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SWA Update: Shelter WA Housing News – 27 March 2006

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1. Where Will They Live?

For the last six months, Shelter WA along with a number of other organisations including the Community Housing Coalition of WA, WA Association for Mental Health and Tenants Advice Service have conducted a campaign on boarding and lodging houses. Following extensive research into this issue, the *Where Will They Live?* Campaign called for an increase in boarding and house accommodation and for improvements in consumer protection.

We recently received an invitation from the Department of Housing and Works to join a working group on this issue. The terms of reference of this working group are as follows:

1. To investigate strategies to sustain, increase and diversify lodging house accommodation, including:
 - o Improving the maintenance of current boarding and lodging houses to meet health, fire and safety standards,
 - o Retaining and supporting existing investment and encouraging new investment, particularly in the private sector, and
 - o 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.

This is good news as it indicates that the Department is taking the issue seriously. However, it also raises a number of questions, including in particular the formal status and resourcing of the working group.

However, a submission by the *Where Will They Live?* Campaign to the Housing Strategy WA draft discussion paper, highlights that there is much work to be done. 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 submission can be downloaded at www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm. We will report on progress on this issue via this email list.

2. Mandurah Housing Forum Date Change

The date of the Mandurah Housing Forum announced in the previous edition of SWA Update has been changed. The forum will now be held on Thursday May 11. All other details remain the same.

Our sincere apologies for any inconvenience arising from the change of date. Thanking you, and please RSVP to confirm your attendance.

An amended flyer for the forum can be downloaded at www.shelterwa.org.au/housing_news.htm.

3. Update: Housing in Hedland

Last month, Shelter WA released its report on housing in Hedland. The report revealed an urgent need to provide more affordable and appropriate housing, particularly for people on low to middle incomes.

On 14 March, the new Housing and Works Minister Michelle Roberts announced a \$50 million project to refurbish 480 Homeswest homes as well as 90 Government Employees Housing Authority (GEHA) homes. Shelter WA congratulates the Minister on this initiative, and agrees that it will go some way towards making South Hedland "a vibrant, safer and a more attractive place to live and work in".

However, as highlighted in Shelter WA's report, much more is required to resolve the housing crisis in Hedland. In particular, industry and local government need to put significant resources into improving housing options in Hedland. Shelter WA therefore hopes that the current initiative is a first step towards a comprehensive solution, rather than the complete package.

Shelter WA's *Regional Housing Analysis: Housing in Hedland* is available at www.shelterwa.org.au/publications.htm.

4. News: Kimberley Housing Crisis Ignored

Catholic Bishop Christopher Saunders has accused the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments of failing to address a housing crisis in the Kimberley. In an article being published in a Catholic newspaper, the Bishop said that "Circumstances such as three or four families in one home, and each of those families with a number of children - in those sorts of circumstances, personal hygiene and good health are impossible".

According to ABC News Online (*Govts ignoring Kimberley housing crisis, bishop says, 23/03/06*), the Department of Housing and Works said that "it is not aware of any major overcrowding, but acknowledges there is a four-year waiting list for housing in Broome".

Shelter WA is surprised that the Department is unaware of overcrowding in the Kimberley. In the last five years, Shelter WA has released a number of reports that all point to extreme rates of overcrowding in the Kimberley as the main housing issues facing the region, including a number of instances of more than 20 people in a 3 bedroom house. Statistical evidence indicates that 31% of Indigenous households in the ATSI region of Broome live in overcrowded conditions – 10 times the WA average of 3%.

Shelter WA has previously estimated the housing shortage in the Shire of Broome to be in the order of 10% of total housing stock in the Shire. It therefore strongly supports Bishop Saunders call on the state and federal governments to use their budget surpluses to tackle the problem.

SWA Update is Shelter WA's housing email list. SWA Update is available to associate and full members of Shelter WA and appears roughly fortnightly. Go to www.shelterwa.org.au/subscribe.htm to become an associate member (currently free of charge).