



**TENANTS'  
UNION**  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

## ANNUAL REPORT **HIGHLIGHTS** 2015-2016



*Mullian, by Millmullian, 2015. Artwork commissioned by the Tenants' Union.*

"Mullian is the Wedge Tailed Eagle, the bird in the centre. The larger circles in the painting represent the larger communities of people and the smaller circles represent the smaller communities. The outside wavy lines connecting the communities are the paths which the people travel between the communities. The smaller shorter lines connecting to the central wavy lines represent the knowledge gained from those communities coming together to create a stronger and more stable world. The Wedge Tailed Eagle in the centre represents the strength of unity in people coming together through fair and just law. The orange lines on the outside represent the wing feathers of the Wedge Tailed Eagle flying over the communities to oversee and protect the people."





## ABOUT THE TENANTS' UNION

The Tenants' Union of New South Wales (TU) has been advocating for tenants in NSW since 1976. The TU is an independent, secular, Community Legal Centre (CLC) & the peak body representing the interests of residential tenants in NSW.

### Our Vision

A society in which people in NSW can access safe, secure and affordable rental housing.

### Our Mission

We aim to make a positive difference to the lives of residential tenants in NSW, and particularly tenants who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

### We are:

- A non-profit membership based cooperative under the *Co-operatives (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012 (NSW)*
- A community legal centre specialising in NSW residential tenancies law and accredited by the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
- A Registered Training Organisation
- The main resourcing body for Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services (TAASs)

### We work to promote the interests of:

- Aboriginal tenants
- Boarders, lodgers and other marginal tenants
- Private tenants
- Social housing tenants
- Public housing tenants
- Land Lease Community residents

### We work towards our goals by:

- Undertaking strategic litigation to advance the interests of tenants
- Informing & educating tenants
- Supporting TAASs
- Advocating for the reform of policies & laws affecting tenants
- Training tenancy advocates and other community workers

# TENANTS IN NSW

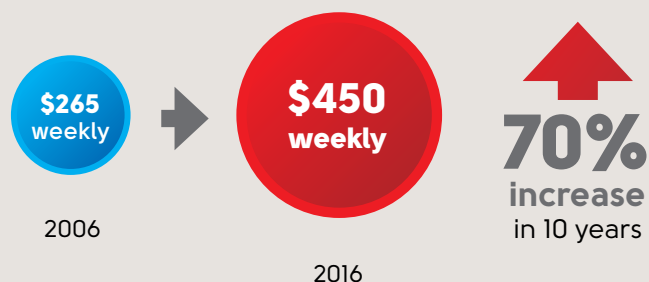
## NUMBER OF RENTING HOUSHOLDS

Based on bonds held by the NSW Rental Bond Board



## MEDIAN WEEKLY RENT

According to the Rent and Sales Report



## AVERAGE BOND

Held by the NSW Rental Bond Board NSW



## VALUE OF BONDS

Held by the NSW Rental Bond Board NSW



# TENANTS' UNION HIGHLIGHTS

## 2015–2016



3,391 instances of **ADVICE, INFORMATION & REFERRAL** provided to tenants and advocates – 20% more than last year



- 248 people **TRAINED** in tenancy law
- 253 people trained in boarding houses law



### RESIDENTIAL PARKS

- 107 land lease communities visited
- 19 information sessions delivered to almost 1,000 residents
- 10,000 copies of *Outasite* magazine distributed
- 2,355 sessions on our new residential parks law website, [thenoticeboard.org.au](http://thenoticeboard.org.au)
- 5 email editions of *Outasite Lite* sent to 586 subscribers



### BOARDING HOUSES

Resources distributed on residents' rights:

- 30,000 wallet sized fold-out cards
- 7,000 brochures
- 500 posters



### ABORIGINAL RENTERS

6 new factsheets written and published



Dozens of **POLICY** engagements with stakeholders in areas such as public and community housing, strata, the *Residential Tenancies Act*, older tenants, residential parks, Millers Point and tax. Plus 74 mainstream **MEDIA** appearances, including 4 on camera



### ONLINE RESOURCES

- 738,013 sessions on [tenants.org.au](http://tenants.org.au)
- 89,644 sessions on the *Tenants' Rights Manual*
- 10 TU e-bulletins sent to 1,304 subscribers
- 2,247 Facebook fans & 1,410 Twitter followers
- 122 posts and 11,496 visitors to the TU blogs



### TENANT NEWS

3 issues published – 11,000 copies in total



### STRATEGIC LITIGATION

- Prevented landlords from circumventing tenancy and land lease community law
- Prevented no grounds evictions by community housing providers
- Dramatically reduced compensation payable by private tenants
- Advocated about systemic issues with Commonwealth Rent Assistance for Aboriginal Housing tenants





## **OBJECTIVE 1: To maintain and enhance the level and quality of information, advice and representation on tenancy law matters to tenants, both directly and through our support of Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services (TAASs).**

### **High quality legal advice and assistance**

We provided advice, information or referral to 3,391 tenants, Tenants' Advocacy and Advice Services (TAAS) and government and non-government organisations. This is an increase of 20% on 2014 – 2015.

