

# TU tenant news

Free newspaper of the Tenants' Union of NSW

Issue 79 July 2005

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## Reshaping Public Housing

or mis-shaping, deforming and stuffing it up?

by Chris Martin

### 'It shouldn't be assumed that anyone has public housing for life.'

These were the words used by the Premier, Bob Carr, to announce a raft of major reforms to public housing in NSW. Under the banner of 'reshaping public housing', the reforms will increase rents for existing tenants and end security of tenure for new tenants in what were reported as the biggest changes to public housing in 50 years.

The Tenants' Union believes that they may also be the worst, both for tenants and the public housing system.

As this paper goes to press, the reforms have yet to come into effect, and most of the detail of the new policies has yet to be worked out by the Department of Housing.

### 'It shouldn't be assumed that anyone has public housing for life.'

These were the words used by the Premier, Bob Carr, to announce a raft of major reforms to public housing in NSW.

### There are four main areas of the reforms:

#### 1. Eligibility.

The Department will change its eligibility criteria for new tenants. All applicants for public housing will have to show that they are of a low income and either have complex needs (for example, they are frail aged, have a disability, or are homeless) or be unable to access affordable housing.

The TU is concerned that this reform will make public housing available to fewer people. Already, too many people who need housing cannot get into public housing. The real solution is to build more housing, not tighten the eligibility criteria.

#### 2. Tenure.

The Department will no longer offer security of tenure to new tenants. All new tenants will sign fixed term agreements, either short-term (2 years), medium-term (2-10 years) or long-term (10+ years). Before the end of the fixed term, the Department will review the tenant against new eligibility criteria (including income). If the tenant does not meet the criteria the tenancy will be terminated at the end of the fixed term.

This reform creates a poverty trap: tenants may lose their home if their income increases. For many people, secure, affordable public housing is what enabled them to improve their circumstances – and when they are evicted they will be back at square one. This reform also means the Department will lose the higher rents paid by tenants who work and earn higher incomes.

#### 3. Rents.

The Department will change the way it calculates tenants' rebated rents. New and current tenants who receive Family Tax Benefit Part A will have an increased portion of the benefit included in the Department's rebate calculation, increasing the amount of rent they pay. New and current tenants on 'moderate incomes' will pay 30 per cent of their income in rent (up from 25 per cent). The Department has said that these changes will commence in November 2005.

Also, the Department will conduct annual reviews of the market rent of premises, and as a result may increase market rents more frequently.

This reform means that many tenants will pay more in rent, and some tenants may pay a lot more. The 30 per cent rate for tenants on moderate incomes creates a poverty trap: after other costs are considered, tenants may actually lose more than they earn if their income increases. What the Department regards as a 'moderate income' is by most standards very modest – as low as \$46 000 for a couple with two children.

#### 4. Water Charges.

For the first time, the Department will charge tenants for water, including where premises are not separately metered. Tenants of unmetered premises will pay a charge proportionate to their income, on top of their rent.

This reform means that tenants of unmetered premises will pay a charge for water that does not relate to the amount of water they actually use. These tenants will not be able to reduce the amount they pay by reducing their water use, so this is not really a water usage charge at all – it's another rent increase. Also, the Department must ensure that tenants do not end up paying for water used in common areas and gardens, or lost through leaking pipes and old fittings.

The Tenants' Union and local Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services have received many inquiries from tenants about the 'reshaping public housing' reforms and how the reforms may affect them.

This sheet presents some questions that are frequently asked, and our answers. The answers are based on information given to the Tenants' Union by the Department of Housing, and the Department's fact sheets.

### Why reshape public housing?

At first glance, the 'reshaping public housing' agenda seems to contradict much of the conventional wisdom about public housing's problems and how best to solve them. At first glance, the 'reshaping public housing' agenda seems to contradict much of the conventional wisdom about public housing's problems and how best to solve them. For example, one of the causes of the Department's precarious financial situation is the long-term decline in the proportion of tenants paying market rents. On this view, the Department should be looking at ways to increase its 'social mix' and get in tenants who earn higher incomes and pay higher rents. Instead, a stated objective of the 'reshaping public housing' reforms is the drive even 'moderate' income earners out of the system.

