Policy Officer, WACOSS)

Changes to Australia's welfare system have damaged the safety net for people who are missing out on Western Australia's mineral export boom and are aggravating the daunting task of sustaining affordable housing.

While being supportive of the Government's aim of moving people into work and its increased investment in employment assistance and childcare, like many welfare organisations around Australia, WACOSS is concerned that people may fall through the net, becoming trapped in a poverty cycle, homelessness, or worse.

A key feature of the **Welfare to Work** policy is to reduce the number of people receiving pensions (like Disability Support Pension or Parenting Payment). Many will be moved from these higher payments to a lower allowance, like NewStart or Austudy.

People on allowance-level payments are required to undertake a number of activities such as; job interviews, an approved training course, a specified number of job searches, or paid work experience. If they don't participate, they can incur a 'failure' on their record. Once three failures occur, Centrelink can impose an eight-week no payment penalty. Likewise, only one "serious failure" (refusing a job offer, leaving a job or failing to meet requirements of full time 'Work for the Dole') can trigger the non-payment period. Unlike the old system, even if a person acts immediately to correct the "failure", they can still be left without payments for two months.

The eight-week non-payment period places tremendous strain on people who are already vulnerable. Some financial help (e.g. bill paying) is available through financial case management, but many people will not be eligible for that support. WACOSS are concerned that these people may not be able to retain their housing if the penalty leaves them unable to meet their rent or mortgage payments. Once accommodation is no longer secure, people find it harder to manage financially, to find employment, to continue their education or training.

Background

Australia prides itself on being a country which uses income taxes paid to Government not just to fund national infrastructure (e.g. ports, roads, rail and

the like), but also to provide income support for the disadvantaged, including seniors, people with physical and mental disabilities, people suffering an illness, young people, students, sole parents and people looking for work.

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) reports that workforce age people who are reliant on income support include:

- 550,000 people receiving unemployment payments, including 325,000 people who have been unemployed for 12 months or longer.
- Around 700,000 people on disability support pensions (DSP), many of whom want to work.
- Around 600,000 parents on parenting pensions (Parenting Payment), many of whom want to work.

Since the Welfare to Work policy changes came into effect on 1 July 2006, the numbers of people who suffered impacts – lower payments or a non-payment period - has been slowly increasing. In the first six months, 5,000 people around Australia were placed on the maximum 8 week non-payment period. That number is expected to jump, if Senate Committee estimates are accurate.

About 18,250 Western Australians will be worse off over the first three years - people estimated by the Government to receive lower payments, or no payment, instead of DSP or Parenting Payment Single, as a result of the policy.

In support of the Government's goal of moving more people into work and in light of the opportunity presented by both a large Federal budget surplus and low official unemployment levels, ACOSS is calling on the following principles to be applied for change to the Welfare to Work policy:

- do not place people on lower payments,
- increase investment in employment assistance,
- guarantee activity requirements for people on payments are reasonable, and
- legislate to protect disadvantaged people against harsh penalties.

The welfare reforms neglected to address the increasingly inadequate rental allowance for people who rely on income assistance. WACOSS, together with members of the *'No Room in the Boom'* campaign, called for an increase in the Commonwealth Rent Assistance to address the shortfall estimated to be about \$800 per household receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance annually.

Tenancy Services

\$WaP Program – Helping Tenants Cut Power and Water Bills

Brenda Conochie (\$WaP Coordinator, Environment House)

The \$WaP (Saving Water and Power) program run by Environment House offers Metropolitan, concession-holding clients, *FREE* home visits and group sessions to help them cut their energy and water bills. Country trips for multiple homes will also be considered.

Our energy advisor Rob Gulley has worked in both the trades industry and in human services. He finds these backgrounds equally useful for his current work of changing awareness, as well as light-globes and tap washers!

Group sessions - desirable but not essential

Group sessions or home visits can be arranged. However, this model of service delivery works particularly well with an initial *FREE* workshop and guest speaker hosted by an agency, then followed by the opportunity to book a home visit.

Group sessions can be organised for your clients for as little as a 15 minute 'familiarisation', though an hour is much better of course.

Rob will bring in lots of appliances for a hands-on show and tell support for his talk and a question and answer session at the end. Free booklets and wall-charts are given to all clients on ways to save water, electricity and gas.

Don't hesitate to help your clients book home visits if group sessions are not feasible. For those who don't want a home visit, they will take away good tips to help them save on their bills. However, note that *FREE* hardware is only provided at home visits.

Home Visits - Tips, tricks and a little tradework

A home visit typically takes between 90 minutes to 2 hours and Rob is normally available for visits during weekdays but on occasion he will do weekday evenings or Saturdays. Home visits are arranged preferably for a time when co-residents can all participate, although this can be varied if need be.

