



newsletter

June 2006

Editorial: Homeswest Housing in the Western Suburbs

by Karel Eringa

Between Tuesday 20 June and Thursday 22 June, the West Australian newspaper published three stories in which Shelter WA was presented as supporting evicting underoccupying Homeswest tenants.

As repeatedly stated in our reports and telephone conversations between Shelter WA and the West's journalists, this is simply not the case. Shelter WA does believe that Homeswest should be proactive in making larger dwellings available to larger families, but only on a voluntary, negotiated basis and only if existing tenants are offered and accept appropriate alternative housing.

In addition, the articles contain a factual error. This relates to the citation that one third of Homeswest's biggest western suburbs properties are occupied by long term residents. I note that this figure was taken

from a draft discussion paper on underoccupancy published by Shelter WA in March 2005, which clearly states that:

- these figures relate to WA averages, and can therefore not be related specifically to Homeswest housing in the western suburbs - in fact there is no mention of the western suburbs in the paper, and
- Homeswest performs significantly better than the Western Australian housing system as a whole in terms of underoccupancy, the rate of underoccupancy in Homeswest being less than half that in the private sector.

Finally, as a body representing housing consumers, Shelter WA was concerned about the West's printing information about vulnerable elderly people. Shelter WA subsequently wrote a letter to the editor of the West Australian highlighting its concerns and

demanding that the West retract the inaccurate facts and misleading statements presented in the two articles identified above, and present an apology.

The West Australian has since apologised to Shelter WA for misrepresenting our views. It also published an edited version of our letter. The text of the original letter and the response from the West are reproduced on pages 6 and 7 of this newsletter.

In addition, the newsletter contains an update on the *Where Will They Live?* campaign on boarding houses, an overview of housing in the recent Federal and State Budgets, an update on the Housing Advisory Committee, a summary of the Equal Opportunity Commission / Department of Housing and Works Joint Statement on Aboriginal Housing, and the new Homeswest Income Eligibility Limits.

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Where Will They Live? Campaign Update

by Mariyon Slany, Community Housing Coalition of WA

Boarding and Lodging Houses not seen as a viable financial proposition – but what are the alternatives?

As the last point of de-institutionalisation, those people who need Lodging and Boarders houses accommodation may find that they have to resort to the streets. A city such as Perth will not continue to maintain its present good living standards and high equity returns if it gains a reputation as a 'box' city for homeless people who are not being provided for in terms of Boarders and Lodgers Housing. Rising land prices and increasing costs have



Boarding house, Fremantle

made operating boarding houses an increasingly unviable operation. The number of boarding and lodging houses has dwindled: roughly two thirds of the sector has been lost over the last two decades. An immediate injection of funds is needed to counteract the decline in current bed numbers. It is the responsibility of government to assist vulnerable members of the community such as people on low incomes with psychiatric illness and/or drug addiction.

Some of the issues that were brought to light in the DHW commissioned CHCWA research (available on the www.dhw.wa.gov.au site) on this issue were as follows:

- The private market currently provides 438 beds (56% of general lodging house beds). This supply of beds in the private sector is dominated by the presence of one large lodge that accounts for just over half of the private bed supply. The CHCWA study predicted that 242 beds in the private sector will be lost within the next 2 years and a further 51 beds will go when lodge owners retire.
- Many current owners are in their late 60s or 70s. There

to redress marked deterioration.

- There are problems with a number of unregistered Boarding and Lodgers Houses, where tenants pay exorbitant rates.

The ability of the lodging house sector to act as a pressure valve on the demand for crisis accommodation (or the alternative of sleeping rough or squatting) is diminishing. Boarding and Lodging Houses are ideal for people to move from living on the streets or

in an institution where support is provided to moving into a private rental situation.

The Residential Tenancies Act needs to be amended to

include some protection for these residents. This needs to be balanced by the awareness of not making the proprietor's life more difficult and thus encourage them to sell their asset more quickly thus reducing supply.

- The profit margin tends to be relatively slim.
- Access to amenities, services and employment opportunities is one important consideration in the location of lodges as the benefits for lodgers as well as 2) affordability and 3) the company of others.
- Changes to planning could include an integrated response from local/state government so as to enable town planning restrictions to be eased and request that redevelopment authorities set aside areas for boarders and lodgers housing as part of new developments.
- Current Boarding and Lodgers Houses need funds

include some protection for these residents. This needs to be balanced by the awareness of not making the proprietor's life more difficult and thus encourage them to sell their asset more quickly thus reducing supply.