### So why is the Government doing this?

One explanation may be that the NSW Government is simply falling into line with the agenda pushed by the Commonwealth Government since the election of John Howard in 1996. The Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA), which sets out the major funding commitments of governments to public housing in Australia, was redrafted in 1996 by the incoming Howard Government to state that public housing should provide 'housing assistance for the duration of need'. The CSHA has delivered less money to public housing ever since. This agenda has its contradictions, however: the current CSHA also specifies that public housing authorities must remove workforce disincentives – that is, remove policies that discourage tenants from getting jobs and earning higher incomes. These same contradictions are evident in the 'reshaping public housing reforms.'

Another explanation is that the reshaping public housing reforms are part of a 'deal' struck at State level, between the Department of Housing and the State Treasury. Treasury has committed to raising loans and other funds to cover some of the Department's liabilities, including its maintenance backlog; in return, the Department has to give up its traditional role as a mixed-income, cross-subsidising housing provider, and instead become a highly targeted, marginal welfare agency. The Department believes that the deal buys it financial viability and keeps the stock of public housing at its present number (about 145 000 dwellings). The Tenants' Union is concerned that this deal is really a Faustian bargain, and that it is tenants who will ultimately pay.

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tenants' union of nsw

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*Views expressed by the contributors to Tenant News are not necessarily those held by the Tenants' Union of NSW.*

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### Aims of the Tenants' Union

The Tenants Union aims to represent the interests of tenants in NSW, both private and public, including boarders and lodgers and residential parks by:

- raising awareness about tenants' problems and rights
- providing high quality advocacy and advice to tenants
- lobbying for improvements in residential tenancy laws
- promoting secure and appropriate housing solutions
- supporting, training and resourcing local, independent statewide tenants advice services.

### Vision

A society in which people in New South Wales are able to access safe, secure and affordable rental housing.

### Values

The Tenants' Union applies the following values to the full range of its activities:

- A belief that all people have a right to safe, secure and affordable rental housing
- A belief that social justice is critical to the health of any society
- Commitment to efficient use of public funds to promote just housing outcomes for people in NSW
- Commitment to engaging the tenants of NSW in the running and direction of a democratic, responsive and constituent-

based tenancy organisation

- Commitment to ensuring that those groups within NSW who are particularly disadvantaged, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people with disabilities, vulnerable youth and the aged are able to access the services of the Tenants' Union
- Commitment to working collaboratively with government, tenancy organisations and other community-based groups to promote equitable housing outcomes for the people of NSW
- Commitment to ensuring a productive workplace that promotes occupational health and safety for employees

### Mission statement

The Tenants' Union seeks to promote a secure, affordable and appropriate housing environment by representing the interests of all tenants and other renters in NSW & by working towards just and sustainable solutions to housing problems.

We do this by:

- Engaging tenants in a democratic organisation
- Raising awareness of tenants' rights, developing policy solutions to housing problems & conducting lobbying & law reform activities in support of better housing
- Providing quality legal advice and information services to tenants in NSW
- Supporting the work of tenancy organisations
- Operating an efficient & productive secretariat

The Tenants' Union of NSW is a community legal centre that has been active in promoting the rights of more than 1.5 million tenants in NSW since 1976.

Over this time we have advocated on behalf of tenants to State and Federal governments, and we have developed numerous resources providing information for tenants and tenants' advocates regarding the rights of tenants in NSW.

### Tenants' Union Board of Directors

David Vaile (chair) Sean Dugan (treasurer)  
Joe Mannix (secretary) ordinary members:  
David White, Barbara Bee, Ruth Simon, Jim Allen and Peter Hollweck

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## Editorial

# When the new story of public housing is not the full story

by Guest Editor, Sharon Callaghan

Reshaping or reforming public housing with the promise of a new approach to tenure, eligibility criteria and fairness suggests a reasonable deal for public housing tenants in NSW.