Rob uses a power meter to show residents how much energy some appliances use in standby mode; he'll install some *FREE* hardware if appropriate (e.g. compact fluoro globes, hot water pipe insulation, draft-stoppers, lower-flow showerheads, tap washers, etc.); and he'll teach as he goes whatever tasks seem appropriate (e.g. adjusting thermostats).

Consent required for tracking bills

Clients *must* agree to Environment House accessing their future bills, via Synergy and Water Corporation, and are asked to sign a consent form. This information is vital for future funding possibilities. This program is only funded until September this year. Names and addresses are not used in any published statistics.

For migrants of non-English speaking backgrounds

Translations of our booklet and wallchart are available in Arabic, Amharic, Farsi, Swahili, French and Burmese so far. A female volunteer will accompany Rob on home visits, where culturally required.

Concession Cards

A Healthcare or pension card qualifies a resident for this free service which is funded by Lotterywest and the WA Government's Sustainable Energy Development Office). To book group sessions or home visits call Brenda at Environment House on 9271 4488 or email info@environmenthouse.org.au. See www.environmenthouse.org.au for more information about us.

We hope to hear from some housing support agencies and clients soon!



Legal Talk

Preparing a Persuasive Argument

Ann-Margaret Walsh (Solicitor, Tenants Advice Service)

We've all been in an argument and probably even think we have won some, but how do we ensure we are presenting the most persuasive argument?

Preparation is the key to developing a persuasive argument. Preparation will assist you with managing your client's expectations, the negotiation process and taking a matter to court. No matter what experience you have had these skills can be practised and developed.

The following is an outline of steps which can be used whether preparing a written submission for a Tier 2 appeal or preparing to negotiate a rent reduction.

Step 1 – Issue Spotting

Although it is not always possible, try to interview the client in person. This will give you the opportunity to view any documentation the client may have and to make a general assessment of the client. Remember, you will probably be the last person to meet your client as the other parties involved will already be in a relationship with them.

During the interview, you will need to identify the problems or issues. Your client will outline the problems as they see them. The interview process allows you to review all of the documents as they may raise other issues that are relevant but are not as important to your client. If your client does not have any documents, have them complete an authority so that you can obtain all necessary documents. It is important to ascertain what your client wants during this initial interview. This information will help you later.

The client has come to you because they are unable to resolve the problems with the other party. This will lead you to think that the other party, rightly or wrongly, may have a different version of events. You will need to explore with your client all of the problems, for example, why the private landlord may be behaving in such a manner or why the Department of Housing and Works is proceeding with an eviction.

Step 2 - Rules

Know your law and any relevant policies. Have them readily accessible in hard copy. Your knowledge will enable you to put a more persuasive argument and ensure all aspects of your client's case are covered.

Step 3 – Analysis of the Case

Analysing the case requires you to apply the law or policy to the facts. It is this process that will enable you to make a decision as to whether what your client wants is achievable. It is necessary so that you can best manage your client's expectations, particularly if your analysis of the matter reveals you will not be able to get what they want.

Analysis is important as it will also involve an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of your case and your opponent's case. It will enable you to make a realistic assessment of the likely outcomes. By emphasising the strengths of your case and weaknesses of your opponent's you will develop a persuasive argument that is invaluable for any negotiations or court preparation.

Step 4 - Conclusion

Your analysis will lead you to a conclusion or the position you are going to take. It ensures you have a basis for your conclusion. Your conclusion may be that the applicant should be placed on the priority transfer list because they cannot obtain adequate treatment for their medical condition in their present location. This conclusion needs to be supported by your analysis.

By following these steps the preparation required will be less daunting and will give you the confidence to present your persuasive argument.

Global Talk

TUQ - 20 years of activism & progresses in Law Reform

Penny Carr (Tenant's Union Queensland)

In November 2006, the Tenants' Union of Queensland celebrated its 20th Anniversary by holding three major events - a symposium, a celebratory dinner and a 2-day law reform forum. It was a huge organisational achievement to mark an auspicious moment in our history!

Symposium

The symposium entitled 'The Role of Queensland Tenancy Law: Within the Contemporary Housing System' assisted participants to think 'outside the square' about solutions to issues confronting tenants.

The three speakers, Professor Terry Burke (Housing Studies, Swinburne University), Dr Tim Seelig (Research Fellow, University of Queensland) and Robin Zakharov (Consultant at The Policy Practice), took participants through a comparison of the Australian housing system with other Western systems. They identified Queensland's specific market circumstances and discussed what specific reforms might appropriately be achieved within the current review of the Residential Tenancies Act.

