

# newsletter

September 2000

## Housing Forum for the Albany Region

The following article is a summary of the Final Report of a consultation undertaken by Shelter WA in the Albany Region in May and June 2000. The Housing Forum aimed to identify and prioritise housing issues in the region; 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. Copies of the Preliminary Discussion Paper and Final Paper are available by contacting Shelter WA.

### The Albany Region: An Overview

Albany is the administrative and service centre of the Lower Great Southern Region (referred to as the region) and is located on the south coast of Western Australia. The region extends 250 kilometres along the coast and 200 kilometres northwards, and includes the major centre of the City of Albany (referred to as Albany) and the regional centres of

Denmark, Mt Barker and Katanning.

- ◆ The region has an estimated population of 51,840<sup>1</sup> with 29,186 or 56.3% of people living in the City of Albany.
- ◆ Albany attracts a high number of retirees resulting in a high proportion (14.8%) of over 65 year olds living in Albany. The region has one of the 'oldest' populations in the State with a median age of 35.3<sup>2</sup> years. At the same time, young people under the age of 15 years are a significant group representing nearly one quarter (23.8%) of the population.
- ◆ While Albany, Denmark and Plantagenet are experiencing a population growth, inland and agricultural regions are experiencing a population decline.
- ◆ The three key industries in the region include agriculture, fishing and timber. These combined

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## ***Albany Region Housing Report continued...***

key industries made up 26.2% of the workforce in 1996.<sup>3</sup>

- ◆ The need to diversify and strengthen the region's economic base in order to provide for wider job opportunities has been identified by government and the local community<sup>4</sup>.
- ◆ The 1996 Census records the total number of dwellings in the Lower Great Southern as being 20,798<sup>5</sup>, with King (in which Albany and its suburbs is located) recording approximately two thirds of the total stock numbers for the Lower Great Southern region.
- ◆ Private rental accounts for 76% of rental housing in the region with social housing providing for 24%. Albany has 60% of rental housing in the region followed by Denmark at 23%.
- ◆ Homeswest presence in the region is approximately 4.7% of housing stock. This compares to a State average of 5.1% and national average of 5.8% of housing stock.

### **Housing Need for Specific Communities**

As part of the preliminary consultations respondents were asked to identify specific groups in the community with high levels of housing need. The following groups were identified and issues and strategies discussed during the consultation.

#### ***Young People***

- ◆ Young people represent almost one quarter of the region's population and are more likely to be unemployed and on a low income than the general community. The diverse housing needs of young people in the region was raised in a variety of contexts.
- ◆ The housing needs of young people with children and specifically young women (under 20 years) with children was raised. This related to the need for appropriate crisis accommodation and the lack

of private rental housing for young people on low incomes.

- ◆ There were concerns regarding the supply of affordable and appropriate housing for students attending tertiary institutions in Albany and Katanning (a TAFE Centre is opening in 2001). The availability and appropriateness of housing for young people on low incomes, including students, was discussed in terms of location, access to services and available transport options. For young people living outside of Albany these issues were further accentuated by the limited housing options available.
- ◆ It is widely acknowledged that the provision of education and employment options is essential for regional areas to 'retain' their young people. Housing is a key component of this strategy and a policy area that needs to be considered in the development of broader community and economic development initiatives.

#### ***Aboriginal People***

- ◆ The need for accessible, affordable and appropriate housing for Aboriginal households in the region was identified as a key issue. The discussion identified a range of areas including discrimination in the private rental market<sup>6</sup>, appropriateness of housing in terms of size and design and lack of availability of public housing stock.
- ◆ It is well recognised that Aboriginal people experience discrimination in the private rental market and this adversely impacts on housing choices. Participants provided examples of discrimination in accessing housing throughout the region. These included real estate agents stating that properties were no longer available (when in fact they had not been let) and people taking up employment and then not being able to

## ***Albany Region Housing Report continued...***

secure housing.

- ◆ Many private and public rental properties were considered to be inappropriately designed for the needs of Aboriginal households which required open living areas and larger houses. There was ongoing need for the development of 4 and 5 bedroom properties, particularly in the town of Katanning, and the issue of overcrowding was raised in this context.

### ***People with a Disability***

- ◆ The need for flexible housing design and management for people with disabilities was raised specifically in relation to public housing. Participants raised the issue of alternative models of service provision that integrate the housing and care needs of people with disabilities.
- ◆ For example, the scenario was presented where a preferred care plan for a person with a disability involved the person living in a house with 'room' for a live in carer. An additional bedroom would enable flexible care arrangements to be implemented, including co-residency and respite. The Ministry of Housing supported the need for generically modified housing at the time of construction.

### **Short Term and Emergency Accommodation**

The Forum identified a gap in the provision of short term and crisis accommodation for a number of groups in the community. Participants stated that issues including mental health, domestic violence and drug and alcohol use were impacting on the demand for crisis accommodation services in the region. Given that existing SAAP agencies provided services to specific target groups, participants identified that this was leading to gaps in service provision for groups that did not meet the selection criteria.

The lack of crisis accommodation for men was identified as an important issue. This was raised in a number of contexts including the need for accommodation for men with restraining orders issued against them, and young men using alcohol and drugs. Addressing men's accommodation needs was considered an essential part of an holistic response to domestic violence and safety and security issues.

