

# Chairperson's Report

In 2005 and 2006 Shelter WA continued to provide an important service to the community of Western Australia. The staff at Shelter have continued to work above and beyond the call of duty, and it is for this reason that Shelter has been able to achieve the following outcomes in the past 12 months.

The commencement of Shelter's strategic planning process, which will outline the direction of the organisation for the next three to four years.

Shelter WA completed a significant amount of work with the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and the Equal Opportunity Commission to progress the recommendations made by the Equal Opportunity Commission's Section 80 Report, Finding a PLace. The outcome of this process included assisting the DHW develop an action plan to implement the recommendations of the S80 Report.

Shelter WA also completed the Hedland Regional Housing Analysis and the Boarders and Lodgers Collaboration/Project. As well as a number of

Forums across the state, including significant work in Belmont and Mandurah.

The continuation of Shelters Newsletter in the past year saw Shelter provide comment on the organisation's position on under occupancy and housing in the western suburbs. Shelter provided an overview of housing in the recent Federal and State Budgets and the work from Shelter's Port Hedland forum, along with comment on the Department of Housing and Work's policies including information and feedback about the Western Australian Housing Strategy.

Importantly, Shelter WA signed a new three year funding agreement with the Department of Housing and Works.

As this is my last Report as Chairperson of Shelter WA I would like to wish everyone all the best. I resigned from the position in September this year and would like give special thanks to all the staff at Shelter. For the Committee members who have been supportive and helped to progress Shelter in the past two years, I would like to say thank you. I wish Shelter WA all the best for the future.

Heath Flanagan

# Agency Report

## KEY ISSUES FOR HOUSING IN WA

In the last two Annual Reports Shelter WA has identified affordability for home purchasers as the key issue in housing and this year is no different. A further interest rate rise and house price growth of 31.5% means that the average family can no longer afford to purchase an average house. While house prices slowed in other parts of Australia in 2005/06, in Western Australia the situation with regard to affordability got worse and prices have grown at over five times the National average.

This was caused partly by a quarter percent interest rate rise in May 2006. However, the bulk of the decrease in affordability was again due to increasing house prices. In Perth, the median house price grew by 21.7% over the year to \$395,000. In regional Western Australia, house prices generally caught up with Perth, with an average increase across the state of 29.4%. Some regional centres continued to experience extreme growth rates, including Mandurah (39.8%), Albany (33.7%), Margaret River (24.3%), Bunbury (38.8%) and Geraldton (30.7%). However, price growth in some other centres was more measured, for instance Broome (12%) and Kalgoorlie-Boulder (13.9%) and.

In last year's Annual Report, the median rent had started to catch up with house price growth and this year rents are growing even faster. In Perth, the median rent jumped 26.9%, from \$189 to \$240 per week. The immediate cause of higher rents is the continued decline in vacancy rates, down from a very tight 2.5% in June 2005 to an extremely tight 1.8%. Vacancy rates appear to be particularly low at the bottom end of the market.

In turn, the low vacancy rate was caused by two factors. The first of these was that Western Australia is continuing to experience positive net migration of 1.6% the second fastest growth rate of the states and territories. The second factor is that house prices have now put home ownership beyond the reach of households earning \$50,000 per year in all of Perth 291 suburbs, down from 21 in 2005. This has caused increased demand for private rental housing, from families who would otherwise have made the transition to home ownership.

At the time of writing, there is no reason to assume that any of the structural factors behind the recent increases in rents will change any time soon. If economic growth continues, as forecast, at its current high levels, house prices will continue to

increase, vacancy rates will remain low and rents will continue to rise. Moreover, at 3.2% Perth's median rental return is at record lows, suggesting there is ample potential for rent increases.

At the same time, social housing has continued its slow decline. Stock numbers fell again this year, from 39,139 to 39,084. Within the social housing sector there has been some divergence. The number of Homeswest dwellings fell from 34,870 to 34,500, while a continued emphasis on community housing saw this sector grow from 3,107 to 4,275 dwellings. Indigenous remote housing also increased, from 1,223 to 1,361 dwellings. This pattern reflects a longer term trend: since 1997, mainstream public housing has declined by 4.7%, while community housing has increased by 66.6% and Indigenous remote housing by 63%.

As population and household numbers have grown, social housing now comprises 4% of all occupied housing stock in WA, down from 4.15% last year and 6.1% in 1997. The Homeswest waiting list is roughly the same as it was 10 years ago, with 13,780 waiting to be housed. This represents a significant decline from the 2001 high of 15,456 but is a small increase over last year's number (12,788).

Most importantly, however, the continuing failure to expand social housing stock has resulted in a decline in the number of families housed. In 2004/05, the number of families provided with Homeswest housing was at its lowest level since Shelter WA began monitoring this statistic in 1982. In 2004/05 only 4,071 new tenancies were created and the DHW Annual Report states that this number has fallen again over the past year, compared to an annual average of 5,074 over 1997-2004 and 7,046 over the 1992-96 period. This is also reflected in the average wait time, which has increased from 56 weeks in 1997 to 74 weeks in 2006, and the median wait time, which is now 11 months, compared to 5 months in 1997.