The symposium attracted about 60 people, mainly tenant advocates and Tenants' Union members, but also real estate industry members and staff and board members of the Residential Tenancies Authority.

Celebratory Dinner

Following the symposium, the Tenants' Union held a celebratory anniversary dinner. The night was a walk through our 20 year history – our birth, our childhood and our maturity. It was made possible by groups of people from the past who spoke of the triumphs and challenges during their involvement. These 'history groups' rolled out anecdotes arising from our achievements and everyday work.

One of the many highlights of the night was our keynote speaker Mr Magnus Hammar from the International Union of Tenants. Coming all the way from Sweden, he inspired us with stories of European tenants with tenure for life, reminding us that despite our work we have the future to focus on.

Around 135 friends and supporters of the Tenants' Union attended, and together with our MC Helen Razor (ex-Triple J morning show), we laughed, reflected and caught up with friends old and new.

Law Reform Forum

In Queensland, both the Residential Tenancies and the Residential Services (Accommodation) Acts are in review. During the 2-day law reform forum, Tenants' Union staff and workers from the tenancy advice services statewide joined forces to discuss our responses to these reviews. Attendees were inspired by the symposium speakers and a special forum attendance on the first day by Magnus Hammar. They were able to identify the issues confronting tenants and discuss options for reform.

Here's to another 20 years of the Tenants' Union of Queensland's triumphs and reforms for tenants!



Network News

Gosnells Community Legal Centre and Tenant Advocacy

Pauline McNamara (Tenant Advocate, GCLC)

Gosnells Community Legal Centre (GCLC) is a not for profit, community based and managed organisation. We are a multidisciplinary and multicultural team of workers and volunteers who are committed to the pursuit of social justice.

GCLC services the South East Metropolitan Corridor of Perth, which includes residents primarily in the shires of Gosnells and Armadale. We assist over 4,000 individuals and families every year.

Our particular focus is on ensuring our services meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community including, but not limited to, migrants and refugees, Indigenous people, youth, the elderly and single parents.

A variety of support services are offered to help resolve legal, financial or social issues. These programs include services in financial counselling, child support, family law, domestic violence, welfare rights, emergency relief, mediation, community legal education and tenancy.

Many of our clients benefit from accessing assistance for their interrelated problems from the one service. For example, housing issues do not often arise in isolation. A client may find themselves in housing difficulty due to problems with Centrelink or perhaps a relationship breakdown.

The location of GCLC in Gosnells Community Lotteries House has encouraged the development of good working relationships with local community organisations. It has ensured that referrals for additional assistance can be facilitated. Similarly, local services and organisations, such as Homeswest, Centrelink and DCD, are able to facilitate referrals to us.

Tenancy related issues are one of the most common problem types presented at GCLC. In 1999, a tenancy program was established at GCLC with the appointment of a part time tenant advocate. This position is funded by the Rental Accommodation Fund, which comprises the interest earned on tenant's bond monies.

The three most frequently raised tenancy issues have traditionally been bond recovery, the need for maintenance/repairs and termination notices. However, these are dwarfed by the number of people requiring assistance with Homeswest applications and appeals. There has also been a recent and increasing trend in people seeking advice and information about rent increases.

In many instances our duty intake officers (DIO) at the front counter are able to resolve tenancy matters with the client by providing information on the law and exploring the options available to them. Some matters require minor intervention such as a phone call to Homeswest to negotiate time to pay, or to a landlord to advocate a proposal. Clients with more complex problems are provided with an appointment to see our tenant advocate, Pauline McNamara.

Originally from the 'red centre' (Alice Springs), Pauline has been married for 34 years, has 4 sons and 5 grandchildren. She began work with GCLC as a volunteer in 2001 and has held the position of tenant advocate for past 3 years. Over this time she has developed considerable experience in a number of areas including an expertise in tenancy law, housing policy, advocacy and negotiation skills, and the attainment of a Diploma in Financial Counselling.

The tenant advocate, Pauline McNamara is available at GCLC between Tuesday to Thursday, 8am to 4.30pm. She can be contacted via email pauline@gosclc.com.au.



Public Housing Watch

Review and Rebuild

Rob Spinks (Executive Officer, Tenants Advice Service)

As reported in the December issue of TAS Talk, a number of reviews are being conducted by Department of Housing of Works into how the department currently operates and how it should operate into the future.

Review into Housing Service Delivery

This review is assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of public housing customer services provided by DHW's 10 regional offices and their branches. Over 40 'think tanks' attended by a wide range of people were conducted throughout the state between December and February this year. A discussion paper for stakeholder comment is expected to be released sometime in the next month.