Current working group

The Department of Housing and Works formed a working group in April this year to address some of these issues and in response to the CHCWA, TAS and Shelter WA research reports as well as the 'Where Will They Live' Campaign. Stakeholders include, amongst others, a local government representative, CHCWA, Shelter WA, WAAMH, TAS, DOCEP, Foundation Housing and a representative from the

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Housing in the Federal and State Budgets

by Samantha Glasgow

Shelter WA's disappointment with the Federal Budget, handed down on 10th May, cannot be overstated. The continued lack of funding for social housing will only continue the decline of social housing in Australia. The Budget offers no additional funding for affordable housing, despite \$60 billion worth of income tax cuts.

Statistics show that social housing under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement has fallen 32% in real terms since 1996, resulting in an 11% fall in stock (from 381,322 – 338, 834) between 1996 and 2005. Also, over that last five years the number of households assisted each year has fallen from nearly 40,000 in 2000/01 to less than 28,000 in 2004/05, which is a decline of more than 30%.

It is with some relief that in contrast to the Federal Budget, the State Government of Western Australia did make some increased commitments to housing, albeit modest, in their last Budget. In particular, Shelter WA supports the State Government's allocation of a 10% increase in core funding for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program as a positive step forward in addressing needs for homeless people and those in crisis. Lobbying from the community sector for this increase paid off and was specifically referred to by the Minister, David Templeman.

Karel Eringa, from Shelter WA said, "While not the 30 to 40

percent increase called for by the community sector, this will at least ensure that the SAAP providers won't be going backwards.. In addition, Shelter WA welcomes the increased funding in accommodation and support for people with disabilities, and the Government's sustained commitment to this over the coming years".

The increase in funding included \$5 million to improve the viability of SAAP services, with each service to receive a core funding increase of 10% of the State's contribution; a further \$6.8 million for the Commonwealth/State SAAP V Agreement and indexation; and \$1.5 million to establish a new refuge.

The Minister did say in his budget briefing to the sector that this is not the end of increasing financial support to SAAP funded services.

Although generally pleased with the outcome of the State budget, Shelter WA is concerned that the State Budget has again missed a golden opportunity to invest some of the tax windfalls into provide additional funding for social and affordable housing. In contrast, the Federal Budget allows some growth in funding to the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement over the next two years, however this will be at a rate less than half the expected rate of inflation (about 2.5%p.a.). This means reduced funding for social housing in real terms and will leave more than 200,000 social housing applicants wondering if they

will ever get an affordable place to live.

Shelter WA agrees with the Shadow Minister for Housing, Senator Kim Carr, who said the Federal "...Budget did not do a single thing to bring down the cost of buying a house for first home buyers or the cost of renting in the private market ... The pressures in the private market will put more Australians at risk of homelessness and place even greater strain on public housing. But in last night's Budget, Peter Costello did not come up with one new dollar for the Federal Government's programs that assist vulnerable Australians to meet their housing needs."

Postscript

Just before this newsletter went to press, Housing Minister Michelle Roberts issued a media statement in which she "slammed the Commonwealth Government for its ongoing funding cuts for public housing in Western Australia." Referring to a real funding cut of 43% since 1996, the Minister said that the "Commonwealth needs to stop shirking its responsibilities and ensure that the people currently waiting will be provided with public housing."

Shelter WA applauds Minister Roberts' call on the Commonwealth Government to provide more funding for social housing. However, at the same time we repeat our call for the WA State Government to use some of its recent revenue windfalls to grow social housing.

Housing Advisory Committee

by Karel Eringa

At the HAC meeting of 4 April 2006, Housing Minister Michelle Roberts expressed her dissatisfaction with the way in which the Housing Advisory Committee operates, as well as its membership. The Minister suspended all future meetings of HAC until further notice, and asked members to consider the makeup of both HAC and its subcommittees and the relevance to having both industry and social housing on the same committee.

The Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) has operated as an advisory body to the Minister and Department for Housing for many years. Its current role is to advise the Minister for Housing and Works on state government housing policy, to participate in the development of Dept 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.

Standing Committees undertake much of the specific research and policy work related to HAC. At present there are two Standing Committees: the Regional Housing Standing Committee works on strategic issues related to housing in WA's regional areas, while the

Homeswest Operational Standing Committee works on Homeswest's operational policies and procedures.

HAC has long been the primary mechanism by which community organisations can raise issues directly with the Minister and Department of Housing in a structured and considered manner. In recent years, it has also provided an opportunity for community groups to meet and discuss issues with industry bodies and other government Departments.

Shelter WA is concerned that the community sector's primary route of bringing housing policy issues to the attention of the Minister of Housing and Director General of the Department of Housing and Works has been suspended indefinitely and without notice. In addition, the Minister has provided no alternative provided structure, other than an invitation to put feedback on the issue.

Nevertheless, we agree that HAC has not functioned optimally over the three years since it was last reviewed. In particular, we have repeatedly raised a number of issues related to the functioning of HAC and its subcommittees, including resourcing and representation.