The priority groups identified for crisis accommodation included:

- ◆ Single women at risk of homelessness and not experiencing domestic violence
- ◆ Young people, and particularly young women (under 20) with children
- ◆ Men involved in domestic violence and/or using alcohol and drugs.

### **Homeswest Policies and Programs**

The Ministry of Housing is an important housing provider in the Albany region with Homeswest managing approximately 4.5% of all housing stock or just over 1300 properties. Forum participants raised a number of policy issues relating to Homeswest operational policy. These included:

- ◆ Debt Management: the adverse impact of the Homeswest Debt Management Policy on people's access to public housing was raised. Participants questioned the financial capacity of people on low incomes to pay back debt so they are eligible for housing. Of particular concern was the implication for women who accumulate debt with violent partners. Participants were equally concerned that people with debts to Homeswest do not qualify for Bond Assistance for private rental accommodation placing them in further financial hardship in terms of accessing other housing options.

## ***Albany Region Housing Report continued...***

- ◆ Security: the need for appropriate security to be installed in Homeswest properties was raised by participants. This was considered a high priority for victims of domestic violence. It was noted that there is often a perception of lack of safety. Homeswest advised that as part of the security policy, security (barrier screens on doors and windows) has been installed in all seniors accommodation and that other programs are being developed to address security concerns of tenants.

### **Landstart New Living Program**

The Ministry of Housing's Landstart New Living Program is being implemented in Albany's Mt Lockyer and Spencer Park estates. The aim of the statewide New Living program is to reduce public housing presence to approximately 12% in the estates, refurbish houses for sale to the public and existing tenants, upgrade and refurbish Homeswest housing and reduce the social stigma attached to the areas.

Participants identified a number of issues in relation to the New Living program including

- ◆ access to information regarding the program and proposed redevelopment of housing stock in the region
- ◆ concerns regarding the maintenance of public housing stock levels in the region and the location of new public housing developments
- ◆ That investors rather than owner-occupiers are purchasing refurbished Homeswest properties through the New Living program, and properties are being privately rented to people who are unable to access Homeswest housing.

### **Private Rental Market**

The issues of affordability, accessibility and security of tenure were raised throughout the consultations. These issues are well documented in housing

literature in terms of low income renters experiences in the private rental market. Participants reported a number of issues including lack of maintenance on private rental properties and discriminatory practices of real estate agents, particularly in smaller towns.

The importance of documenting discriminatory practice was emphasised. At the same time it was acknowledged that in many cases people are unlikely to seek redress given the lengthy process versus the immediate priority of addressing their housing needs. The role of the Ministry of Fair Trading and Tenants Advice Service was highlighted in terms of informing real estate agents and tenants of their rights and responsibilities.

### **Future Directions: Planning for Affordable Housing**

The Great Southern region is experiencing population growth, particularly along the coast. Planning for appropriate housing in the region requires the involvement of local and state government departments, the community sector and local communities. An essential component of housing development and provision is the need to cater for a diverse community, and to provide housing that is affordable, appropriate and accessible for low income consumers.

***For a copy of the Final Report including strategies to address issues raised through the Consultation please contact Shelter WA.***

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### **Footnotes**

1. ABS *Regional Population Growth 1998-99*, ABS, Canberra, p. 83
2. Department of Commerce and Trade (1999) *Living in the Regions: The Views of Western Australians: The Great Southern Report*, p. 7
3. Great Southern Development Commission & Dept of Commerce and Trade *Great Southern Economic Perspective 1999*, GSDC, Albany
4. Department of Commerce and Trade (1999) *ibid*, p. 15
5. ABS *Housing Characteristics – 1996 and 1991 Censuses*, 1996, ABS, Canberra
6. National Housing Strategy

## *New Executive Officer at Shelter WA*

**Erin Gauntlett** recently resigned from Shelter WA after two years in the position of Senior Policy Officer. During that time Erin made a significant contribution to housing policy in Western Australia and working toward better housing outcomes for low income people. Erin's strong commitment, professional approach and quality of contribution to housing policy and practice will be greatly missed. Shelter wishes Erin all the best in her future career.

Following a recent review of positions at Shelter WA, the Management Committee has retitled the Senior Policy Officer position to Executive Officer. The new job title reflects the diverse role of the position which includes management of the organisation; policy development and research; and lobbying, advocacy and representation work.

Shelter WA is pleased to announce the appointment of **Alfred Bock** as **Executive Officer**. Alfred will be commencing at Shelter WA in early October and brings extensive experience in policy development and analysis across a range of areas including economics, employment and training. Alfred has worked in the private sector, with government and non-government organisations. We are delighted to have Alfred join Shelter WA and look forward to working with him.

## United Nations Committee on Economic Social

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Over the past twelve months, non-government organisations throughout Australia, including Shelter WA, have been involved in the Australian Social and Economics Rights Project (ASERP). ASERP was a coordinated effort by non-government and community organisations to have input to the review of the Australian Government by the United Nations Committee Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

As signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Australian Government is required to report to the UN Committee every five years demonstrating how it is meeting its obligations under the Covenant. The final stage of the review process took place in Geneva, Switzerland in August this year with the UN Committee making its Concluding Observations earlier this month.

As reported in our March 2000 newsletter, the WA ASERP Working Party developed the *Community Organisations Report on Housing in Western Australia* to submit to the United Nations Committee. The Report addressed Article 11 of the Covenant which specifically addresses the right to housing.