### **High quality education**

We trained 248 advocates and volunteers from TAASs, an increase of nearly 40% on 2014 – 2015. 253 people also attended our boarding house law seminars.

We visited 107 residential park communities and delivered 19 information sessions to almost 1,000 residents through our Residential Parks Community Education Project

### **Accurate and accessible materials produced on tenancy law & related matters**

We distributed 30,000 wallet-sized fold-out cards with information on the occupancy principles and the Boarding House Hotline, through boarding houses and community organisations working with residents of boarding houses.

We had 738,013 sessions recorded for *tenants.org.au*, confirming

that it continues to be a significant source of information on all tenancy matters. Our factsheets were viewed or downloaded 808,579 times, an increase of 8% on 2014 – 2015. The online *Tenants Rights Manual* had 89,644 sessions in 2015 – 2016.

We had 2,355 sessions on *noticeboard.org.au* the residential parks information website.

We have 2,247 followers on Facebook and 1,410 on Twitter. Our blog, *The Brown Couch* averages 1,000 visits a month with 11,496 unique visits over the year.

### **Working with Tenant Advice and Advocacy Services**

We conducted our second biennial survey of TAASs assessing the TU's performance in its resource and support role.

Overall, TAASs report high levels of satisfaction across the areas of the TU's work. This is true for timeliness, quality, relevance and their relationships with TU staff.

The TU's legal support and resources are the areas most accessed by respondents. Training provided by the TU and our coordination of TAAS network meetings are also highly valued.

### **Dhubany, by Millmullian, 2015**

*"Dhubany is our spirit which is here represented by our totem animals. To help our spirit stay strong we need a safe place to live, a safe place to call home. The line in the middle of the animals represents our songlines that connect all our people and all our totems. We sing up our songlines to take care of ourselves, our country and our totems. In our cultural way we take care of our totems making sure our totem animals are safe and well for now and for future generations. In this way we also take care of our spirit."*  
Artwork commissioned by the TU.





## OBJECTIVE 2: To have a positive impact on public opinion, policies & practices affecting tenants in NSW.

### Social housing

In mid-2015 the NSW Government proposed legislation in Parliament on 'anti-social behaviour' by social housing tenants. This was introduced without consultation of tenants or workers across the community services sector. Through lobbying from the TU, in conjunction with others from the TAAS network and several Community Legal Centres, some of the harshest aspects of these reforms were modified before becoming law.

### Tax and housing

2015 – 2016 saw renewed national discussion on the impact of tax law on housing affordability. The TU remains supportive of reform to unwind the distortions of Australia's housing markets through negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts. We published a *Tenants' Guide to Tax Reform* and blog posts on *The Brown Couch* to enable tenants in NSW to engage in the discussions.

### Review of NSW rental law

We made a significant contribution to the statutory review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010*.

This commenced with our report *5 years of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 in NSW* and concluded with a comprehensive submission to NSW Fair Trading's targeted discussion paper. In the meantime we hosted a roundtable meeting with 22 other NGOs who also contributed to the review. Amendments to the Act are to be tabled in early 2017.

### TU in the media

We had 74 engagements with the media, including:

- 4 opinion pieces
- 17 live to air radio interviews
- 1 live & 3 recorded TV interviews
- Quoted in 36 print media articles

Plus 122 blog posts and numerous media briefings

### Relationships with tenants & NGOs on strategic advocacy

We participated in a number of strategic ongoing forums and one-off events to consult, inform and advocate.

We also maintain positive relationships with tenant participation organisations and social housing tenant groups.

## OBJECTIVE 3: To build a strong and dynamic organisation capable of providing high quality services and advocating effectively in the interests of tenants at a systemic level.

The TU Board continues to foster a practice of reflection and learning. The TU participated in the Australian Association Benchmarking Survey conducted by the Association Executive Services. The results from this self-assessment are benchmarked against an average Australian Association. The TU scored a high 174 which is well above the average Australian Association score of 124.

The Board also held an external facilitated review day in January. This was a day devoted to self-evaluation and planning.

*Continued overleaf*

### *Wawai, by Millmullian, 2015*

*"Wawai travelled our country creating land forms, waterholes and rivers all of which are important to our people for spiritual and physical wellbeing. The concentric circles represent campsites of different family groups across country. The country was created for all people to share so all people deserve a safe place to call home on country."*

*Art commissioned by the TU.*





*Tenant Advocates and Tenants' Union staff at the Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services Network Meeting, April 2016*



Initiatives developed from this process include the development of board Key Performance Indicators, implementation of a cloud-based information sharing system for board members, increased stakeholder engagement and agenda revision to facilitate 'big picture' discussion.

In collaboration with staff the Board also endorsed and published a new strategic plan for the TU covering the period 2016-2019. The 3 priority areas are:

- Effectively communicate and strategically deploy our organisational identities
- Build a constituency for change in tenant law and practice within the context of social justice
- Create a strong, viable and sustainable organisation

We are 100% compliant with the NACLC Accreditation Standards and maintain our Registered Training Organisation status.