However the "soft" language of reshaping or reforming, does not tell the whole story. What it does do though, is seek to disguise a fundamental shift in public housing away from public towards a form of crisis housing which claims to target those in greatest need. New public housing tenants will only be offered short or medium-term leases, less than two years for short term, and long-term leases of ten years will be offered to frail elderly tenants or those living with a disability and others who need significant social support.

### So what happened to the original story of public housing?

Public housing was a valuable part of government-owned community infrastructure that allowed a secure, affordable roof over the heads of families and individuals who lacked the personal and financial resources to buy a home or compete in private rental at a particular stage in their life. Despite the challenges that people faced they could keep building their community networks and meet new challenges without the costs and stress of frequent family upheaval. Casual or irregular paid work, for example, would not mean that your public housing could be taken away, it would merely mean an adjustment to your rental payment to reflect your changing income. The new reforms however, will result in those on short or medium-term leases who may also be lucky enough to get paid work, being forced into the private rental market. The upheaval and cost of moving and leaving neighbourhood support will, without doubt, cause great hardship or worse when tenants are retrenched from regular work.

While directing housing towards those living with great hardship is a good thing, it should not be the only way to provide housing to community members.

The loss of security of tenure in public housing is a short-sighted move away from maintaining diverse communities of tenants, young, old, poor and not poor, well and not well with diverse abilities and resources. Public housing neighbourhoods should reflect the richness of the broader community as that inevitably benefits us all.





**I moved into a new flat. There was no phone line. I paid about \$250 to have the phone connected. Had there been an existing line, the cost would have been about \$50. Now that I am moving out, I want the landlord to reimburse me \$200. How do I go about getting this money? Should there have been a phone line there already?**

You might not get that money back. The Residential Tenancies Act 1987 does not deal with telephones or telephone lines. So, the phone line you have had connected is an addition to the premises covered by section 27 of the Act.

Section 27 means that you cannot make additions without the landlord's prior written consent and then may not remove additions without a further consent.

If you ask for consent to remove an addition and it is not given, then you can demand compensation and apply to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal, within 30 days, for a money order if you are not paid.

If consent to remove the addition is given, and you do remove it, then you are liable for the cost of restoration of the premises to pre-addition condition.

The phone-line-trap is very cute. If you ask for consent to remove it, the landlord may say yes. In which case you cannot get reimbursed your \$200. If you do have it disconnected, you get no money for it. And; the trap is reset for the next tenant.

If the landlord says no when you ask for consent to disconnect the phone line, you can demand reimbursement

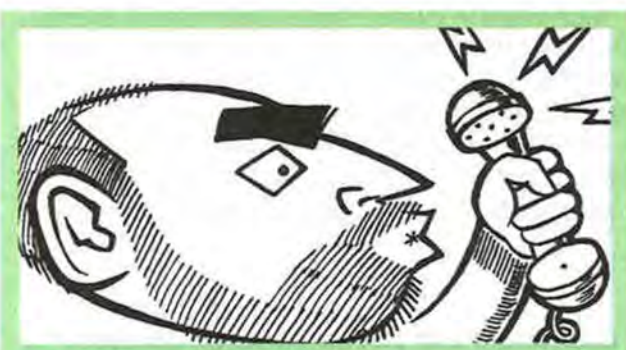
## From the Hotline



and take action in the Tribunal.

Whether there should be a phone connection available at the premises let is a question of habitability. The standard set up by the Act (in-s25) is "fit for habitation". This is an objective standard; it does not take into account the particular circumstances of the tenant. Though it is now normal for houses and flats to be connected to a phone service, lack of that service does not render the premises uninhabitable like (for example) a lack of fresh water would.