On 19 May, HAC held an informal meeting to discuss this issue. At this meeting, there was general agreement that that HAC does have potential value to both the Minister and its membership in two distinct ways. Firstly, HAC is the only regular forum in which the Minister can hear issues of concern to key players in the housing sector. Secondly, members found HAC a useful mechanism for fostering communication and understanding between Government, industry and community representatives.

The May meeting resulted in a 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.

In addition, the May meeting reached broad agreement that the Homeswest Operational Standing Committee should continue to exist as a Departmental advisory body, rather than as part of the HAC structure.

We are currently awaiting the Minister's reply.

New Homeswest Income Eligibility Limits

Income eligibility limits for Homeswest housing have changed. The new income limits for public housing assistance, which apply as of 1 May 2006, are as follows:

Number in household	Metro & country		NW & remote areas		Disability limit Metro / Country		Disability limit NW & remote	
	Single Income	Dual Income	Single Income	Dual Income	Single Income	Dual Income	Single income	Dual Income
1	\$430	-	\$610	-	\$540	-	\$760	-
2	\$580	\$670	\$820	\$940	\$725	\$830	\$1,025	\$1,180
3	\$695	\$790	\$980	\$1,120	\$870	\$1,000	\$1,225	\$1,400
4	\$815	\$930	\$1,150	\$1,320	\$1,020	\$1,160	\$1,440	\$1,650

Notes: Income of both applicant and partner to be included in the assessment of income. For households with more than 4 people add \$115 per person and \$145 for households with someone that is disabled.

EOC / DHW Joint Statement

by Karel Eringa

On 23 June, 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:

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

- o Communicating – making our message clear and finding the best ways to deliver it to Aboriginal people
- o Responsiveness – engaging Aboriginal communities in the design of any new housing to meet local needs, taking complaints and appeals seriously.
- o Review and Reform – seeking new ways of doing business and making sure that these new ways cater for the most disadvantaged people.
- o 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.

Where Will They Live? Campaign Update - Cont'd

private sector. The terms of reference are as follows: The working group will:

1. Investigate and develop short term and long term strategies to sustain, increase and diversify lodging house accommodation, including:
 - improving the maintenance of current boarding and lodging houses to meet health, fire and safety standards.
 - retaining and supporting existing investment and encouraging new investment, particularly in the private sector; and

- intervention strategies across all levels of government
- 2. Review regulation and legislative controls of boarding houses to provide appropriate consumer protection measures for boarders and lodgers.
- 3. Review linkages across government to better deliver appropriate services to residents, such as health and guardianship.
- 4. Develop minimum standard guidelines for new construction of boarding and lodging houses in WA.

5. Deliver a strategy report by January 2007.

This is good news as it indicates that the Department is taking the issue seriously but much work also needs to be done in terms of community integration. The wider community can be brought on side by developing units that aim towards looking as attractive as possible whilst ensuring the need for proximity to urban city facilities is maintained. Planning and community consultation is vital for future developments.

Editorial - cont'd



1st Floor, Claisebrook Lotteries House,
33 Moore St., EAST PERTH 6004
Ph: (08) 9325 6660 Fax: (08) 9325 8113
Mob: 0417 295 896
Email: shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au
ABN: 43 436 576 540

The Editor, Mr Paul Armstrong
The West Australian Newspaper
Newspaper House
50 Hasler Road
Osborne Park WA 6017

Wednesday, 21 June 2006

Letter to the Editor

Dear Mr Armstrong,

I am writing to express three serious concerns regarding two recent articles in your newspaper, published yesterday (p5: "Homeswest threat in leafy suburbs") and today (p3: "Rules and rich block Homeswest").

My first concern is that the articles contain a factual error. This relates to the citation that one third of Homeswest's biggest western suburbs properties are occupied by long term residents. I note that this figure was taken from a draft discussion paper on underoccupancy published by Shelter WA in March 2005, which clearly states that:

- these figures relate to WA averages, and can therefore not be related specifically to Homeswest housing in the western suburbs - in fact there is no mention of the western suburbs in the paper, and
- Homeswest performs significantly better than the Western Australian housing system as a whole in terms of underoccupancy, the rate of underoccupancy in Homeswest being less than half that in the private sector.

Both of these facts are abundantly clear from our report, and were clarified on several occasions in telephone conversations between our organisation and your newspaper in the weeks leading up to the publication of the articles. In addition, the draft discussion paper was superseded by a final report in August 2006, which adjusted the proportion of underoccupancy in Homeswest down to 26%.

My second concern is that the first article in particular misrepresents Shelter WA's position regarding underoccupancy, presenting our organisation as supporting evicting underoccupying Homeswest tenants. As repeatedly stated in our reports and telephone conversations between our organisation and your newspaper, this is simply not the case. Shelter WA does believe that Homeswest should be proactive in making larger dwellings available to larger families, but only on a voluntary, negotiated basis and only if existing tenants are offered and accept appropriate alternative housing.