Review into Homeswest Appeals Mechanism

DHW has undertaken to contract an independent consultant to conduct a review into the HAM. TAS welcomes this review and looks forward to providing input. It is expected to occur in the next few months.

Review into Boards and Committees

New Housing Minister's Forum

Minister Roberts has recently formed the Housing Minister's Forum. This forum which takes the place of the *Housing Advisory Committee* (a Ministerial standing committee with representatives from a wide range of organisations associated with social housing) will meet twice yearly. Its purpose will be to provide advice to the Minister on issues relating to social housing. It will have approximately 10 members which are generally peak bodies with an interest in social housing. TAS has taken up the offer of membership.

HOSC wound up

The *Housing Operational Standing Committee* has been disbanded. TAS feels that HOSC provided a valuable function through input into DHW rental policies. Much good work was done in this committee, leading directly to policy development and policy change. TAS does not see the Housing Minister's Forum as a suitable alternative to HOSC and looks forward to the development of an appropriate alternative forum.

Campaign News

Campaign Update

Over 1500 signatures from petition postcards were collected for the 'No Room in the Boom' Campaign and these were presented to the Minister for Department of Housing and Works Hon Michelle Roberts (MLA) in mid February by a small contingency of the Campaign Committee.

In late February, Campaign Committee representatives also met with staff of the Premier and with the Minister for Consumer Protection Hon Sheila McHale MLA, impressing upon them the issues raised by the Campaign and what the government could do to assist renters in the current rental crisis.

Responses by the current Government to the Campaign Committee indicated that they were aware of the Campaign, they acknowledged and were sympathetic to the tenancy issues raised, and were seriously considering the solutions presented to them by the Campaign Committee (as stated on the postcards).

Recent concrete developments for alleviating the rental crisis & housing affordability issues include:

- Calls on the Howard Government by the Premier and the Minister for Housing, requesting they boost rent assistance (press releases: 20.2.07 & 4.3.07) stating there is: "... clear evidence of the lack of understanding and compassion shown by Mr Howard for almost a quarter of WA Households who live in rental accommodation".
- Scrapping of Letting Fees announced by the Premier (press release: 4.3.07): "*Letting fees can be an unnecessary burden on those who are already cash-strapped and doing it hard trying to find suitable rental accommodation...The Premier said WA's economic boom had resulted in a pressurised rental market and meant consumers already had to battle each other for properties before finding bond money and rent in advance*".
- Investigating the possibility of scrapping option fees (press release 4.3.07): "...the Minister said she was also examining whether to scrap or cap 'application' and 'option' fees – a charge payable when submitting a rental application."

- Announcement of Shared Equity Scheme for First Home Buyers on low incomes, especially Homeswest tenants (12.2.07): *“The First Start scheme is designed to make this dream more attainable and is one of a series of measures the State Government will be implementing to help address housing affordability and land supply in WA.”*
- Dozens of articles in the paper and on TV News, highlighting the plight for renters. Some have been in direct response to the Campaign and its media releases.
- Housing Affordability Task Force and presentation of paper on WA’s Affordability Crisis (Jan 07) by the Opposition Leader Paul Omodei. Whilst the report falls short in providing specific recommendations to relieve the situations for renters, it did acknowledge a problem for renters saying..” *those who do not have their own property and are renting, the times have also been tough and are set to get much worse...Rents have grown by a 30 per cent on average over the last 18 months and are set to expand by around another 50 per cent over the next year of so”.*

And whilst some of the objectives of the Campaign have been achieved, the Campaign is far from over. Many of the Campaign objectives have yet to come to fruition and the community sector is clearly saying the problem for the most disadvantaged renters is getting worse, causing homelessness and putting additional pressure on SAAP and CAP services. Currently, one of the most common calls to TAS’ Tenants Advice Line is about rent increases. These issues and the Campaign are not going to go away.

The Campaign Committee in the next couple of weeks are having another ‘think tank’ to consider the next steps for the Campaign. The purpose is to explore how the Campaign can continue to put pressure on the Government, both Federal and State, for immediate and long term solutions for tenants. Whether one thinks the Campaign has been directly responsible for the interest in and outcomes for tenants may well be arguable, however, it is not difficult to argue for a need to continue to keep the tenants voice in the debate.

If there is no consolidated coordinated lobbying on behalf of the most disadvantaged tenants, then we risk leaving the voice in this debate (on affordable housing), to primarily that of the property developers, owners and real estate agents, who are very organised and powerful lobbyists.

The Campaign is therefore committed to continuing to provide a consolidated voice for tenants, with clear and repeated messages.