There is increasing evidence that the lack of an adequate supply of affordable and appropriate housing across all tenures has produced increased pressure on some of the most vulnerable groups in society. As more and more relatively well-off families are either delaying or giving up altogether on purchasing their own house, they reside for extended periods of time in private rental.

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Falling vacancy rates and increasing rents mean that people who are less well off can no longer rely on the private sector for appropriate housing that they can afford. The outcome is increased pressure on the social housing sector, reflected in increased waiting lists and longer waiting times.

At the human level, the more vulnerable groups end up at an increased risk of homelessness or in inadequate housing. Large refugee families, young people, Aboriginal families and people with mental health issues are amongst the first to be effectively excluded from mainstream accommodation. As a consequence, these groups will be forced to reside for longer in expensive or inappropriate types of accommodation. Many end up roofless, forced to overcrowd with their friends and relatives' housing or staying for extended periods in refuges and crisis accommodation.

Put in simple terms, Western Australia's housing boom has provided a financial windfall for existing home owners and, via increased tax revenue, to the State and Commonwealth Governments. However, the boom has a shadow side, causing increased housing stress for many and homelessness for the most vulnerable groups.

The soon to be implemented State Housing Strategy will be an important first step in recognising the extent of the housing crisis caused by the boom. However, both the State and the Commonwealth Governments now need to match this recognition with commitments expressed in dollars and targets expressed in stock numbers and percentages.

## WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR: CORE FUNDING

As stated above, Shelter WA receives its core funding from the Department of Housing and Works (DHW). In 2004/05, Shelter WA the basis of the funding shifted from an annual workplan to a two yearly Service Agreement, with an annual Contract Management Plan. As of the 2006/07 financial year the biannual funding agreement will be replaced by a three year contract. The goals of the 2005/06 Contract Management Plan were as follows:

- To be an effective voice on housing issues
- To inform members of the community sector about housing issues
- To support members of the community sector to work together to achieve positive housing outcomes for low income housing consumers

- To take a lead role in the development of social housing policy positions which reflect and are informed by Shelter WA's constituency
- To manage Shelter WA effectively, efficiently and appropriately for the benefit of the community.
- To further develop Shelter WA's research capacity

The 2005/06 Contract Management Plan focused Shelter WA's activities on four key areas:

1. Housing Advisory Committee
2. Community consultation
3. Input into Department of Housing and Works policies and practices
4. Information provision to the community

In practice, much of Shelter WA's activity under its core funding agreement was influenced by two major events that took place in 2005/06. The first of these was the National Housing Conference, which took place in Perth in October 2005. The second major event was the launch of the draft discussion paper for the Housing Strategy WA. As will be evident from the overview below, Shelter WA took a very active role in both of these events.

### 1. Housing Advisory Committee (HAC)

The Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) is an advisory body to the Minister for Housing and Works. Its role is to advise the Minister on State government housing policy, to participate in the development of Department of Housing and Works policy and program initiatives, to advise on research and the development of new policies and to assist in identifying housing needs in the community.

HAC is chaired by the Minister for Housing and Works and its membership includes representation from industry, community bodies, relevant State and Commonwealth Government Departments, and local government. It has two standing committees, the Homeswest Operational Standing Committee (HOSC) and the Regional Housing Standing Committee (RHSC). HOSC deals with operational issues associated with Homeswest; Shelter WA provides the chair of this committee.

In early 2006, the new Minister for Housing, Michelle Roberts, suspended the Housing Advisory Committee until further notice. HAC held an informal meeting in May, which resulted in a

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proposal for an amended structure of HAC that was sent to Minister Roberts. The general outline of the proposal is for an annual HAC meeting, along with quarterly meetings of three standing committees as well as quarterly meetings between the Minister, Director General of DHW and the Chairs of the three Standing Committees. At the time of writing the Minister had not yet responded, and at this stage the future of HAC remains uncertain.

Despite the uncertain future of HAC, Shelter WA pursued a number of issues pursued through both HAC and HOSC in 2005/06. These issues included:

## *Underoccupancy*

Underoccupancy occurs when a dwelling is occupied by significantly fewer people than the number of bedrooms would allow. HOSC and the Department of Housing and Works were concerned about underoccupancy within public housing because Homeswest's waiting list for large family housing could potentially be cleared if all one, two and three person households occupying four plus bedroom properties were to relocate into more appropriately sized dwellings.

In order to investigate how this might be achieved, HOSC established a working party to undertake research into underoccupancy and consult with the community to develop an appropriate policy. The working party was convened by Shelter WA and its membership included representatives from the Department of Housing and Works, Department of Consumer and Employment Protection and the Tenants Advice Service.