Numerous other submissions were made by non-government organisations addressing the broad range of rights covered by the Covenant. The Victorian Council of Social Services coordinated the publication *Community Perspectives: Australia's Compliance with the UN Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights* which addresses each of the thirteen articles of the Covenant, including the right to housing.

### The right to adequate housing in Australia

As part of the Review process various delegations have the opportunity to make verbal presentations to the UN Committee. The following statement was made by Leilani Farhar from the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions to the UN Committee Extraordinary Session on 14 August, 2000. Leilani visited Western Australia in July 1999 and met with a wide range of people to assess local housing issues and policy.

“Madame Chair,

Over the past three years the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions has been working closely with a number of Australian NGOs. During this time we have learned a great deal about the status of the right to housing in Australia and we would like to take this opportunity to share a little of what we have learned with this Committee. The comments that I am going to make today draw on the report of the Australian Social and Economic Rights Project and I refer the Committee to that report for information regarding the status of all of the rights in the Covenant.

Madame Chair, I wish I could spend the next 7 minutes telling the Committee that, true to common perception, Australia is a country with few housing problems. I would like to be able to report that housing in Australia is accessible, affordable, habitable, and culturally adequate for the majority of the population and that most tenants enjoy secure tenure. Unfortunately, this is NOT the story I am going to tell you today.

## & Cultural Rights

“At this point the Committee may or may not be surprised to learn that Australia, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, ranked 4th on the 3 Human Development Index, has at least 105,000 homeless women, men and children.”

Leilani Farhar,  
Centre of Housing Rights & Evictions

The Australian government has undertaken a major redirection in housing policy for low income households that focuses on the provision of housing through the private market rather than the public sector. As a result, the Commonwealth government is moving away from assisting States with the provision of public housing stock and moving toward the provision of housing subsidies to low income individuals and families who are then required to compete for housing in the private rental market.

The government report recognises that low-income households can't always compete in the private market (though they don't state why) and they suggest that two of its policies address this lack of competitive edge; 1. The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) – social housing provision; and 2. The Commonwealth Rent Assistance Programme – rent subsidy to low income tenants. What the government report doesn't say is that it has dramatically decreased the amount of money it transfers to the State and Territory governments for the purchase, construction and management of social housing. Between 1985 and 1995 this funding declined by 25% in real terms and since 1996 has been further diminished by \$334 million. At the same time, the government has introduced stricter eligibility requirements for public housing, and restricted security of tenure for new public housing tenants. Needless to say, the end result is that fewer low income Australians than ever before are able to access public housing and the already large waiting lists for this type of housing just continue to grow.

The government may claim that to offset the decrease in funding for social housing, it has increased monies allocated to the Commonwealth Rent Assistance program. While it is true that the government has increased the amount of funds allocated for this program, it has not met its objective of making housing affordable for low-income households. The average Australian household is likely enough to spend only 13% of their income on housing costs, whereas those with the lowest

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## ***United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...***

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incomes and the most disadvantaged who are eligible for the rent assistance program are paying more than 65% of their income on housing costs.

Pushing low-income families and the most disadvantaged in Australia out of public housing and into the private market is causing many to suffer insecure tenure and is causing rising rates of homelessness. Discrimination by landlords on a number of grounds including race, gender, source and level of income household type, and physical or mental health problems means that for many, the private market is not an option. As a result over 200,000 Australians are living in Boarding Houses and Caravan Parks, where they endure intolerable living conditions and where they lack secure tenure, the cornerstone of the right to housing.

At this point, then, the Committee may or may not be surprised to learn that Australia, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, ranked 4<sup>th</sup> on the 3 Human Development Index, has at least 105,000 homeless women, men and children. And this is most certainly a conservative estimate.

While the national housing picture is bleak, it only gets worse at the State and Territory level. In July of last year I was invited to Perth in Western Australia to hear more about the status of the right to housing for residents in that State. I spent three days meeting with aboriginal tenants, low income tenants, housing organizations and State level government officials. The focus of my visit was on the State public housing provider – Homeswest – because it plays a critical role in housing for the most economically disadvantaged in Western Australia. Of particular concern to COHRE is the explicit and implicit racism in many of

Homeswest policies and the impact on Indigenous tenants, as well as the harshness within which policies are applied. The harshness and racism that informs Homeswest policies are reflected in the number of tenants who are being evicted from public housing. Between 1998 - 1999 Homeswest issued 3,502 termination notices, representing 9% of all public housing tenancies. In the same period only 269 tenancies were restored. Of even greater concern is that 40% of these termination notices were issued to Aboriginal tenants. With the private rental market unaffordable and inaccessible due to rampant racism, Aboriginal families are being forced to live in cars and parks or to live in already over-crowded housing.

To my dismay, the Homeswest officials with whom I spoke were unwilling to admit responsibility for their harsh approach to public housing and they were quick to blame pressures for reform on the Commonwealth government. Furthermore, these officials knew nothing about their international human rights obligations with respect to housing and even less about their reporting obligations to this Committee.

Time constraints prevent me from providing you with more information about the housing conditions of residents in Western Australia, but I refer you to an excellent report about these issues written by a coalition of community organizations and submitted to the Committee at the beginning of this year.

And so, what can this Committee do to ensure the realization of the right to housing in Australia?

