



**Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft:**

**Tenants Advice Service/Shelter WA  
Consultation Report**

**Tuesday 14 February 2006**

## **Aim**

The aim of the Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft Consultation was to provide a forum for tenant advocates and other people working with households with housing difficulties to:

- ❖ Be informed by the Department of Housing and Works of the background and purpose of the Housing Strategy;
- ❖ Be informed of the draft response drawn up by the Tenants Advice Service;
- ❖ Identify and raise issues of current or potential concern associated with housing in the Western Australia community;
- ❖ To discuss whether these issues have been considered in either the Strategy or TAS' draft response;
- ❖ To provide feedback on areas of concern to be included within TAS' response to the Strategy.

## **Introduction**

The Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft was released by the Western Australian State Government in June 2005. The Strategy has drawn on significant research and positioning papers analyzing major housing issues in the State and how housing requirements have changed over the past 30 years. The Strategy is based around five strategic areas with each including several initiatives to achieve the overriding objectives. The Housing Strategy is intended to provide affordable housing solutions for the people of Western Australia for the next 25 to 30 years.

The Government has sought feedback and comment from housing stakeholders, State and local Government, industry associations and all members of the wider community on the Strategy. The closing date for feedback and comment is 28 February 2006. The feedback received will be used to enable the Strategy to be re-drafted, with this final Strategy being sent to Parliament by mid 2006.

## **Presentations**

Rob Spinks, Executive Officer of Tenants Advice Service hosted the forum.

The opening presentation was by Bev Wilcox, Senior Policy Officer with the Department of Housing and Works, Office of Policy and Planning. Bev provided forum participants with a brief explanation of the background research basis for the Strategy and a review of the document's strategic objectives.

The second presentation was a brief review of the draft response compiled by the Tenants Advice Service to the Housing Strategy. TAS has drafted a comprehensive response to the Housing Strategy which acknowledges strategies the organization supports, issues TAS believes the document has failed to consider adequately and matters that the document has failed to consider at all. In hosting this forum, TAS was seeking to gain further knowledge from those groups working with tenants and people with housing difficulties on issues of concern which would either validate or amend the draft response. TAS welcomed all comments made by the forum participants as they all contribute to our better understanding of housing issues and whether the Strategy has acknowledged all of these matters.

The final presentation, given after the general forum discussion, was an overview by Karel Eringa of the areas of concern to be highlighted in Shelter WA's response to the Housing Strategy. Shelter WA is undertaking a comprehensive response to the Housing Strategy WA and has organized a number of similar forums with different groups to enable a better understanding of the range of issues affecting housing in this State.

## **Issues Raised by Forum Participants**

After the presentations by the Department of Housing and Works and Tenants Advice Service, Rob Spinks invited participants to raise any issues of concern regarding housing availability, suitability or affordability, or any related housing issue. Participants did not necessarily need to have read the Housing Strategy before commenting as all contributions are useful in better understanding where problems lay and whether the Housing Strategy has considered these matters.

The following issues were raised by participants. These have been placed within the various Strategic Areas as defined by the Housing Strategy.

### **General/Guiding the System:**

- The proposed 25-30 year lifespan of the Housing Strategy is too long without regular review during this period to ensure it maintains relevancy and is achieving its objectives and aims.
- The need for increased co-operation between government agencies to prevent homelessness among at risk groups such as victims of domestic violence and children at risk.
- Regional Housing Strategies need to be redrafted to acknowledge the realities of housing people in new areas. Currently for example in Bunbury people are being encouraged to move into new developments where there is no infrastructure or social services.

- Prices of land in regional areas such as Bunbury are simultaneously being pushed up due to demand meaning Homeswest cannot afford to compete with private investors to purchase and develop the land.
- There needs to be adequate service provision to people across all regional areas, such as providing health services to all who need it.
- Lack of housing is a dynamic situation that will continue to worsen even whilst the Housing Strategy is being discussed and reviewed. Solutions need to be proactive and operate within reasonably brief time frames.

#### **Home Ownership:**

- Make available financial assistance similar to rent assistance (CRA) for eligible home purchasers.
- Allow certain households to access their superannuation to help them purchase a home.
- The current DHW home purchase equity scheme of 70%/30% split is not realistic for many people – if this was reduced to perhaps 80%/20% more households would be able to purchase.

#### **Private Rental:**

- Tenure security for private tenants could be assisted by amending the Residential Tenancies Act to allow rental increases to be capped.
- Private tenants would also benefit from abolishing the need to pay a deposit in private rental accommodation.
- While 5 year tenancies may provide some security of tenure to private tenants, the Residential Tenancies Act needs to be amended to offer protection to tenants needing to vacate the tenancy for reasons beyond their control.
- Owners of private rental properties (investors) should be required to contribute to the Rental Accommodation Fund. Investors/owners make considerable use of the Magistrate's Court in relation to tenancy disputes but do not contribute to the operation of the system and this should be amended.
- Seek explanation as to whether the money being offered as financial incentives to private investors/developers to provide low cost accommodation would not be better used if it was spent directly on improving and increasing Homeswest stock.
- Centrelink places barriers in the way of household seeking to relocate to areas (often rural) that are more affordable. This then places households in greater financial and housing stress.
- Private rental demand is a dynamic market, so the idea of conducting an audit of rental supply and demand at one given point in time will be meaningless as this will change almost immediately it is completed.
- Currently three times more money is spent on the provision of rent assistance than on the provision of public housing in Australia yet it results in only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of households being relieved of housing stress. The

system needs to be reevaluated and a more efficient way of assisting people into affordable housing needs to be developed.