The working party conducted community consultations and statistical research, which found that underoccupancy is a significant issue in public housing in Western Australia. The main driver of underoccupancy was found to be a combination of changing bedroom requirement of some Homeswest tenants and the lack of terms within the Homeswest Tenancy Agreement and Rental Policy Manual to allow Homeswest to require under occupying tenants to relocate to more appropriately sized dwellings.

The working party's final report was released in July 2005, and included amendments to the DHW Tenancy Management Policy. The report is available from:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm).

## *Good Neighbour Policy*

Early in 2005, the Minister for Housing announced his intention to initiate changes to Department of Housing and Works policies and procedures with regard to antisocial behaviour of its tenants. The Minister referred the policy to the Homeswest Operational Standing Committee, which established a working party on the issue. The working party was convened by Shelter WA. Its membership included representatives from the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection, Department of Community Development, Jacaranda Community Centre and the Tenants Advice Service.

The working party identified six main concerns with the draft policy:

- Introduction of fixed term tenancies
- Extending the Good Neighbour Agreement to all tenants
- Lack of funding for appropriate mediation services
- Potential breach of privacy legislation
- Problems with practical implementation due to subjective terminology

The working party's final report made six recommendations, suggesting changes to both the language and the substance of the Good Neighbour Operational Policy and the associated Acceptable Behaviour Agreement. In addition, the working party recommended that households with a history of anti-social behaviour should be required to receive tenancy support rather than put onto fixed term tenancies, and that the DHW negotiate Memorandums of Understanding with a number of mediation services as well as the WA Police and Local Government Authorities. Finally, the working party recommended that the DHW include information on how to maintain a successful tenancy in a pamphlet.

The final report of the Good Neighbour working party was released in July 2005 and is available from:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm).

## *Other issues*

Other issues that Shelter WA progressed through HAC and HOSC in 2005/06 included:

- *Public Housing Rent Reform*
- *Not For Profit Housing Company*

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- *AHURI Research Agenda*
- *DHW Relocations Policy*
- *DHW Excess Occupants and Visitors Policy*
- *DHW Tenants with poor tenancy history*
- *Fair wear and tear*

## 2. Community Consultation

### *Housing Strategy WA*

"In July 2000, the Office of Housing Policy began some background research in preparation for the development of a housing strategy for Western Australia, in order to provide a robust framework for the advice it provides to Government. The thinking behind the work was that in order to fulfil its role of advising the Minister for Housing and Works and the Department of Housing and Works, on broader housing issues, it needed to take a holistic approach to the housing sector and the relationships between the various segments. On taking government in February, 2001, the Labor administration moved to consider the applicability of the work done so far, to their pre-election promise to undertake a housing strategy."

The then Minister for Housing and Works, Fran Logan, launched the Discussion Draft of Housing Strategy WA in September 2005. Between October 2005 and February 2006, Shelter WA consulted widely with housing consumers and agencies to inform its submission to draft discussion paper of the Housing Strategy WA.

Shelter WA used two types of consultations, being focus groups and community forums. The community forums were organised with partner organisations including the Equal Opportunity Commission, WACOSS, Tenants Advice Service, Peel Community Legal Service, Men's Advisory Network and Multicultural Services Centre. They were intended for peak bodies and service providers to discuss how the Housing Strategy WA would impact on their clients' ability to meet their housing needs. A total number of 105 people attended these community forums.

In addition, Shelter WA conducted focus groups, which gave disadvantaged housing consumers an opportunity to discuss housing in an informal, comfortable environment. A total of 164 people attended 15 focus groups, which included seniors, Indigenous people, migrants and refugees, women, mental health consumers, park home owners, and Homeswest tenants.

Overall, the consultations revealed a mixed response to the Housing Strategy WA draft discussion paper. On the positive side, participants generally felt that it was good to for the first time have a strategy that examines housing issues in an integrated and holistic way. Participants also agreed with the overarching goals expressed in the discussion draft, and many people commented that the document had been very well researched.

On the negative side, however, an overwhelming number of participants felt that the draft discussion paper was a "collection of motherhood statements", while the detail required to achieve the strategy's worthy aims was sorely lacking. "Simply stating that everyone should have appropriate housing within their capacity to pay, without saying how you're going to achieve that is not a strategy, it's an expression of powerlessness," said one participant.

The most important outcome of the consultations was the need for more detail, including performance indicators, timelines for implementation, and designated funding. Shelter WA's submission therefore recommends that the State Government, in response to community consultation, develop in the Housing Strategy WA performance indicators that are achievable, measurable, realistic and funded appropriately. Timelines for implementation are also to be provided. It is anticipated that implementing this recommendation will result in substantial changes to the Strategy. Therefore, Shelter WA further recommends that when the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed that the Housing Strategy WA (Draft) is re-advertised for further comment.

At the time of writing, the new Minister for Housing, Michelle Roberts, had not yet announced a release date for the strategy. Shelter WA's submission to the Housing Strategy WA can be viewed / downloaded from:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm).