If anyone is interested in more information about the Campaign they can go to www.taswa.org and follow the Tenancy Week/Campaign link, or call Rob Spinks (TAS Executive Officer) or Michelle Burgermeister (Campaign Coordinator) on (08) 9221 9499.



Photo from left: Paul Prendegast (Shelter WA), Lynne MacLaren (WACOSS), Anna Paris (Ruah) and Rob Spinks (TAS) before presenting the Campaign postcards to the Minister for Department of Housing and Works.

Campaign Lobbying

The following are the arguments behind the demands made in the postcard petition that were taken to the Labor Government politicians in February this year.

1: Scrap letting and option fees currently paid by tenants

Currently an agent is allowed to charge the equivalent of one week's rent to the tenant for a **letting fee** that becomes the agent's commission (this commission is also paid by the landlord). We believe the tenant's contribution to the commission should cease as it is a service to the landlord, to be paid for by the landlord.

Tenants face a significant financial commitment when establishing a new tenancy at Perth's current median rent of \$250 per week:

<i>Option fee</i>	<i>\$250(refundable)</i>
Letting fee: 1 weeks rent	\$250
Bond: 4 weeks rent	\$1,000
Rent in advance: 2 weeks	\$500
Total:	\$2,000

An **option fee** is where the agent requires "a deposit" to be lodged with the application (one weeks rent). This fee is normally paid in cash by the applicant. The option fee is refunded if the application is unsuccessful. The problem is the speed of refund, particularly as the refund is normally paid by cheque and the delay caused by waiting for cheques to clear can prevent applicants with limited resources putting in further applications.

The payment of option fees seriously impedes the ability of low income tenants to establish new tenancies and limits their access to appropriate properties when available.

2: Increase the amount of bond and rent assistance provided

During 2005/06 the DHW established 9,445 bond assistance loans at an average value of \$487 (State Housing Commission; Annual Report 2005/06), as pointed out above the average tenancy costs \$2,000 to establish and Bond Assistance only covers half of the bond component.

Providing Bond Assistance Loans to cover 75% of the cost of 1,000 median priced bonds would cost an additional \$250,000.

As at March 2005, 85,122 West Australians received CRA payments. Nearly two thirds (60%) received the maximum amount payable. After receiving

CRA, 27.6% of households remained in housing stress, (paid more than 30% of gross income on rent) and 37.6% of recipients were not in housing stress before they received CRA. This means that CRA was successful in eliminating housing stress for just over one third (34.8%) of CRA recipients (Shelter WA).

In 2003, CRA was successful in eliminating housing stress for 37.4 % of recipients. Comparing this to the 2005 figure indicates that CRA is becoming less effective in staving of housing stress.

In 2005 the average annual affordability gap for these households was \$800 but since then rents have been increasing by around 19% per annum in Perth. The situation is much worse for households in regional areas impacted upon by the mining boom and tourism, for example Port Hedland.

In June 2006 the average weekly rent for a 3 bedroom property in Port Hedland was \$602 by September 2006 it had grown to \$650. This equates to a rental increase of \$48 per week which would have absorbed 79% of the \$60.62 CRA the household received, leaving only \$12.60 to go toward improving affordability.

CRA is ineffective in the Western Australian context where different regions have vastly different weekly rents. The estimated cost of introducing a State CRA top up would be \$17.6 mil per annum (based on 2005 gap).

3: Pass new laws to prevent excessive rent increases

Renters are experiencing financial difficulty as a result of rapidly increasing rents, in one period last year, (Sept 05 to Sept 06), the median rent increased by 19%. This rate is 6 times the current CPI of 3.3%. We recommend tying rent increases to an index, for example CPI through provisions in the WA Residential Tenancies Act. This will ensure housing affordability is maintained at a sustainable level for low-medium income private rental tenants.

4: Restore public housing to 6% of housing stock

In 2005/06 the DHW added 879 dwellings to their stock public housing, at a cost of \$203 million, approximately 80% of these were newly constructed and the remainder were established dwellings purchased at market price (DHW Annual Report 2005/06). This year the average cost of acquisitions will be approximately \$233,000 per dwelling.