Ideally you negotiate with the landlord or agent for a phone line to be connected before signing an agreement to rent a place, and make it a term of the agreement. If this does not work, then seek advice of your local Tenants Advice Service and consider your options. ★



The Tenants Union Hotline operates between 9.30 am-1 pm, and 2 pm-5 pm on weekdays. A tenants adviser can provide information over the phone, or may refer you to your local tenancy service. Freecall 1800 251 101

## Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services Refunded



Eastern Area Tenants Service receiving their cheque from Paul Pearce (Member for Coogee) L to R Amie Meers, Paul Pearce, Jo Kwan

The Office of Fair Trading has approved funding for the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Program across NSW for the next three years.

The ABC online reported that "up to 27,000 renters incur problems with rent, bond recovery and house repairs each year."

The Minister for Justice, John Hatzistergos, told the ABC "there are 1.5 million tenants in NSW and amongst them are some of the most vulnerable people in our community."

He went on to say that "for this reason, \$7 million of funding is being provided in NSW for a program which will provide advice and advocacy assistance to these tenants. Some of these people have issues relating to repairs which they cannot resolve, others have problems in

relation to rent, some of them have concerns in relation to their bonds, disputes relating to their capacity to recover their bonds."

Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services provide free and confidential advice and advocacy for private and public tenants, residential park residents, boarders and lodgers.

Services provide a valuable role in their local community, apart from providing advice and advocacy they also conduct community education



Tenants' Union staff from left at the back: Sarah Drury, Michelle Jones, Chris Martin, Grant Arbutnot. Front from left: Sue Phoo, Carmen Jauregui, Simone Montgomery, Julianne Reilly.

sessions on a range of topics about renting and the law.

If you want more information or are seeking assistance you can contact your local Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service.

ABC Online, Wednesday, July 6, 2005, 7:15am (AEST), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200507/s1407661.htm>

### Directors Required

The Tenants' Union of New South Wales Co-operative Limited (TU) is a non-profit co-operative founded in 1976 and located in Sydney, New South Wales. As well as being the peak resource unit for the Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Program across NSW, the TU is also a specialist community legal centre.

The Tenants' Union of New South Wales is seeking expressions of interest from people interested in serving in a voluntary capacity on the Board of Directors.

Interested persons should contact the Executive Officer, Michelle Jones on 8272-7208 for an information package. Interested parties must address selection criteria included in the information package.

Applications close: Thursday 28 July 2005





## Reshaping Public Housing FAQs

Because the Department has yet to work out the details of the reforms, there are some questions for which we do not yet have an answer. Check the Tenants' Union's website for updates.

### Which of the reforms apply to current tenants, and which of the reforms will apply to new tenants?

Generally speaking, current tenants will be affected only by the changes to rents and rent subsidies, and the water charges. New tenants will be affected by all of the reforms: that is, the changes to eligibility, the changes to tenure, the changes to rents and rent subsidies, and the water charges. But see the Department's fact sheets, and the answers below, for more particular information.

### I know someone who is on the waiting

#### list, and has been for years. Are they affected by the reforms?

The Department says that people who were on the waiting list from before 27 April 2005 (the date the reforms were announced) will remain on the waiting list and be eligible for housing if they continue to satisfy the old (that is, pre-27 April 2005) eligibility criteria.

If and when they are offered a tenancy, they will be affected by the changes to tenure, the changes to rents and rent subsidies, and the water charges.

### I'm a current tenant. If I get a transfer, will I have to sign a fixed term agreement?

No. The Department has said that the changes to tenure will not affect current tenants, including if you transfer to another property and sign a new agreement. If the Department asks you to sign a new fixed term agreement, contact your local Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service.

### I'm currently on a 3-year fixed term agreement under the renewable tenancies policy. Will I go onto one of the new types of fixed-term agreements?

No. The Department says that no current tenants will go onto the new type of fixed term agreement, including tenants who are currently on fixed term agreements under the current renewable tenancies policy. The Department says that it anticipates that when the fixed terms of agreements under the current renewable tenancies policy expire, the tenancies will be 'renewed' as continuing agreements.