### *Regional Housing Analyses*

A key role of Shelter WA is to facilitate community input to the development of housing policy. In order to facilitate that role, Shelter WA conducts annual housing forums in a particular area of Western Australia, usually in response to requests from local individuals or organisations. The aims of these regional forums are to:

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- identify and prioritise housing issues for the region in a regional housing analysis,
- develop strategies to respond to issues, and
- establish ongoing links between Shelter WA and local community organisations and their workers, government departments and local government.

Since 1998, Shelter WA has conducted housing forums in Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Busselton, Derby, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Mandurah / Pinjarra, Margaret River, Midland and Port Hedland. Reports on all of these forums can be downloaded from:

[www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

## *Regional Housing Analysis 2005: Port Hedland*

Between January and December 2005 Shelter WA conducted a Regional Housing Analysis of Port and South Hedland. The project combined a series of community consultations, interviews with stakeholders and background statistical research. A final report on the project has now been released.

The report's key finding is that Port Hedland's housing market is severely dysfunctional. It characterises Hedland as a town of 20,000 people that provides adequate housing to only 12,000, with the remainder living in caravans, dongas or overcrowded housing. This lack of appropriate and affordable housing acts as a bottleneck that curtails the town's economic development and is a key cause of many of its social problems.

Firstly, the housing market acts as a factor that exacerbates the severity of Hedland's economic cycle. Decision makers have allowed this situation to persist, on the implicit assumption that any increase in demand for housing will only be temporary, ie. until the next downturn of the economic cycle.

However, long term under-investment in appropriate housing has resulted in a substantial proportion of Hedland's long and short term residents living in inappropriate accommodation. It has resulted in high housing prices, often poor maintenance, lack of diverse accommodation stock, homelessness, overcrowding and at the same time underoccupancy. It acts as a poverty trap for the, mostly Indigenous, people who reside in public housing. It is the root cause of Hedland's difficulties attracting people to work in its service industries.

A solution to Hedland's housing problem is therefore a precondition to both its economic and social development. The severity of Hedland's economic cycle, its lack of services, and the dependence of its Indigenous population on Homeswest for its housing needs all stem from a common source, being a lack of appropriate and affordable housing. Any solution must start with a recognition by all key players that Hedland can no longer afford not to cater for the housing requirements of such a substantial proportion of its residents. The town must provide housing for all of its residents, and stop regarding housing needs generated by economic activity as 'temporary'.

The report calls on industry and the three levels of Government - State, Commonwealth and local - to come together to develop a housing strategy for Hedland. In addition to this, the report makes 31 recommendations that are aimed at resolving particular issues faced by specific groups. We are planning return to Hedland later this year to progress these recommendations. The report is available at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm).

## *Regional Housing Analysis 2006: Mandurah / Pinjarra*

Mandurah has over the recent past undergone rapid population growth. This has resulted in major shifts in housing affordability and economic polarisation. Consequently, requests have been made by stakeholders, particularly the Peel Community Legal Service, to investigate the implications of housing and change.

In early 2006 Shelter WA started consultations with stakeholders in Mandurah regarding housing and social change. For a full list see Appendix 2. In combination with a desk top analysis, the consultations developed the following concepts:

- That the Council recognise the impact of new development on transport, community services and infrastructure
- The Council to develop and implement an Affordable Housing Policy
- That the Council implement the recommendations of the National Sea Change Task Force, particularly the Social Impact Analysis requirement for Developments of more than 3 units and
- The development of an employment strategy

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- Develop and co-ordinate the housing outcomes of Peel 2020 and the National Sea Change Task Force via an open communication strategy
- Recognise that any plans for the future of Mandurah need to consider the impact of gold and aluminium on growth
- That Council and State government consider the development of appropriate planning models for large scale developments to include affordable housing, community consultation and social impact assessments.
- Land for development for future Homeswest housing in order to meet growing demand

Consultations with stakeholders in Pinjarra are scheduled for September, and Shelter WA is hoping to release the final report on housing in Mandurah / Pinjarra towards the end of 2006.

## *Future Regional Housing Analyses*

As part of its funding agreement with the Department of Housing and Works, Shelter WA will be reviewing the effectiveness of its community consultation processes in regional areas. In particular, Shelter WA has expressed its concern that the current process means that the organisation does not have sufficient resources to visit key regional centres more than once every 5-10 years.

Shelter WA is currently developing a new format for consultation in regional areas that aims to address this concern. While details have not yet been developed or agreed on with the DHW, the new format is likely to retain the current format for centres in the South West of Western Australia, but introduce a less resource-intensive approach for areas further removed from Perth.

### **3. Input into Department of Housing and Works Policies and Practices**

Shelter WA uses a number of avenues to feed relevant information gained through its various activities into the Department of Housing and Works. The principal mechanisms for this are the Housing Advisory Committee and Homeswest Operational Standing Committee outlined above, as well as regular formal and informal meetings with DHW staff at all levels of the organisation.