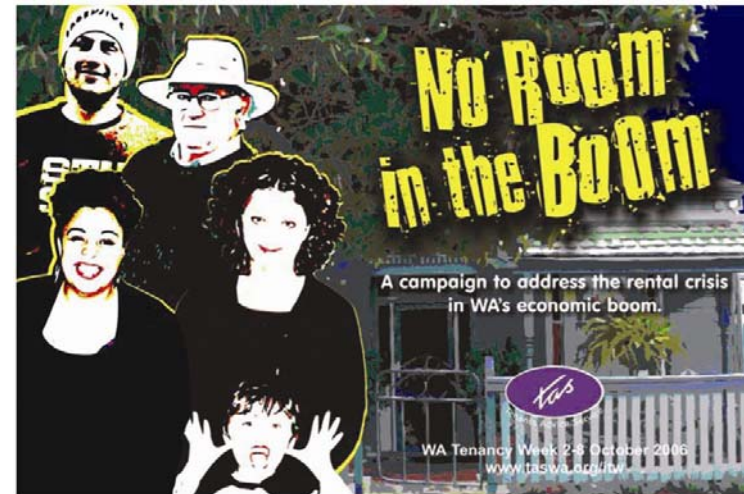
Each year approximately 22,000 new dwellings are added to the total stock in the State of 818,000 dwellings (2006). Public housing currently represents just over 4% of the States total housing stock. Last year 879 dwellings were added to the stock of public housing, at this rate public housing is set to continue its proportional decline. In order to maintain a presence of 4% requires an additional 920 housing units per annum, to reach our recommended target of 6% by 2015 will require the DHW to acquire a total of 3,308 housing units per annum.

Table 1: Public housing acquisitions and cost of reaching 6% target by 2015.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
All Dwellings @ start of year	818,000	840,000	862,000	884,000	906,000	928,000	950,000	972,000	994,000
Are. New Dwellings Constructed	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000	22,000
Total Housing Stock Projection WA	840,000	862,000	884,000	906,000	928,000	950,000	972,000	994,000	1,016,000
Public Housing Required to equal 6%	50,400	51,720	53,040	54,360	55,680	57,000	58,320	59,640	60,960
PH Stock @ 2006	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500	34,500
Additions to reach 6% by 2015		1,988	1,988	1,988	1,988	1,988	1,988	1,988	1,988
PH Additions @ 6% of New Dwellings		1,320	1,320	1,320	1,320	1,320	1,320	1,320	1,320
Additions to Achieve PH @ 6% by 2015		3,308	3,308	3,308	3,308	3,308	3,308	3,308	3,308
Total PH Stock Required for 6% by 2015		37,808	41,115	44,423	47,730	51,038	54,345	57,653	60,960
PH Projected Prop. of All Dwellings		4.4%	4.7%	4.9%	5.1%	5.4%	5.6%	5.8%	6.0%
PH Shortfall 2006	15,900								
Est. Cost Per Dwelling Plus (3% CPI)	\$233,000	\$239,990	\$247,190	\$254,605	\$262,244	\$270,111	\$278,214	\$286,561	\$295,157
Est. Cost of PH Achieving 6% by 2015		\$793,766,925	\$817,579,933	\$842,107,331	\$867,370,651	\$893,391,667	\$920,193,417	\$947,799,220	\$976,233,196

Source: ABS and DHW Annual Report

Picture below: No Room in the Boom Campaign postcard



No Room in the Boom!

A campaign to address the rental crisis in WA's economic boom.

Dear Premier

WA is experiencing a rental crisis. Rents have skyrocketed and there is a shortage of properties available for rent. Whilst WA may well be experiencing an economic boom, residential tenants are hurting and this problem does not look like it will be solved by market forces alone. If nothing is done soon the impact on ordinary and disadvantaged tenants will become an even greater problem. **Action needs to be taken now!**

I therefore urge the Western Australian Government to:

- Scrap letting and option fees currently paid by tenants
- Increase the amount of bond & rental assistance provided
- Pass new laws to prevent excessive rent increases
- Restore public housing to 6% of total housing stock.

Signed by: _____
 Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Email: _____

More information about Tenancy Week (2-8 October) and the **No Room in the Boom Campaign** (on-going) can be found on the website: www.taswa.org.au/itw or call Tenants Advice Service on (08) 9221 9499. We can make arrangements to collect signed postcards.

To help you, the Campaign Committee will forward this signed card to the Premier

Attention:
 Premier of Western Australia
 The Hon Alan Carpenter MLA

C/- No Room in the Boom
 Campaign Committee
 PO Box 6057
 Perth WA 6892

I want to be kept up to date about the Campaign via email. (tick)

Story of a Petitioner

Michelle Burgermeister talks with Carole De Barre (Community Support Worker, Ruah Inreach)

The response to the Campaign from community workers has been very strong with dozens calling the Tenants Advice Service about the terrible effect the rental crisis has had on their client groups. Some have felt so passionate about the campaign objectives that they organised to inform people of the campaign and to collect signatures.

The following is an interview with Carole de Barre, one of those impassioned community workers who single-handedly collected almost 150 signatures:

What is the work you do?

I work within two teams. I am a Social Worker with Community Mental Health. We support people to successfully live in the community with their mental health issues. I am also a Community Support Worker in a program called Ruah Inreach under the umbrella of Ruah Community Services.