### How will the new 30 per cent rent rebate rate for 'moderate income' earners apply?

At the moment we don't know. The Department's fact sheet gives several 'examples' of moderate incomes, but the Department has yet to work out what it will regard as a 'moderate income' for all household types. Also, the Department has yet to work out how the 30 per cent rate will apply when a household passes the 'moderate income' threshold. At the moment we understand that the Department is looking at phasing an increased rate, so that people who earn just over the 'moderate income' threshold will pay just over 25 per cent of their income in rent, rather than the full 30 per cent.

Some tenants have received letters stating that the average rent increase for moderate income earners will be \$30 per week. Depending on how the rate is applied, it may be less or it may be more. Until we know how the new rate will be applied, it is impossible to say what anyone's rent increase will be.

### 'Where did you get your BMW?' Minister Tripodi falls for an urban myth

When announcing the 'reshaping' reforms and new rules aimed at forcing moderate income earners out of public housing, Minister Tripodi gave an example of the sort of person the Government was after. 'Under the new arrangements we'll make an assessment and ask you, for example, please explain where you got your BMW from. If you can't explain, you'll be asked to leave.'

For many people, the image of the BMW-driving public housing tenant will seem at once strange, yet strangely familiar. Every year or so A Current Affair and Today Tonight run a story about 'BMW-driving public tenants', with images of the stately automobiles parked brazenly in the car-park of a Department of Housing building in the inner-city. The show's presenter confects to be outraged and the video-tape put back on the shelves for another day.

Because the Minister saw it on TV, must the story be true? The last time ACA ran 'BMW-driving public tenant' story, a resident of the building featured rang the TU to tell us that the cars in question did not belong to tenants but instead were parked there by a business in the area. The TU rang the Department and confirmed that the Department has a commercial arrangement with an international business association whereby its members may access the car-park. These business people are, of course, completely entitled to drive around in luxury cars.

There may be other explanations for other BMW sightings, too: doctors paying house calls, children coming to visit, even the occasional tenant owning an old beemer (the TU recently saw one in the classifieds for a couple of thousand dollars). But really, public housing tenants in BMWs - it's an urban myth, Minister.

... this page continued from page 1

### What can I do about these reforms?

Ring or write to your local Member of Parliament. Write to the Premier and the Minister for Housing. Let them know how the reforms are going to affect you.

If you are a current tenant, let them know how the rent increases will affect you - especially if the increases will make you leave your job, or turn down work. Let them know how the rent increases and the so-called water charge will affect your household budget - what you will have left to spend on food, medicines and other necessities, and what you may have to go without. Let them know what the security offered by public housing has meant for you.

If you are on the waiting list for public housing, let them

know about your housing conditions - how much it costs, whether you have had a hard time finding housing, and whether you have had to move a lot.

Talk to your neighbours about your concerns. Check the Tenants' Union's website for sample letters, and the latest information about the reforms.

### What is the Tenants' Union doing about these reforms?

The TU has told the Government that it is opposed to the reforms. The TU will, however, consult with the Department as it works out the details of the reforms, and try to get the best deal it can for current tenants, new tenants and applicants.

### I've already received a rent increase notice! Is this because of the new policies?

In May this year, the Department began sending out notices to increase the market rent for its properties. The market rent is the underlying rent for the premises, before any rent subsidy is taken into account. Tenants who receive a rent subsidy are not directly affected by an increase in market rent (though they would have to pay the increased amount if they were, for whatever reason, to lose their rent subsidy). The increases to market rents are different and separate from the changes that have been announced for rent subsidies - the Department should have made this clearer in its letters to tenants.

### I've been told that each household will pay an average amount of \$4 per week for water. Does that mean everyone pays the same?

It may sound like that, but no. The Department has said that tenants of premises without individual meters will pay a charge on top of their rent. The amount of the charge will depend on the amount of your rent. The Department will calculate the rate of the charge so that the total amount collected equals the Department's total water bill. It is important to note that this means that tenants of unmetered premises will not be able to reduce the amount they pay for water by reducing the amount of water they use.