## *Surveys*

In June 2001 Shelter WA started a project aimed at profiling homelessness in Western Australia. The core of the project is a series of surveys of agencies dealing with homeless people, and a progress report on the project called *No Place Like Home* was released in December 2004. In August 2005, Shelter WA released the outcomes of Survey 6 of the project.

This survey by and large confirmed the findings of the five previous surveys, as detailed in the *No Place Like Home* report. In particular, the survey found that young people and Indigenous people continued to be represented disproportionately among the homeless people of this State. Affordability issues continued to feature prominently as a barrier to homeless households accessing rental housing.

Shelter WA is planning to conduct Survey 7 in September this year.

## *Urgent Response Network*

In August 2005, Shelter WA launched its Urgent Response Network. The purpose of the network is to inform Shelter WA members about emerging housing issues and guide the development of Shelter WA's position on these issues. Network members receive notification by email of new and contentious housing issues, and then have the opportunity to feed their comments back either confidentially to Shelter WA or as an open comment accessible to all list members. Current and past issues discussed on the Network are available in a special members-only section of:

[www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

During 2005/06, three alerts were issued, related to the suspension of the Housing Advisory Committee and the decline of boarding and lodging houses in Perth. Shelter WA received some welcome and positive feedback from network members, and will continue to use the service into the future.

### **4. Information Provision to the Community**

All of the publications listed below were produced during the 2005/06 financial year and are available from: [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

#### *Newsletters:*

- June 2006: Homeswest Housing in the Western Suburbs

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- March 2006: Mixed Response to Housing Strategy WA
- December 2005: Housing Strategy WA
- September 2005: The Dark Side of WA's Housing Boom

## Information Sheets:

- #26: Keystart Home Loan Schemes

## Occasional Papers:

- OP2005-2: The Boarding House System in Metropolitan Perth
- OP 2005-1: Financial Workforce Disincentives in Public Housing

## Submissions:

- Shelter WA Submission to Housing Strategy WA Boarding and Lodging Houses: Submission to Housing Strategy WA
- Submission to the First Home Owners Grant Review
- Submission to the State Tax Review

## Papers and Reports

- Mandurah's Housing Needs: Discussion Paper for Consultation Forum 11 May 2006
- Report: Housing Strategy WA Consultation with tenants
- Regional Housing Analysis: Housing in Hedland
- Report: Housing Strategy WA Consultation in Mandurah
- Final Report: Good Neighbour Policy
- Final Report: Homeswest Under-Occupancy
- Discussion Paper: Community Forums on Hedland's Housing
- A Profile of Homelessness: Survey 6

## Website:

In 2004/05, Shelter WA's website received 134,813 'net' hits (ie. excluding image files and scripts) at an average of 2,585 per week. This figure included 92,665 papers and reports downloaded at more than 1,750 per week. The chart below shows that traffic to the site has increased steadily since its launch in February 2001, with the main growth in the last three years associated with people viewing or downloading the papers and reports on the site rather than simply clicking through.

## SWA Update

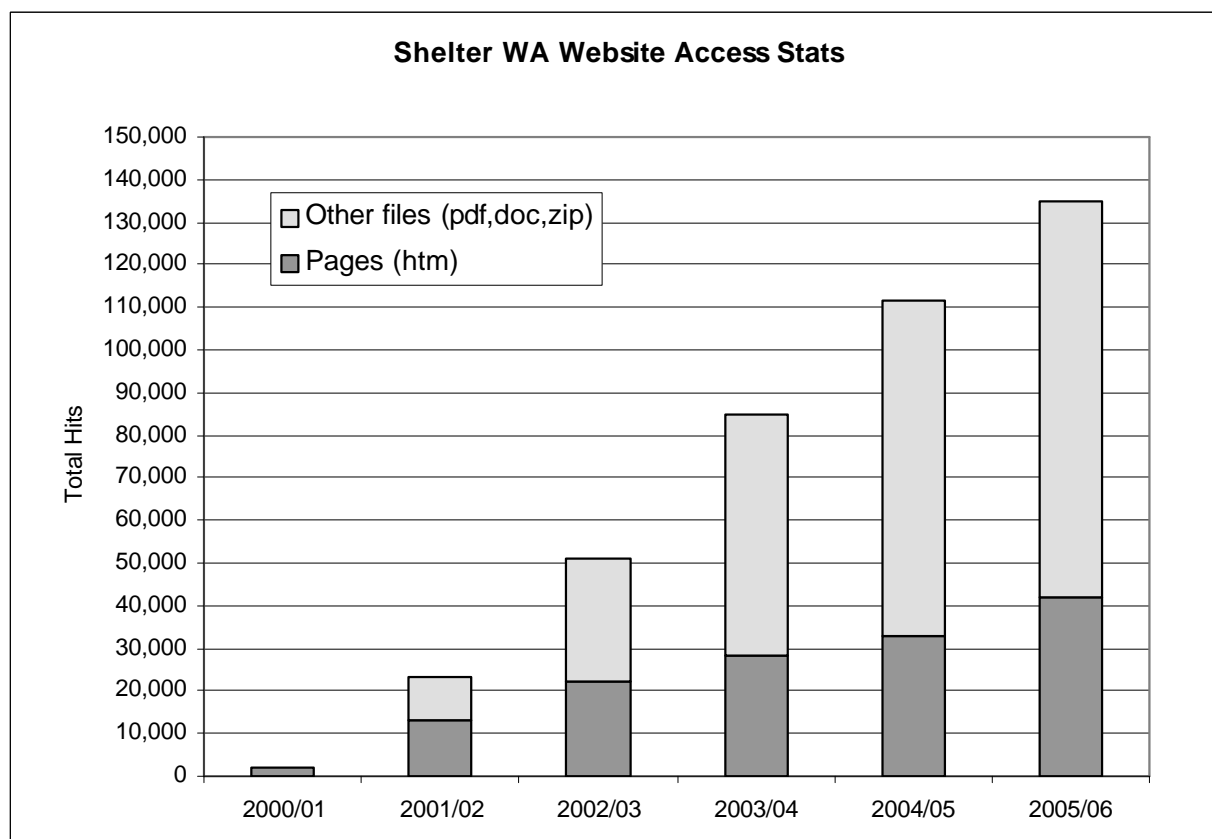
Shelter WA has continued its fortnightly Housing Policy and Research email list, SWA Update. During 2005/06, Shelter WA sent out 19 updates covering a wide range of housing related issues. Despite a significant number of people subscribing and unsubscribing to SWA over the year, the total number of subscribers remained more or less stable at around 175.