**Government Supported Housing:**

- Homeswest must stop focusing on priority need or high need clients and provide housing assistance to all low income households. By assisting low income households as soon as possible the chance of housing difficulties worsening is decreased.
- Homeswest needs to acknowledge that all people have a fundamental right to safe, affordable and appropriate housing and that no Homeswest tenants should face eviction.
- Current Homeswest stock is old with many associated maintenance problems. Tenants are being held responsible for old stock disintegrating simply due to age, and the inability to pay for this damage leads to tenancy debts. Similarly many older houses are on large blocks which tenants cannot afford to water and maintain, again leading to problems with their tenancies for untidy properties.

**Supporting Priority Need:**

- The Strategy aims to increase aged care facilities to meet the demands of the current population and the ageing Baby Boomers, but with a declining population there is likely to be a surplus of such facilities in the future. What will happen to these facilities then?
- There are a number of existing aged care provision programs in operation which are not being adequately funded by the Commonwealth – how does the State government foresee the new proposed projects will be adequately financed?
- Why is the Strategy looking to introduce new aged care programs when many ‘pilot programs’ such as the ACHA have been operating for 10 years with successful results but have not been implemented as substantive programs?
- When providing housing assistance (whether through public housing or the private market) to migrants or new arrivals the housing must be culturally appropriate – language difficulties and barriers need to be acknowledged and accounted for, dwelling size needs to be catered for.
- The idea of one solution for all situations does not work and this needs to be amended – do not attempt to make the person/household fit the house, but rather the house fit the person/household (cultural needs, requirements of personal situation of each individual). The cultural needs of Indigenous people must be considered when allocating accommodation and in this way associated problems of overcrowding and inappropriate behaviour problems may be largely avoided.
- The Strategy has an ethnocentric view of the housing solution for Indigenous people – Indigenous people are not an homogenous group

whose housing problems can be met by one solution. The Strategy needs to rectify this failing if it aims to meet the housing needs of Indigenous people.

- The Strategy fails to acknowledge the findings of the Equal Opportunity Commission report *Finding a Place* (December 2004) and thus cannot possibly hope to solve the many housing problems Indigenous people face.
- Crisis housing and housing for refugees is also social housing and should be given the same level of acknowledgement and resourcing as general social housing. Current problems with crisis housing for women escaping domestic violence is that accommodation is always filled to capacity and male children over a certain age cannot be housed, causing additional distress for the mother and children.

## **Conclusion**

A common concern raised during the forum was the need for housing to be more responsive to the individual and their culture. Accommodation must acknowledge that all people, even of the same culture, are different and require different solutions to housing problems. Similarly the need for public and social housing to be available for all people on low incomes, not just those with greatest need, and it must be suitable and reflect their ability to meet the costs of that housing stock. Ageing stock costs tenants money they can least afford. Where home ownership is possible for those who seek it, new and innovative ways of helping people enter the market must be considered.

Tenants Advice Service would like to thank all the forum participants for their attendance and contribution to the discussion on the Housing Strategy WA. A number of housing issues were raised by participants and these are noted above in greater detail and will be used to help further inform our response to the Strategy.



## Consultation - Housing Strategy WA

Tuesday 14 February 2006 at 1pm

A forum

to discuss the State Government's draft 25 year plan for housing in WA.

### Agenda

1.00pm	1.0 Introduction
1.10pm	2.0 Overview of <i>Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft</i> – (DHW)
1.40pm	3.0 Summary of TAS' draft response (Nicola)
1.55pm	4.0 Facilitated discussion (Rob)
2.45pm	5.0 Shelter WA's position on the discussion draft (Karel)
2.55pm	6.0 Summary
3.00pm	7.0 Close

## **Attendance Register**

### **Name**

### **Organisation**

Cherie Dawkings	Wesley Mission Perth
Bruce Lovatt	Wesley Mission Perth
Helen Humes	Mission Australia – SHAP
Udami Abeysinghe	Communicare
Sue Chadwick	NSCLC
Ann Marie Paulson	City of Cockburn
James Kirton	Sussex Street
Deborah Devattimo	M.I.D.L.A.S.
Robyn Withnell	Community & Youth Training Services
Camille Inifer	Gosnells Community Legal Centre
Pauline McNamara	Gosnells Community Legal Centre
Eden Knight	Agencies for South West Accommodation Inc.
Diana Campbell	FCLC
Paul Harrison	WRAS
Karel Eringa	Shelter WA
Bev Wilcox	Dept of Housing & Works, Office of Policy & Planning
Mia Ziembinski	Tenants Advice Service
Debbie Wardle	Tenants Advice Service
Rob Spinks	Tenants Advice Service
Nicola Milsom	Tenants Advice Service