What does Ruah Inreach do?

Ruah Inreach has 5 mental health community work support teams across Metropolitan Perth. The purpose of these teams is to stop the 'revolving door' syndrome into hospitals. Our goal is to keep these clients out of hospital and in the community.

The work we do is totally directed by the client. We assist them on anything they feel is important to them. This can include helping them with issues around accommodation, mental health, medication, employment and work force issues, connecting them with community and counselling.

We work from what we call a recovery model, as opposed to a medical model, which means that by addressing the whole person with the right support we can stabilise them in the community and enrich their lives. Too often the focus is just on their mental health problem and sometimes fixing their housing problem can make all the difference.

Are many of your clients who are tenants affected by the rental crisis?

Most of my clients are tenants and many have been affected by the rental crisis. The most significant issue has been rental increases. I have just had one client, whose rent went up by \$50 per week, which is about 25% in one hit. She is on a disability support pension, and she is now really struggling

financially. I have no doubt that the current rental situation will continue to effect clients in the future.

Why have you got behind the Campaign?

The Campaign struck a chord with me because of the impact the rental crisis has had on our client group. Most of our clients are on disability pensions and are being housed in the private rental market. I know they will and are being severely disadvantaged by the pressure the economic boom has added to rental prices and the shortage of rental properties. When you have a mental illness you don't need extra stress in your life, it just exacerbates the illness.

How did you manage to collect so many signatures?

At first I took the postcards to my workplaces at Rockingham and Kwinana Mental Health Services and to Ruah. I asked co-workers to sign and to my surprise they did so with enthusiasm. I then started taking them to our regularly run Ruah group activities. Clients and their families were curious about them and when I explained the Campaign to them they were keen to sign them.

What has been the response by tenants/clients to the postcard?

The response to the postcards was very positive. Everyone when informed about the Campaign agreed it was a good thing to do. Some said it was great that people cared about tenants and that there were campaigns trying to get things improved. Only a couple of people were reluctant to sign. One was an investor who said they felt too guilty to sign because they were putting up their rent!

Overall this is an important issue and I think the Campaign has heartened struggling tenants out there that someone cares about what they are dealing with.

Below photo: Social Worker Carole de Barre from Ruah Inreach.



TAS News

Policy Work - Tenants Advice Service

Rental Crisis

The current rental crisis has been big news over the last few weeks. The media, both locally and nationally, have recently picked up on what most tenants have known for some time, that: "Times are tough if you are a tenant or looking for a rental property in WA."

TAS has been very active in raising public awareness and lobbying the government's decision makers for actions that will make a real difference to renters in the current market. The '*No Room in the Boom*' Campaign which is supported by a wide range of organisations has continued to gather momentum and is having real influence. See previous articles for Campaign updates.

RTA review

Many readers will be aware that the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 has been under review for some years. The completion of this review appears to be edging closer with recent assurances from the Minister's office that a government position paper is almost ready for release. It is understood that there will be opportunities to comment on the recommendations for reform outlined in this paper.

Discrimination Actions

In late 2006, TAS researched discrimination in the rental industry in WA and forwarded submissions to the 'United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing' and to the Commissioner of the WA Equal Opportunity Commission, Yvonne Henderson. TAS has since received advice from Yvonne Henderson that the EOC is seriously considering a public education program, similar to one undertaken in Victoria, on discrimination and renting.

Boarder and Lodger Working Party

A cross departmental working party with very broad representation is soon to complete a report which will make specific recommendations about the introduction of consumer protection measures for boarders and lodgers as well as strategies to sustain, increase and diversify boarding and lodging stock in WA.

TAS Policy Priorities

TAS recently identified its policy priorities for 2007. These include:

- providing solutions to the rental crisis;
- influencing the relationships between utility providers and tenants;
- having input into the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism review;
- clarifying consumer protection measures for SAAP housing;
- progressing consumer protection measures for boarders and lodgers; and
- influencing the regulations/legislation that applies to park home owners.

TAS Training and Seminar Events (March – June 07)

March

1 March	Roofs for Youth Training
8 & 9 Mar	Tenancy Law for Community Workers
20 March	Seminar: Racial Hatred Laws and Tenancy

April

17 April	WA Tenancy Network Op. Forum
18 & 19 April	Tenancy Law & Homeswest Tenancies

May

9 & 10 May	Tenancy Discrimination
21 & 22 May	Tenancy Law for Community Workers

June

6 & 7 June	Tenancy Law for Homeswest Tenancies
12 June	WA Tenancy Network Op. Forum
13, 14, 15 June	Court Advocacy
25 June	Residential Parks (Long-stay Tenants) Act 2006

A copy of the Training Calendar and course details can be downloaded from the TAS website (Education/Events link) or by contacting TAS on 9221 9499.