In response to request from members, we have now started putting back editions of SWA Update on our website at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/subscribe.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/subscribe.htm)

This page has editions from 2004 onwards, and new editions are made available every few months.

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## WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR: PROJECT FUNDING

### *Organisational Capacity of Indigenous Community Housing Organisations*

For the last six months, Shelter WA, the Remote Areas Development Group at Murdoch University and the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre at the University of Queensland have been working on a research project for AHURI on Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHO). The project will provide a detailed, contemporary, empirical understanding ICHOs, with the aim to inform an understanding of, and to identify short and longer-term options, to enhance the capacity of the ICHO sector.

The study focuses on non-financial factors affecting viability, and builds on AHURI Project 30282, "Indigenous housing - assessing the long term costs and the optimal balance between recurrent and capital expenditure" that explored financial viability factors affecting ICHOs. A progress report is available at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/housing\\_news.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm)

### *National Housing Conference*

The fourth National Housing Conference 2005: Building for Diversity was held at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre on 27 and 28 October 2005. Organised by the Department of Housing and Works and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, the Conference aimed to " address the many dimensions of Australian diversity; consider the housing market and policy implications of this diversity and attempt to formulate considered and well-researched responses."

Shelter WA participated in the organisation of the National Housing Conference in three distinct ways. Firstly, we were an active member of the organisational committee for the Conference. Secondly, we participated in the Conference itself by organising an information booth, delivering a paper and chairing sessions. Finally, we successfully applied for a grant of \$15,000 to Lotterywest to subsidise a limited number of

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people in the not-for-profit sector to attend the National Housing Conference in Perth in October 2005.

As stated in the grant application, the aim of the subsidies was "to assist prospective participants who can demonstrate a need for financial support". Subsidies were available to West Australian "workers and volunteers in community-based organisations who either face high travel and accommodation costs to attend the Conference, or who have difficulty meeting the costs of registration, travel and accommodation associated with the Conference due to their small annual budget."

Shelter WA received 48 subsidy applications from 36 organisations by the due date of 12 October 2005. The total amount of funding requested was \$30,989, or more than double the \$15,000 available. 30 applicants were based in remote areas, 5 in regional areas, 12 in the Perth Metropolitan area and 1 in New South Wales. The bulk (37) of the applicants applied for the maximum amount available to them, with nine applying for more and two applying for less.

As the number of applications received exceeded the amount of money available, a selection panel met on 14 October to prioritise the applications. The panel consisted of four members of the Steering Group of the National Housing Conference:

Margy Dia	Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate, Dept of Housing and Works
Karel Eringa	Shelter WA
Mike Newbigin	Community Housing Coalition of WA
Rob Spinks	Tenants Advice Service

After a rigorous selection process, the panel allocated a total of \$15,000 in subsidies to 32 delegates from 24 organisations. 10 of these organisations were based in the Perth Metropolitan area, 3 in regional WA and 11 in remote parts of the state. A further 7 applicants from 1 regional and 5 remote organisations remain on the reserve list. Finally, 9 applications from 1 metropolitan and 5 remote organisations were rejected as they either did not meet the eligibility criteria or advised that they were no longer intending to attend the Conference.

