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From: Karel Eringa [karel@shelterwa.org.au]
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Shelter WA Housing News: 19 February 2004

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1. Shelter WA Homelessness Survey

Shelter WA is currently conducting a follow-up survey among agencies dealing with homeless people in Western Australia. Shelter WA conducted similar surveys in June 2001, March 2002, September 2002 and February 2003. These surveys were initiated to identify changes in the composition of homeless households in WA over time and to measure the impact of the Government's response to the Homelessness Task Force Recommendations. Some key findings from the last survey were:

- * Low incomes continued to be a principal feature of homeless households with 96% of households having an income of less than \$408 per week..
- * There was significant growth in the proportion of children (<14 yrs) who were homeless, increasing from 30% in March 2002 to 45% in February 2003. Children accounted for 60% of homeless Indigenous people in the 2003 survey.
- * Housing affordability continues to be a crucial issue. The proportion of income required to access median priced rental housing in Perth for all homeless households was 78% in 2003, a significant rise from the 2002 survey of between 37% for a single parent and child and 52% for a couple and child.
- * There was a doubling in proportion of single parent households experiencing homelessness, up from 20% in September 2002 to 42% in February 03.

Full findings of the four previous surveys are available from www.shelterwa.org.au (publications). In addition, Shelter WA is finalising an overview of homelessness in WA based on the surveys and external statistical information. This report is scheduled for release in late April this year.

If your agency wishes to participate in the survey, a survey form can be downloaded from www.shelterwa.org.au (housing news). Please complete 1 survey form only for each household requesting accommodation assistance on Tuesday 2nd March 2004. The completed survey form should be returned to Shelter WA by fax or post by Tuesday 16th March 2004.

Your assistance with this research will be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the survey or Shelter WA, please contact Shayde Douglas (homeless.project@shelterwa.org.au) or Paul Pendergast (paul@shelterwa.org.au).

Go to www.shelterwa.org.au (housing news) to download the survey form.

2. Melbourne Housing Conference

The 19th World Planning and Housing Conference and the National Housing Conference 2004 will take place at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention

Centre, from 19 to 22 September. The focus of the conference will be on "what sustainability means in a planning and housing context for the Asia-Pacific". There are eight sub-themes:

- * Sustainability in Planning and Housing
- * Affordable Housing and Housing Affordability – Public and Private
- * Community Building
- * Urban Ecology
- * Strategic Asset Management
- * Asia – Pacific Rural and Regional Issues
- * Indigenous Planning and Housing
- * Governance and Accountability in Local Government

The organisers have called for papers; the closing date for the receipt of abstracts is 12 March 2004. Papers or poster displays for consideration can be submitted via the conference website www.rmit.edu.au/earoph2004.

3. Business Tax Review

The second package of Business Tax Review legislation has recently been passed by WA's Parliament. As a result, a number of changes came into effect on 1 January. The changes that are relevant to housing include:

- * Abolishing stamp duty on tenancy agreements (leases).
- * Increasing the property value thresholds for the \$500 conveyance duty rebate for first home buyers – from \$135,000 to \$185,000 for established homes; from \$202,500 to \$277,500 for established homes north of the 26th parallel; and from \$52,000 to \$72,000 for vacant land. The Government estimates that this will result in around 4,000 additional first home buyers being eligible for the rebate;
- * Introducing a single rate of mortgage duty of 0.4%, except for loans related to a principal place of residence, which will continue to receive a concessional rate of 0.25%.

Shelter WA welcomes these changes and expects that they will bring a marginal improvement to housing affordability for tenants and first home purchasers. However, Shelter WA notes that these changes are not sufficient to fully address housing affordability and accessibility issues for low income earners. As argued in previous papers, substantial investment in social housing, significant changes to tenancy law and considerable changes to the taxation treatment of investment in real estate are required to achieve this.

Further information on the Business Tax Review is available at the WA Treasury website, www.dtf.wa.gov.au/cms/tre_content.asp?ID=486

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