Community Services Industry Award 2006

The Tenants Advice Service was a finalist in the 2006 Community Services Industry Award for the category: *Strengthening the Community Services*. TAS showcased its *Training, Education, Publications and Advice Line Programs for Community Workers*.

Upon notification of being a finalist, Rob Spinks said: "I think we were chosen because of our long standing and innovative approach to contributing to the community sector's learning on tenancy law".

Each year the Department of Community Development provides an award to celebrate and recognise the contribution and efforts of people and agencies in the community services industry across WA. The Industry Awards were presented at a dinner at the Rendezvous Observation City Hotel in Scarborough with hundreds of workers from the community sector. The TAS contingency included Rob Spinks, Michelle Burgermeister, Mia Jeffrey and Ann-Margaret Walsh.

The winner for this category was *Perth Inner City Youth Service project: Opening Closets*.



Photo: Awards night attendees, from left Michelle Burgermeister and Ann-Margaret Walsh (TAS).



TAS Staff Movements

In January this year our Administrator Helen Feasey left TAS after nearly 3 years, to pursue a career in accounting with the Australian Tax Office. During her time here she made huge innovative changes to the accounts and electronic filing system. Her expansive knowledge store and sense of humour will be missed in the office.

James Graham has been a casual telephone advice line worker at TAS for almost 2 years. He has left to concentrate further on his law studies at Edith Cowan University and enter the more lucrative area of security shift work.

Mia Jeffrey started in July 2005 as the Publications and Promotions Officer. In mid-March she is reluctantly leaving her job at TAS for a sea-change with her husband to sunny Geraldton.

Our new administrator, Richard Hopkins, started at TAS on 6th March 2007. We wish him a happy and smooth transition.



Top left: TAS staff Taryn Benn, Debbie Wardle, Rob Spinks, Toby King, Mia Jeffrey and Rebecca Hall.

Top right: Lucie Panero and Paul Harrison at TAS Xmas.

Bottom left: Ann-Margaret Walsh and Alicia Mayer at TAS Xmas.

Bottom right: Debbie Wardle and James Graham at TAS Xmas.

TAS Services

Tenants Advice Service (TAS) is a community legal centre funded to provide quality advice, education and information to residential tenants and community workers in WA.

The vision of TAS is a society where the rights of tenants are respected, protected and encouraged.

We do this through:

- Developing and responding to policy and law reform.
- Providing legal advice on most matters related to tenancy law.
- Providing education and training on the rights and responsibilities of tenants.
- Producing a range of publications relating to tenancy.

Acknowledgements

TAS is funded by the Commonwealth through its Community Legal Service Program and the State Department of Consumer and Employment Protection's Tenancy Advice and Education Program.

Contributions

TAS Talk aims to keep community workers up to date with state-wide tenancy issues, policy developments, activities and reports. It also discusses broader tenancy issues in the context of market and housing issues, National and International issues and trends.

If you are interested in contributing to future issues of TAS Talk, call TAS on 08 9221 9499 or email tas@taswa.org

The **next edition of TAS Talk will be available in June 2007**. All items to be published must be received by **4.30pm on Friday 25th May 2007**.

If you have any problems accessing this edition of TAS Talk, you would like to unsubscribe or would like to offer any other feedback, please contact the Tenants Advice Service either by phone on 08 9221 94999 or email to tas@taswa.org.

Disclaimer

The views of those expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect TAS' views.

Membership/Donation Form

By becoming a TAS member you will:

- support the continuation of an independent service for tenants
- receive information about the latest developments in tenancy
- have the opportunity to provide input into the role and direction of TAS
- be eligible to nominate for the TAS Executive Committee
- receive discount rates on our community worker manuals
- receive the quarterly TAS Talk newsletter

Please fill in:

Contact Name:

Organisation:

Postal Address / Postcode:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Please tick:

New membership / Membership renewal / Donation

Please tick:

- UNWAGED/STUDENT/PENSIONER \$5.00 gst free
 INDIVIDUAL \$10.00 gst free
 ORGANISATION \$22.00 gst incl.
 I wish to make a donation of \$____.00
(Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible)

Please make cheque/money order payable to: Tenants Advice Service

Please return this form to:

Tenants Advice Service Inc

PO Box 6057 East Perth WA 6892

admin 08 9221 9499 fax 08 9221 9609

email tas@taswa.org web www.taswa.org

To pay by direct credit, ring TAS for account details.

On completion, this will be a TAX INVOICE

ABN 57 997 204 986