Shelter WA received excellent feedback from some of the recipients, and wishes to thank Lotterywest for its generosity in providing the grant.

## *EOC Investigation into Public Housing for Indigenous People*

Between 2002 and 2004 the Equal Opportunity Commission conducted a major investigation into public housing for Aboriginal people. The Commission released its final report, Finding A Place, in December 2004. The report identified a number of shortcomings of public housing for Aboriginal people, including poor maintenance, poor training of officers and a lack of stock.

Much of the report confirmed findings published by Shelter WA over the last few years in a number of reports, and Shelter WA therefore supported many of the report's recommendations. Regrettably, however, the report missed an important point, being that public housing in Western Australia is under-resourced to cope with the demands that are placed on it. Consecutive funding cuts and an increased focus on those who are 'most in need' have resulted in falling income for our State Housing Authority, forcing it to reduce costs in order to prevent shortfalls.

The Department of Housing and Works initially accepted only nine of the 168 recommendations made in the report. However, in May 2005, the DHW approached Shelter WA as Chair of the Homeswest Operational Standing Committee to conduct a project operationalising the recommendations of the report.

Since June 2005, Shelter WA has been working with the Department of Housing & Works and the Equal Opportunity Commission to progress the recommendations of the EOC's report on public housing for Aboriginal people, Finding A Place. In this report, the EOC identified a number of shortcomings of public housing for Aboriginal people, including maintenance, training and a lack of stock.

The DHW and EOC have agreed to an Action Plan to implement the report's 165 recommendations using five strategies:

1. New Training - Looking at better ways of delivering services to Aboriginal people
2. Clearer communication - improving ways and means of talking and writing to Aboriginal clients and their advocacy

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3. Get Feedback – seeking input through local consultation, complaints and suggestions for improvement, appropriate planning

4. Review and Reform – new policy and procedures to improve mainstream Aboriginal housing and remote area Aboriginal community housing

5. New Models – better styles of housing and housing service in urban and remote settings that customise design to Aboriginal families / people.

In addition, the Department of Housing and Works and the Equal Opportunity Commission released a joint statement on Aboriginal housing. In this statement, Commissioner for Equal Opportunity Yvonne Henderson and Director General of the DHW Bob Mitchell state that:

Safe and appropriate housing is essential to the well-being of all people.

Without adequate housing, health is at risk and people are unable to make the most of the education, training and employment opportunities that will help them and their families get on in life.

The Department of Housing and Works recognises the important contribution it can make to the lives of so many Western Australians and is working with the Equal Opportunity Commission and other government and non-government agencies to continually improve the services it provides, to meet the reasonable expectations of all stakeholders.

Our organisations are working together, and with Aboriginal people, to make the best use of our combined resources to address their housing needs.

In the statement, both organisations commit to a reform and review process, which “will require an on-going learning strategy and joint effort from the next few months to two years to put in place.” Specifically, the DHW and the EOC have agreed on the following future directions for improving services:

Building on the best – learning from successful initiatives in Western Australia and elsewhere and using these to provide better housing for Aboriginal people.

Communicating – making our message clear and finding the best ways to deliver it to Aboriginal people

Responsiveness – engaging Aboriginal communities in the design of any new housing to meet local needs, taking complaints and appeals seriously.

Review and Reform – seeking new ways of doing business and making sure that these new ways cater for the most disadvantaged people.

Training – making sure staff participate in high quality and relevant training that improves their capacity to deliver services to Aboriginal people.

The Joint Statement on Aboriginal Housing can be viewed at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/housing\\_news.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm).

The Equal Opportunity Commission’s Housing Investigation Update has further details on progress to date and is available from [www.shelterwa.org.au/housing\\_news.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm).

Finding a Place is available from the Equal Opportunity Commission’s website, [www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au](http://www.equalopportunity.wa.gov.au). Shelter WA’s response is available from:

[www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

## **WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR: OTHER WORK**

### *Boarding and Lodging Houses*

In late 2001, the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection commenced a statutory review of the Residential Tenancies Act (WA) 1987. In its two submissions to the Review, Shelter WA identified the lack of consumer protection for boarders and lodgers as a key issue. The submissions highlighted that:

- boarding and lodging houses are an important source of low cost housing in inner city areas for men and women of a range of age groups
- boarding and lodging houses provide accommodation for a significant and increasing number of people with disabilities (physical, psychiatric and intellectual)
- a significant proportion of boarders and lodgers live in the sector for long periods of time.

In view of the complexity of the issue, Shelter WA highlighted a need for further research into and consultation about consumer protection for

# Agency Report (continued)

boarders and lodgers. In particular, Shelter WA is concerned that any such protection should be designed to:

- prevent any further decline in the number of boarding and lodging houses in Perth, and
- allow sufficient flexibility to guarantee the safety of all residents.

In June 2005, Shelter WA commenced a project researching the issues relating to the rights of boarders and lodgers. This project complemented other research conducted by the Community Housing Coalition of WA and Tenants Advice Service, and aimed to gather information by conducting some 35 interviews with boarding house residents and managers in the metropolitan area.