## **United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...**

We ask that the Committee:

1. Discuss with the government of Australia the development of a National Housing Strategy as called for under General Comment No.4.
2. Discuss the retrogressive measures the government of Australia has undertaken with respect to transfer payments to the States and Territories for social housing, in light of the government's obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to housing.
3. Discuss with the government whether federal and human rights legislation provides adequate protection against discrimination to housing given that currently this legislation only includes the grounds of race, sex, and disability, but not other possible grounds such as source of income, ethnicity, creed, religion and sexuality.
4. We ask the Committee to investigate how the federal government ensures that State and Territory governments know about the international human rights obligations and how they ensure the States and Territories are upholding these obligations.

Madame Chair, before closing, I would like to remind the Committee that the 2000 Olympic Games are just around the corner and, as you are well aware, with large events such as this come a plethora of human rights violations, particularly violations of housing rights. Your Committee has already taken some action in response to information it received about evictions and other housing issues in Sydney and I trust that you will question the Australian government about the steps it has taken to protect the right to housing and if steps have been taken how effective they have been. Of course, this isn't to say that the

Committee should not join in the celebration of the Games, but I ask that you do so with a critical gaze that recognizes that while the games must go on, so too must the protection of human rights. Thank you."

### **Concluding Observations of the UN Committee**

The Concluding Observations are the final statement made by the UN Committee in relation to the review process. The Concluding Observations for the review of the Australian Government were made earlier this month and include a number of statements in relation to housing. The full text of the Concluding Observations are provided here with the housing observations highlighted in bold.

#### **Australia**

1. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered the third periodic report of Australia on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/1994/104/Add.21) at its 45<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> meetings, held on 24 and 25 August 2000, and adopted, at its 55<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 31 August 2000, the following concluding observations.

#### **A. Introduction**

The Committee welcomes the submission of the third periodic report of Australia, which has been prepared in conformity with the revised reporting guidelines established by the Committee. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the readiness of the

*(Continued on page 20)*

## *Shelter Housing Forums 2000/2001*

Each year Shelter holds a number of forums to hear about housing issues in different communities and regions.

The aims of the Forums are to:

- ◆ provide an opportunity for discussion and exchange of information on issues such as Homeswest policy, tenancy issues, and access to affordable and appropriate housing
- ◆ identify and prioritise housing issues, and develop strategies to respond to issues
- ◆ establish ongoing links between Shelter WA and local community organisations and their workers, government departments and local government.

Shelter will be holding two forums in 2000/2001. A forum will be held focusing on housing and mental health issues in metropolitan Perth followed by a forum in the Kimberley Region.

Shelter WA will be making contact with communities and organisations before the forums are held to identify housing issues. The preliminary consultations will be used to target and prioritise issues to ensure that the forums are used effectively.

If you would like more information about the Forums please contact Shelter WA.

# Housing Advisory Committee Update

As reported in our last newsletter, a planning session was held in May this year to review the future role and purpose of the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC). Subsequent to the planning session recommendations were made to amend the Terms of Reference and expand the membership of the Committee. The recommendations have since been endorsed by the Minister and the first meeting of the 'new' HAC was held last month.

The Terms of Reference for the HAC are now as follows:

- ◆ To advise the Minister for Housing and the Managing Director on State Government housing policy and other related matters
- ◆ To participate in the development of Ministry of Housing policy and program initiatives
- ◆ To advise on or recommend research and the development of new policies and guidelines in areas of perceived need
- ◆ To assist in identifying housing needs in the community.

Membership of the HAC has been reviewed and includes:

- ◆ WACOSS
- ◆ Shelter WA
- ◆ Tenants Advice Service
- ◆ Community Housing Coalition of WA
- ◆ WA Housing and Urban Research Institute
- ◆ West Australian Municipal Association
- ◆ Ministry for Planning

- ◆ Ministry of Housing
- ◆ Commonwealth Family & Community Services
- ◆ Housing Industry Association
- ◆ Real Estate Institute of WA
- ◆ Master Builders Association
- ◆ Urban Development Institute of Australia.

As part of the review process three Standing Committees have been established to provide advice to the HAC on policy and strategic issues relating to different housing tenures. These are:

- ◆ Rental Sector Standing Committee
- ◆ Home Ownership Standing Committee
- ◆ Community Housing Standing Committee.

The Standing Committees are currently reviewing and developing Terms of Reference to guide their future direction.

Shelter WA will provide an update on the restructured HAC in the next Newsletter. In the meantime if you would like more information please feel free to contact us.

## ***ACOSS Social Housing Workshops***

Shelter WA attended the sixth and final ACOSS Social Housing Workshop in Sydney in July this year. The Workshops have provided a valuable opportunity for the housing sector, universities and government to come together to explore trends and issues in relation to social housing policy and research.

The areas for discussion during the six workshops have included

- ◆ the future of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
- ◆ trends in housing tenure
- ◆ supply of low cost private rental housing
- ◆ links between housing, employment and income support
- ◆ welfare reform
- ◆ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

The focus of the final workshop was on the future of social housing. Professor Bill Randolph, Director of the Urban Frontiers Program at the University of Western Sydney, presented findings from his research paper *Strategic Directions for Housing Assistance* co-authored with Michael Darcy. The research was commissioned by the NSW Department of Housing to explore potential scenarios for the future of social housing in New South Wales.