My third and final concern relates to your newspaper publishing photographs and names of specific Homeswest tenants. As a body representing housing consumers, Shelter WA finds your newspaper's publishing such detailed information, with vulnerable elderly people, irresponsible and reprehensible, as it not only compromises the privacy of these people, but could also put them in personal danger.

In view of the above, I demand that your newspaper:

1. publicly retract the inaccurate facts and misleading statements presented in the two articles identified above, and
2. present an apology to Shelter WA.

Yours sincerely,

Karel Eringa
Executive Officer

Editorial - cont'd

The West Australian

West Australian Newspapers Limited

ABN 98 008 667 632

June 21, 2006

Mr Karel Eringa
Executive Officer
Shelter WA
33 Moore Street
EAST PERTH WA 6004

Dear Mr Eringa,

RE: Homeswest threat in leafy suburbs (*The West Australian*, June 20, 2006)
and Rules and rich block Homeswest (*The West Australian*, June 21, 2006)

Thank you for your letter, which has been passed to me by editor Paul Armstrong for investigation and response.

As discussed by phone, I do not believe the newspaper's reporters handled this issue well at all and we will publish a revised, shortened letter from your organisation, as agreed, to set the record straight.

On behalf of the newspaper, please accept my apology for the reporting of the stories, which either contained or repeated errors. Although I have explained how I believe the errors in the first report could have been made, it is unacceptable that your approaches to remedy the situation for a subsequent publication was made difficult and did not result in a correction of your position.

Both reporters will be counselled about the matter.

Again, *The West Australian* regrets if the reportage over the two days caused you or Shelter WA any embarrassment. The newspaper appreciates the effort and time Shelter WA staff made to contribute to the story and we hope that any future dealings with you or your organisation are more successful.

Yours sincerely,



David Hummerston
Editorial Counsellor/Saturday Editor

News in Brief

Shelter WA Projects

We have been successful in obtaining funding for two projects. The first of these is developing a Policy Platform for National Shelter. Samantha Glasgow (formerly Lambert) has returned to Shelter WA to coordinate this project. Samantha will be consulting with members of both National Shelter and Shelter WA regarding what issues they think should be included in the platform.

The second project is a joint project with the Tenants Advice Service, which involves conducting a scoping study for a Homeless Persons Legal Clinic in Perth. Similar clinics are already operating successfully in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The project will be managed by Shelter WA's Community Development and Policy Officer, Helen Doran-Wu, and will involve consultations with homeless people as well as agencies that deliver services to homeless people.

New National Shelter Website

National Shelter has re-launched its website, including recent publications and media releases. The address is www.shelter.org.au.

Housing in Mandurah

Over the last few months, Shelter WA has been conducting a series of community consultations on housing issues in Mandurah. The focus of these consultations is now on the housing consumers of Mandurah. We have set up meetings with migrants, seniors, precinct representatives and Indigenous youth, and more are being planned.

Although a few more consultation sessions are

planned, the project is nearing the end of the consultation stage. Some of the suggestions that were put forward during this stage include:

- o That the Council recognise the impact of new development on transport, community services and infrastructure
- o The Council to develop and implement an Affordable Housing Policy
- o 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
- o The development of an employment strategy
- o Develop and co-ordinate the housing outcomes of Peel 2020 and the National Sea Change Task Force via an open communication strategy
- o Recognise that any plans for the future of Mandurah need to consider the impact of gold and aluminium on growth
- o 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.
- o Land for development for future Homeswest housing in order to meet growing demand

The next stage of the project will be detailed research to cross-reference the findings of the consultations with statistical and other background information. We are aiming to have a final report on housing in Mandurah by November this year.

In the meantime, the discussion paper for the Mandurah consultations is still available on to www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm.

Shelter WA

Shelter WA is Western Australia's peak independent housing organisation. Shelter WA is community managed and represents the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues. Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

We do this through:

- ⊙ co-ordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- ⊙ developing and responding to policy;
- ⊙ providing education and information ; and
- ⊙ promoting alternative housing models.

Newsletter Production

Publisher Shelter WA
Editor Karel Eringa
Contributors Karel Eringa,
Samantha
Glasgow, Mariyon
Slany

If you have any queries or comments regarding the articles in this newsletter, or if you would like to contribute to future Shelter WA newsletters, please contact Karel Eringa (details below).

While we are happy to consider any articles submitted for publication, we reserve the right to edit material in consideration of space, content and relevance.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Shelter WA.

Contact Details

1st Floor, 33 Moore Street,
East Perth WA 6004
Ph: 08 9325 6660
Fax: 08 9325 8113
Mob: 0417 295 896
shelterwa@shelterwa.org.au
www.shelterwa.org.au