### **Cultural safety for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander staff and clients**

The TU recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the First Peoples of Australia,

and that the majority of Aboriginal people are tenants.

The TU works to achieve cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We take cultural safety to mean 'an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge of denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together'.

We adopted our *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Policy* in February 2016. We continue to take actions to implement the policy. Our *Reconciliation Action Plan* is being finalised through extensive consultation with our Aboriginal Advisory Committee and the Koori TAASs.

The artwork done for us by Aboriginal artists Pauline Syron-Coxon and Millmullian (Laurance Magik Denis) graces the TU office walls, and digital versions have been used in our publications including this *Annual Report Highlights 2015-2016*.

We annually hold Sorry Day and NAIDOC Week events for all staff.



*"Over the past 40 years the Tenants' Union has worked tirelessly to deliver positive reforms for the betterment of tenants across NSW. It gives me great pleasure to join in on celebrating this occasion and I would like to sincerely congratulate the organisation on its leadership and numerous achievements."*

*– Victor Dominello MP,  
Minister for Innovation  
and Better Regulation*

# 40 YEARS OF THE TENANTS' UNION!

2016 marks 40 years of the Tenants' Union. Four decades of working for tenants' rights is no mean feat. A number of events were held to celebrate, and to recognise the thousands of volunteers, staff, members, board directors, funders and supporters who have contributed to the TU's achievements.

## BBQ Launch

We launched our anniversary celebrations on Thursday 11 February 2016 with a BBQ at Northcott Community Centre. TU staff wielded the sausage and onion tongs, salads were provided by the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence, and one hundred tenants, tenant advocates, community supporters and dignitaries came along. Formal congratulations from the NSW Government were given by Shayne Mallard, MLC, representing Brad Hazzard, Member for Wakehurst and Minister for Social Housing. Also attending were Tanya Mihailuk, Member for Bankstown and Shadow Minister for Social Housing, Jenny Leong, Member for Newtown, Alex Greenwich, Member for Sydney, and Fair Trading Commissioner Rod Stowe.

We asked the three Members of Parliament to help Julie Foreman, Executive Officer of TU, to cut the cake.

We also asked each of them to tell us about their experience of tenancy issues. Check out *The View from Macquarie Street* on the TU's Facebook page or Youtube channel.

## House and Home: Looking Back, Looking Forward

"If we want to live in a fairer society where people feel valued, we have to make sure that our nation's housing meets people's needs rather than just boost the profits made by wealthy investors."

– Professor Keith Jacobs

We held a forum and party on 15 August, just two days shy of the actual date of our founding (17 August). Redfern Town Hall was packed with tenants, advocates past and present, founding members of the TU, and representatives from organisations TU works with in the housing and homelessness sectors.

Victor Dominello, Minister responsible for Fair Trading, gave the opening address in which he acknowledged the significant contribution the TU has made to tenancy law reform of 40 years.

This was followed by a forum on the theme of The future of tenants' rights. The keynote address was by Professor Keith Jacobs, University of Tasmania. Speakers on the panel were Dr Dallas Rogers, Western Sydney University; Dr Emma Power, Western Sydney University; and Ned Cutcher, TU Senior Policy Officer.

Aunty Millie Ingram gave the Welcome to Country. Zoe Norton Lodge of the ABC consumer watch television program *The Checkout* mc-ed. Entertainment during the forum was *MissJudge*, a skit by *Agents for Social Change*, a social housing tenant group from South West Sydney, on the power of words we use and their impact on tenants.

The party which followed was a great chance for 40 years of workers for tenants' rights to catch up and swap stories, enlivened by a set of housing themed songs from *Lady Sings it Better*.

## Getting the word out

We created an online gallery of 40 moments in TU and tenants' rights movement history – view it on our Facebook page. We published a special edition of *Tenant News*. Two websites were launched – the redesigned *tenants.org.au* and *thenoticeboard.org.au*, a specialist website for residents of land lease communities.

## My House, My Home

We produced a video documentary to celebrate our 40 years of tenant activism, showcase our work today, and outline the work still before us. You can view a short version or the full documentary on our Facebook page or Youtube channel.

We look forward to your support for at least another 40 years!



Right: MPs & Julie Foreman cut the cake at the BBQ launch.



*Burralgaa Walaay,  
by Millmullian, 2015*

"This painting Burralgaa Walaay (Brolga's Camp/ Nest/Home) shows two Brolgas caring for their eggs in a nest that they built together. The Brolgas are celebrating the security and love in which they will nurture their future young. The five concentric circles represent the different locations where the Brolga's may nest given the right conditions. The red arched lines represent the water and giver of life they need to provide for their young."

*Artwork commissioned  
by the Tenants' Union.*

## NEED ADVICE?

Free, independent, professional advice is available from your local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service. For contact details, factsheets and more information, visit

**[tenants.org.au](http://tenants.org.au)**

You can also read our full Annual Report and Financial Statements at [tenants.org.au/tu/annual-reports/2015-2016](http://tenants.org.au/tu/annual-reports/2015-2016)



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