The resulting paper, *The Boarding House System in Metropolitan Perth*, found that the boarding house sector is "in a crisis situation. Two critical issues have emerged in recent years. Firstly, rising land prices and increasing costs have made operating boarding houses an increasingly unviable operation. As a result, the number of boarding and lodging houses has dwindled: roughly two thirds of the sector has been lost over the last two decades. It would appear that a third of what remains may disappear over the next 18 months.

At the same time, there is a complete absence of any form of consumer protection for boarders and lodgers in Western Australia. Unlike tenants in private rental and social housing, boarders and lodgers are not covered by any comprehensive legislation such as the Residential Tenancies Act. As boarding and lodging houses play a critical role in housing some of our community's most multi-disadvantaged citizens, there is an urgent need to increase consumer protection for this group."

The paper consequently recommended that the State Government urgently develop a Boarding and Lodging House Strategy. This strategy should address simultaneously the issues of consumer protection and supply.

The paper is available at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/occasional\\_papers.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/occasional_papers.htm).

## *Where Will They Live? Campaign*

In late 2005, Shelter WA, the Community Housing Coalition of WA, the Tenants Advice Service and the WA Association for Mental Health launched the *Where Will They Live? Campaign*. This campaign is an attempt to ensure that government is aware of the issue and will commit to a strategy that increases the number of boarding houses, existing lodgings will be better maintained and that consumer rights of residents are better protected.

Research underlying the campaign found that boarding houses are an essential housing option for a range of people, including the aged, people with disabilities and the poor are facing an increased risk of becoming homeless. The campaign found that 242 boarding and lodging beds are likely to close by 2007 due to rising land prices and increasing costs have made operating boarding houses an increasingly unviable operation.

At the same time, the campaign identified a complete absence of any form of consumer protection for boarders and lodgers in Western Australia. Unlike tenants in private rental and social housing, boarders and lodgers are not covered by any comprehensive legislation such as the Residential Tenancies Act. As boarding and lodging houses play a critical role in housing some of our community's most multi-disadvantaged citizens, there is an urgent need to increase consumer protection for this group.

The Campaign called on the State Government to develop a comprehensive Boarders and Lodgers Strategy to:

- Develop strategies to increase boarding and lodging house stock
- Improve the maintenance of current boarding and lodging houses.
- Provide appropriate consumer protection measures for boarders and lodgers.

Pressure from the campaign resulted in the Minister for Housing and Works forming a working group on the issue, with a brief to develop a strategy detailing appropriate strategies to improve and expand the boarding house sector. The working group is to report by January 2007. A submission from the *Where Will They Live? Campaign* to the Housing Strategy WA discussion draft is available at:

[www.shelterwa.org.au/housing\\_news.htm](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm).

# Agency Report (continued)

## *National Shelter*

Many of the issues affecting housing consumers in Western Australia emanate from policies and programs that are determined at national level. National Shelter is the peak non-government organisation representing the interests of low-income housing consumers. While it has been unfunded since 1996, National Shelter continues to represent the interests of housing consumers at the national level.

In order to ensure that housing remains on the national political agenda, Shelter WA continued to play an active role within National Shelter in 2005/06.

During 2005/06, National Shelter focused on two issues, being the development of its policy platform in preparation for the next Federal election and housing affordability.

National Shelter has identified four priority areas requiring urgent attention:

1. A National Indigenous Housing Strategy
2. Addressing the Housing Problems facing Regional Australia
3. Providing an Adequate Supply of Affordable Housing
4. Reforming Demand side strategies

With regard to housing affordability, National Shelter pursued this issue by forging a partnership with industry, the Unions and other community groups in a National Housing Alliance. National Shelter's Chair, Adrian Pisarsky, is currently the spokesperson for the Alliance.

The Alliance called for reform across all tenure types - private rental, social housing and home ownership - to ensure that the Australian Dream of securing their own home is not left out of the reach of all but a wealthy few. In August 2005, the National Housing Alliance presented its case to a joint meeting of Planning and Housing Ministers, which subsequently adopted a framework for affordable housing.

## **WORK FOR THE PAST YEAR: OTHER COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS**

*In addition to the activities highlighted above, Shelter WA participated in a large number of meetings and events. While listing of these meetings and events exhaustively would be impractical, they include the following:*

- *membership of the Keystart Advisory Committee*
- *membership of the Boards of the Tenants Advice Service, Habitat for Humanity (WA) and Claisebrook Lotteries House Association,*
- *meetings with Local Government authorities, State Government Ministers and Members of Parliament,*
- *presenting to forums including WACOSS Emergency Relief Forum, Sea Change Conference: homelessness in Bunbury, HURIWA conferences on Network City and homelessness,*
- *providing information to academics, students and members of the public, and*
- *providing assistance to homeless people and people in housing crisis.*