The paper provides an overview of current issues facing social housing, highlighting the impact of targeting policies to the most in need, the mismatch

between public housing stock and tenant's needs, and the limited ability of the current system to respond quickly to changing community needs.

Randolph and Darcy propose a set of 'essential principles' to inform future social housing policy decision making which include equity, security, inclusion, responsiveness, a whole of government approach and, in the longer term, financial viability and sustainability.

Questions around the sustainability and viability of the current housing system underpinned the research. In response to this, the research paper presents three scenarios for the future of social housing:

- ◆ **business as usual** which means continuing to attempt to meet increasing demand with reduced real funding
- ◆ **contraction** of the system of housing provision to a very highly targeted one with a reduced asset base; and
- ◆ **growth and diversification** of the system through higher levels of output achieved through a combination of innovative funding mechanisms, creative use of the current asset base, reforms to the capital funding and rent rebate/allowance systems, and changes to the rent setting method.

Randolph and Darcy identify the third scenario, **growth and diversification**, as the preferred model for the future of the housing system. The model is

based on three key innovations which are the development of a continuum of assisted housing options, growth of the system, and establishment of an Affordable Housing Corporation.

*Copies of the research paper are available from the NSW Department of Housing website at [www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au) or by contacting the Urban Frontiers Program on (02) 4620 3443 or email: [urbanfrontiers@uws.edu.au](mailto:urbanfrontiers@uws.edu.au) Shelter WA has a copy in its library.*

Following the presentation by Bill Randolph, workshop participants discussed key issues and priorities of the housing system and identified the elements and principles of a vision for housing in 2010.

The elements of a housing vision included:

- ◆ Housing will be acknowledged as integral to the achievement of social outcomes
- ◆ There will be an integrated housing system, aiming for affordability for all (housing assistance and housing affordability measures part of one whole)
- ◆ There will be strong leadership from the Commonwealth and other levels of government in planning, policy, regulation and legislative framework
- ◆ Private rental market will be overhauled with government support to stimulate investment and address market failures

- ◆ Rent reforms will be implemented with affordability as a key measure
- ◆ There will be a strong and viable funded social housing sector
- ◆ Local responses to local issues.

In the final session of the workshop, small groups addressed the following key questions:

- ◆ How can housing, employment and income support policy work better together?
- ◆ How should the supply of low cost housing be encouraged and facilitated?
- ◆ How can the system assist those with priority needs and at the same time build sustainable communities and a sustainable housing system?
- ◆ How should the issue of affordability of housing be addressed?
- ◆ What are possible subsidy approaches? What are the incentive/disincentive effects arising from each?

*An ACOSS Report of the Final Workshop will be available from Shelter WA in the near future. We'll keep you posted.*

## National Shelter Update

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**A**t the National Shelter Council meeting held in July this year the following issues and projects were discussed as part of the agenda:

- ◆ **Housing Research Project** is in its final stages. The National Shelter Research, funded by the Cavill Foundation, explores the links between housing and the labour market. We will let you know when the final paper is available.
- ◆ **Welfare Reform** As reported in our last newsletter National Shelter made a submission to the Welfare Reform Interim Report earlier this year. There are concerns that the Welfare Reform Report does not adequately address the links between housing and income support.
- ◆ **National Homelessness Strategy** was launched in May 2000. While the Commonwealth Family and Community Services will be undertaking community consultation this will not include consultation in Western Australia and several other states.

### State/Affiliate Reports to the July Council

#### NSW Shelter

- ◆ There has been major closure of boarding houses across Sydney.
- ◆ Homeless Memorial Service was held on 21 June - the longest night of the year - at

Paramatta Town Hall in Sydney. The Service was attended by 300 people to remember those who have died homeless in the last year.

- ◆ Plans for an Affordable Housing Seminar are underway.

#### South Australia

- ◆ Reports of increasing rates of homelessness in the inner city due to inter state migration and back packers
- ◆ Urban Renewal project will reduce public housing stock from 66,000 to 53,000. There are 32,000 people on the waiting list.
- ◆ Department of Human Services is considering a duty of care policy and the implications of housing people without support
- ◆ Homelessness SA has been established as the peak organisation in South Australia
- ◆ Report of private rental research undertaken by Shelter SA is currently in draft form.

#### Queensland

- ◆ A successful State Housing Conference was hosted by Queensland Shelter in August
- ◆ Currently developing a literature review on urban renewal to inform policy development
- ◆ Queensland Shelter website is up and running

### Victoria

- ◆ Series of reviews are underway or planned on rental housing support program (Tenant Groups), eligibility, income eligibility, and segmented waiting list
- ◆ State Government Homelessness Strategy has recently been released and is available on the Infoxchange website
- ◆ A Women's Housing Policy is being developed.

### ACT Shelter

- ◆ The vacancy rates in the private rental sector in ACT are lowest in the country.
- ◆ A submission has been made to establish a Community Housing peak in ACT.

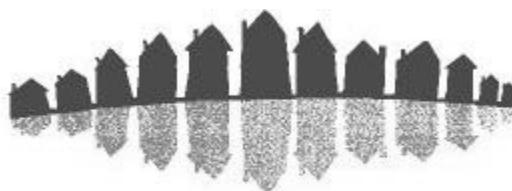
### Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations (AFHO)

- ◆ AFHO was officially launched by the Minister for Family & Community Services Senator Jocelyn Newman in May this year.
- ◆ AFHO has developed numerous Briefing Papers including Welfare Reform, SAAP IV, The National Homelessness Strategy, and Indigenous Homelessness.
- ◆ Annual General Meeting will be held in November.