### I've heard that new tenants will have to sign one-year fixed term agreements. Is this true?

The Department has said that from 1 July 2005, new tenants will sign fixed term agreements of one year while it works out its new policy on fixed term agreements. After the policy is worked out (the Department says it is aiming for July 2006) and their fixed-terms are due to expire, each of these tenants will be offered a short, medium or long-term tenancy, depending on their circumstances.

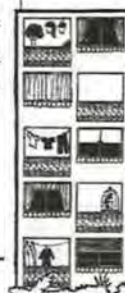
### I'm confused about these 'eligibility criteria'. What's it mean?

Perhaps a good way to understand it is this: under the reforms, there will actually be three sets of eligibility criteria:

- first, the criteria to determine whether you get into public housing;
- second, the criteria to determine whether you get a short, medium or long-term tenancy agreement; and
- third, the criteria to determine whether you get to stay in public housing when the fixed term of your agreement is ending.

### How much money is the Department raising through the rent increases and water charges? What is it being used for?

The Department says that the changes to rent and rent subsidies are expected to raise an additional \$340 million dollars over ten years, and the water charges an additional \$300 million over ten years. The Department has said that this money will help 'build or acquire 12 000 new homes in the next ten years'. Note that these are not additional new homes: instead they will replace older stock that is sold or destroyed. The Department has said that it is seeking to keep the amount of stock at its current level (about 145 000 dwellings).





# Tenancy News Across the Globe...



## Zimbabwe: Mass Evictions Constitute Human Rights Abuse

Zimbabwe's mass evictions campaign could amount to a crime against humanity cautioned the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), a leading international human rights group working towards the promotion and protection of the right to adequate housing. The evictions violate both 'the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)' says Scott Leckie, Executive Director of COHRE.

Leckie added, "This case shows the importance of respecting all human rights. Lack of democracy in Zimbabwe has contributed to poverty. Rising unemployment has led to the expansion of the informal sector. The recent forced evictions and brutal demolitions have started a domino-effect that will soon topple the other rights of thousands of Zimbabweans to work, food, housing, healthcare and children's education."

Source: COHRE media release, June 28 2005 [www.cohre.org](http://www.cohre.org)



## Serbia: Housing Centre in Belgrade

The Association of Tenants from Serbia and Montenegro, together with the IUT and support from the Olof Palme International Centre, will initiate a project aiming at setting up a Housing Centre in central Belgrade. This will be a service centre open to the public for inquiries about housing in general; such as rents, legal rights, tenancy agreements, where to look for a flat, etc. The Centre will co-operate with other consumer and human rights organisations.

Source: Global Tenant, March 2005, <http://www.iut.nu/>

## Germany: Privatisation of Public Housing

Germany's largest public housing owner, the GAGFAH, has sold its housing stock because of serious national budget problems. GAGFAH is owned by the public national pension funds and owns 81,000 flats in Germany. The stock was sold to a private US-pension company. Last summer another US company bought 60,000 flats from the GSW, Gemeinnützige Siedlungs- und Wohnungsbaugesellschaft, one of the major public housing companies in Berlin. The German Tenants' Union, DMB, was able to increase their influence concerning all issues in relation to the social rent law, ensuring strong individual rental agreements and protection against notices to quit. "Together with the government we managed to make a pretty good deal for the tenants living in the GAGFAH houses" says Barbara Litke at the DMB.

Source: Global Tenant, March 2005, <http://www.iut.nu/>

## Sweden: Black Lists

In January the municipal public housing company in Malmo, Sweden was found to have illegally registered tenants, or prospect tenants, with anti social behaviour tendencies. The register also included information such as race, ethnic belonging and mental disturbance. The Ombudsman against Discrimination and the Office of the Public Prosecutor are currently examining the case. Swedish Union of Tenants insists on guarantees from the housing companies that no such lists are in use today.

Source: Global Tenant, March 2005, <http://www.iut.nu/>

## Netherlands: Plans to ban poor immigrants

The city of Rotterdam has said that it wants to ban poor and unemployed immigrants from moving there and evict existing anti-social tenants. The city council has adopted a policy paper which said it sought to restore long-term balance to the city.