### Shelter Tasmania

- ◆ Undertaking research on loss of boarding houses accommodation in Tasmania and identify best practice models (paper available by contacting Shelter WA)
- ◆ All tenancies in Tasmania are now under the Residential Tenancy Act introduced in 1997 and a review of the Act is in progress
- ◆ Shelter will be participating in TasCOSS's new Community Gateway Web Site. The project received funding from the Regional Telecommunication Infrastructure Funds

*The next National Council meeting will be held in Canberra in November.*



## OFFICE OF HOUSING POLICY

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**T**he Office of Housing Policy was created by the Minister for Housing in 1999 as part of the Government's new approach to its role in housing in Western Australia, which also saw the establishment of the Ministry of Housing. The structure of the new Ministry reflected the diversity and complexity of the housing agenda for government.

However, it was recognised that there is a continuing requirement for independent policy advice on strategic housing issues to be provided to the Minister, the Board and the Ministry's Managing Director. The Office of Housing Policy has been charged with this role and also provides a focus for the coordination of the roles and contributions of government, industry and community, as stakeholders of the State's housing agenda.

The foundation Director, Anne Arnold, took up the position in November, 1999 and began the task of establishing the Office and recruiting staff to give the capacity to undertake its roles. Anne previously held positions as Executive Director of the W.A. Division of the Urban Development Institute of Australia and as Deputy Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission.

The Office is staffed by two senior policy officers, Ian Hafekost and Stewart Darby, who bring a wealth of experience in social housing policy development and the housing industry, respectively, to their roles.

Sandra McGowan provides executive and research support. She also has a role as secretary to the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) and the Housing Industry Forecasting Group (HIFG), which advise the Minister, and whose Secretariat functions are the responsibilities of the OHP.

The successful and productive operation of the Housing Advisory Committee, as a vehicle for the provision of advice to the Minister, is a key aspect of the Office's role. The Director works closely with the Chairman, Ian Carter in facilitating community input to MOH and Government decision-making. The OHP will also take a lead in ensuring information flows between HAC and its sub-committees and out to the wider community.

The facilitation of links between community groups, the housing sector and Government for the achievement of quality housing outcomes, is a key element of the role of the Office of Housing Policy.

The Office of Housing Policy is located at 605 Wellington Street, Perth, and can be contacted by telephone on 9226 1531, or email to [smcgowan@housing.wa.gov.au](mailto:smcgowan@housing.wa.gov.au). We are currently developing a web site which will be used to disseminate research and other information to our stakeholders.

## HOUSING 2029

The major task which the Office of Housing Policy will undertake over the next two years, is the preparation of a housing strategy for Western Australia, to be known as Housing 2029.

It will explore trends and issues associated with the provision of high quality housing in Western Australia for the next thirty years.

Given the major demographic and economic changes forecast for the next thirty years, it is important to develop a strategic housing response to those forces. Housing 2029 aims to:

- provide the community, industry, and government with a window to the future on housing
- facilitate a “whole of government” approach to developing the State’s housing policy
- identify and develop strategies to bridge emerging gaps
- link housing policy to other agency programs
- explore policy responses to future funding scenarios for public housing.

The process for development of the strategy will be

inclusive and iterative, allowing for ongoing input by stakeholders. Issues papers will be scoped in consultation with interested groups and draft papers are to be published on the web or in hard copy for public comment.

The three background papers which will inform the strategy will be tabled at the October meeting of the Housing Advisory Committee. A workshop to scope the trends and issues papers is scheduled for late November/early December. Interested stakeholders will be notified via the HAC structure.

# Information & Resources

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## Websites - National & International Housing Research

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute  
<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/>

Urban Frontiers Program, University of Western Sydney  
<http://fistserv.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ufp/>

Fannie May Foundation, United States  
<http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/research/index.htm>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, United Kingdom  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/>

## Journals

**National Housing Action** is published by National Shelter to provide a forum for debate on significant issues relating to housing and social justice. In this context, National Housing Action aims to facilitate discussion and critical analysis of development in housing and related areas; housing issues from the perspective of low-income housing consumers; developments in government policy; housing policy alternatives; housing issues for particular groups of consumers; housing programs and practices; and tenure forms and issues.

The journal canvasses contributions from a range of interest areas, including academia, industry and government. It aims to especially encourage consumers and community advocates to communicate their views on housing policy and issues.

The journal is published three times per year. For more information and subscriptions contact National Shelter by mail PO Box 25, Hackett, ACT, 2602 or contact Shelter NSW on (02) 9267 5733.

## Conferences

Refugee Council of Western Australia and the Myer Foundation present

### **Inaugural Refugee Conference**

from 17—19 November, 200, Hotel Rendezvous, Observation City, Scarborough

The Conference includes a session entitled 'Practical solutions to dealing with : accommodation, language and employment issues

For more information contact Jackie King, Chairperson, Refugee Council of WA  
phone 9440 6970 or email [jeznjack@inet.net.au](mailto:jeznjack@inet.net.au)

Community Housing Federation of Australia & Community Housing Coalition of WA present

### **People & Place: Setting a Context for the Future**

27—29 November 2000, University of Notre Dame, Fremantle

For more information contact Millenium National Community Housing Conference Secretariat  
phone: (08) 9335 2360 or email: [lynn@freo.houser.com.au](mailto:lynn@freo.houser.com.au)

## Library Additions

The following publications have recently been added to Shelter WA's Library & Resource Collection. If you would like to access the Library please contact Shelter WA to make a time to come in. Unfortunately we are not able to loan publications out of the office.

- ◆ ASERP (2000) *Community Perspectives Australia's Compliance with the UN Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*, VCOSS, Melbourne
- ◆ Beer & Badcock (2000) *Home Truths: Property Ownership and Housing Wealth in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne
- ◆ Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (2000) *Housing Rights for Everyone, Everywhere COHRE Activity Report July 1998 – December 1999*, COHRE, Geneva
- ◆ Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (2000) *The Status of Social and Economic Rights in the Solomon Islands*, COHRE Mission Report, COHRE, Geneva
- ◆ Council to Homeless Persons (2000) *Parity: Homeless Programs Overseas*, Volume 13, Issue 6, Victoria
- ◆ Council to Homeless Persons (2000) *Parity: Homelessness and the Law*, Volume 13, Issue 7, Victoria
- ◆ Darcy & Randolph (1999) *Strategic Directions for Housing Assistance: Final Report prepared for the NSW Department of Housing*, Urban Frontiers Program, Sydney
- ◆ McCormick, Wylie & Horn (2000) *Outcomes for Households Receiving Financial Assistance to Secure or Maintain Private Rental Housing*, Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne
- ◆ Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2000) *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society: Final Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform*, July 2000
- ◆ RMIT (2000) *Urban Policy and Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3, September 2000
- ◆ Solanec, T. (2000) *Racial Discrimination: Aboriginals and the Private Rental Market "Overcoming stereotypes and breaking the cycles of housing despair in Western Australia"*, Centre for Aboriginal Programs, UWA, Nedlands
- ◆ Shelter Tasmania (2000) *Boarding House Models*
- ◆ Urban Frontier Program (2000) *Frontier Briefings - Strategic Directions for Housing Assistance*, May, UWS, Sydney
- ◆ Walls, L. (2000) *Accommodation Needs of Mental health consumers: An assessment of housing options in the Joondalup mental health catchment area*

## ***United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...***

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*(Continued from page 9)*

State party to advance the date of the presentation of its third periodic report which is indicative of the State party's willingness to cooperate with the Committee. The Committee welcomes the constructive dialogue which took place between the delegation of the State party and Committee members. The Committee regrets, however, that, due to the unexpected advance of the consideration of the State party's report, the written replies to its list of issues were not available to Committee members before the dialogue. The Committee also regrets that a number of questions were not answered to its satisfaction.

### **B. Positive Aspects**

The Committee acknowledges the fact that in general, the majority of Australians have a high standard of living, and that the State party continues its efforts to maintain this relatively high standard of living in the country. This is supported by the fact that Australia is ranked fourth on the UNDP Human Development Index for the year 2000.

The Committee notes the introduction of policies for streamlining business regulation and the delivery of government services, in particular the implementation, beginning in July 2000, of the Goods and Services Tax, aimed at the reduction of income tax for the majority of working Australians.

The Committee commends the State party's contribution to solving the recent Asian financial crisis.

The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's leadership role in maintaining peace and stability in the region, inter alia by providing economic

and humanitarian assistance, particularly in East Timor.

The Committee notes that in August 1999, the Parliament passed a motion expressing a commitment to reconciliation with the indigenous populations of Australia as an important national priority, and a "deep and sincere regret" for past policies that have negatively affected them. The Committee also notes that in May 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation presented to the Australian people its final proposals for a Document of Reconciliation towards the development of measures to improve the position of the indigenous populations of Australia.

The Committee notes that the State party has allocated 2.3 billion Australian dollars for giving priority to indigenous programmes.

The Committee welcomes the partnership between the State party and indigenous communities in initiatives aimed at providing greater access for indigenous peoples to culturally appropriate health services and allocating significant resources for the improvement of indigenous health in general.

The Committee notes that despite the persistence of disparities between men and women in the field of employment, there has been an increase in the percentage of women employed at higher levels.

The Committee welcomes the various programmes established by State party to address domestic violence, among them APartnerships Against Domestic Violence@, ARural and Remote Domestic Violence Initiative@, AGender and Violence Project@ and ACrisis Payment@.

## ***United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...***

### **C. Factors and Difficulties Impeding the Implementation of the Covenant**

In spite of existing guarantees pertaining to economic, social and cultural rights in the State party's domestic legislation, the Covenant continues to have no legal status at the federal and state level, thereby impeding the full recognition and applicability of its provisions.

### **D. Principal Subjects of Concern**

The Committee regrets that, because the Covenant has not been entrenched as law in the domestic legal order, its provisions cannot be invoked before a court of law.

**The Committee expresses its deep concern that despite the efforts and achievements of State party, the indigenous populations of Australia continue to be at a comparative disadvantage in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights particularly in the field of employment, housing, health and education.**

The Committee notes with regret that the amendments of the 1993 Native Title Act have affected the reconciliation process between the State party and the indigenous populations who view these amendments as regressive.

The Committee notes with concern that the Workplace Relations Act of 1996 favors individual negotiation with the employer over collective bargaining, thereby reducing the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The Committee is also concerned about the restrictions resulting from the Act with regard to the protection of wages, job security and temporary employment.

The Committee notes with concern that homeworkers, who are predominantly women, do not enjoy any form of social protection and are paid substantially lower wages than the minimum wage, therefore compelling them to work excessively long hours in order to earn enough for the daily subsistence of their families.

The Committee notes with concern that paid maternity leave is not provided for in law or in collective labour conventions, and that the State party has not ratified ILO Convention No. 103 concerning maternity protection.

The Committee regrets that the absence of an officially set poverty line in Australia has deprived the Committee of the criteria it needs to determine the progress achieved over time by the State party in its efforts to reduce poverty.

The Committee is concerned that the current Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (in New South Wales) does not provide adequate security of tenure and protection against eviction and arbitrary rent increases. In view of that, rents in Sydney have increased substantially and cases of forced evictions are reported to have taken place, especially as a result of the forthcoming Olympic games.

The Committee expresses its deep concern that, despite the guarantees of coverage for all under the Medicare system, the problem of long waiting periods in hospitals for medical services, and in particular for surgery, has not been sufficiently addressed.

The Committee notes with concern that no steps have been taken to respond to its 1993 recommendation to strengthen human rights education in formal and non-formal curricula. Furthermore, while the

## ***United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...***

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State party has given information relating to the funding of private and public schools, it has not provided sufficient information on the difference in quality of schooling available to students in public and private schools.

### **E. Suggestions and Recommendations**

The Committee strongly recommends that the State party incorporate the Covenant into its legislation, in order to ensure the applicability of its provisions in the domestic courts. The Committee urges the State party to ensure that no conflicts occur between the Commonwealth and State law in this respect. The Committee encourages the State party to follow the High Court's position concerning "legitimate expectations" arising from the ratification of the Covenant.

The Committee encourages the State party to pursue its efforts in the process of reconciliation with Australia's indigenous peoples and in the efforts it is making to improve the disadvantaged situation they are in.

The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that the legislative provisions concerning job security are strengthened and effectively implemented, especially for the most vulnerable groups, such as fixed-term contract workers, temporary workers and casual workers.

The Committee strongly recommends that the State party undertake measures to protect homeworkers and to ensure that they receive the official minimum wage, that they benefit from adequate social security and that they enjoy working conditions in conformity with legislation.

The Committee recommends to the State party to

consider the enactment of legislation on paid maternity leave and to ratify ILO Convention No. 103 concerning maternity protection.

The Committee recommends that the State party limit its prohibitions on the right to strike to essential services, in accordance with ILO Convention No. 87, and in the context of civil service, for civil servants who exercise functions of State authority.

The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that labour in private prisons is voluntarily undertaken and is properly remunerated.

The Committee requests that the State party provide detailed information on the work for dole scheme in its fourth periodic report.

The Committee calls upon the State party to ensure that the two-year waiting period for receipt of social security assistance by new immigrants does not infringe upon their right to an adequate standard of living.

The Committee strongly urges the State party to establish an officially set poverty line, so that a credible assessment can be made of the extent of poverty in Australia. The Committee requests further that the State party provide information on this issue in its fourth periodic report.

**The Committee strongly recommends that the State party, at the federal level, develop a housing strategy in keeping with the Committee's General Comments No. 4 and 7, including provisions to protect tenants from forced eviction without reasons and from arbitrary rent increases. In addition, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that all**

***United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights continued...***

“The Committee strongly recommends that the State party, at the federal level, develop a housing strategy in keeping with the Committee's General Comments No. 4 and 7, including provisions to protect tenants from forced eviction without reasons and from arbitrary rent increases.”

**State and Territory governments establish appropriate housing policies in accordance with this strategy.**

The Committee calls upon the State party to take effective steps to ensure that human rights education be included in primary and secondary school curricula and that the State party inform the Committee of the measures taken in this regard in its fourth periodic report.

The Committee requests the State party to provide additional, more detailed information, including statistical data which is disaggregated according to age, sex and minority groups, concerning the right to work, just and favourable conditions of work, social security, housing, health and education, in its fourth periodic report.

**Finally, the Committee requests the State party to ensure the wide dissemination in Australia of the present concluding observations and to inform the Committee of measures taken to implement recommendations contained in present document in its fourth periodic report, to be submitted by 30 June, 2005.**

**Where to from here?**

Shelter WA and National Shelter will be following up the Concluding Observations by the United Nations Committee and we will keep you informed. If you would like any further information please contact Shelter WA.

# *Shelter WA Annual General Meeting*

*will be held on Friday 27 October, 2000 from 3.30pm*

*Conference Room, Claisebrook Lotteries House,*

*33 Moore Street, East Perth*

*An opportunity to meet the new Executive Officer and  
preview our website.*

*RSVP Wednesday 25 October on 9325 6660*

*or [sheltwa@opera.iinet.net.au](mailto:sheltwa@opera.iinet.net.au)*

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## ***Role of Shelter WA***

**S**helter WA is a peak community managed housing organisation established in 1979, which seeks to represent 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.

It does this through:

- Coordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- Developing and responding to policy
- Providing education and information; and
- Promoting alternative housing models.

## ***Newsletter Production***

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*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, Publisher or Shelter policy.*

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