Source: Global Tenant, March 2005, <http://www.iut.nu/>



In mid-May, the police and military in Zimbabwe commenced 'Operation Restore Order' (Murambatsvina), a mass displacement and eviction campaign aimed at informal sector traders and residents living in informal settlements across the country. "The Statute of the International Criminal Court clearly prohibits the deportation and forcible transfer of population under certain conditions that appear to be present in the Zimbabwean operation," Leckie cautioned.

In the last three weeks, more than 22,000 people have been arrested for so-called 'illegal trading', while over 200,000 people have been forcibly evicted without notice and their homes or stalls demolished. Police used guns, batons, sledgehammers, bulldozers, flamethrowers and torches to destroy the dwellings and intimidate the occupants. COHRE has also learnt that several occupants were forced to destroy their own homes at gunpoint, despite having government-issued residence permits.

The Government of Zimbabwe has claimed that Operation Restore Order was necessary to prevent 'illegal trading' in commodities and foreign currency. "Mugabe's mismanagement of the economy has created an unemployment crisis, with 70 percent of Zimbabwe's workforce currently out of work. The very people made destitute by his policies have been violently deprived of their only remaining sources of income and shelter," said Leckie. The evictions also ignore the important role played by the informal sector in sustaining the economy. The destruction of property, businesses and houses only heightens Zimbabwe's current economic disaster.

## UK Exhibits Extreme Use Of Anti Social Behaviour Order's

As the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders has increased, courts have become bolder and more inventive with regard to tailoring them around an individual's case. Many of these prohibitions are absurd simply because the act liable to land them a prison term is so clearly not of a criminal nature.

**The Bridge family** - The first case of a family ASBO in which a married couple and their three sons have been banned from congregating together outside their home in groups of more than two. Other conditions of the order include an 11pm-7am curfew and bans on the use of foul language and the entering of the local police station and council buildings.

**Daisy** - A 17-year-old profoundly deaf girl was served an order for spitting in public. Having broken it she is currently in prison on remand.

**Alexander M.** is the oldest recipient of an order to date. At 87 years of age he is, among other things, forbidden from being sarcastic to his neighbours.

Source: Global Tenant, March 2005  
<http://www.iut.nu/>



# ...and Around Australia

## Refugees face a homeless future

A national study carried out by the Australian Housing Urban Research Centre found "30% of refugees had experienced homelessness" The Centre stressed that "Housing plays a critical role in the successful settlement and integration of refugees;" However a third of people in their study had faced rental discrimination.

The Australian 11/4/05

## Welcome to my neighbourhood

One of Australia's richest women Janet Holmes a Court made a point of introducing herself to her newest neighbours. Subiaco Council (In WA) has redeveloped some of their office space into community housing. The new tenants are matured aged people with diverse needs.

Ms Holmes a Court was quoted as saying "I wanted to live in a community not a street"

Sydney Morning Herald 5/5/05

## Property Spiral Strands Renters

An analysis of Centrelink and Residential Tenancy Authority figures showed struggling Queenslanders were being forced to spend a greater share of their low incomes on rent. Increases to rent assistance have not been in line with housing costs and a multimillion-dollar injection to the scheme would be needed to close the gap. Social groups and the State Government believe the dwindling proportion of support has been the catalyst to Queensland's burgeoning public housing waiting lists.

The Courier-Mail - Monday February 28 2005

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# Tenants Rate a Mention

Here are a few tenancy stories which made it into NSW media in the last few months.  
Please feel free to send the TU your media stories, especially from radio, TV or regional newspapers.

## Public Tenants In Northcott Score A Win

The Housing Minister Joe Tripodi announced that a community development worker position will continue on the Northcott Housing estate in Surry Hills. Northcott Narratives is an arts project that aims to build a sustainable community through the arts. "Ms Henderson said the Northcott Narratives program, had helped lower crime, revitalised the community centre and improved relationships between tenants and the wider community".

Sydney Central Courier 8 July 2005

## The Block Under Threat

Former Whitlam government minister Tom Uren has labelled Frank Sartor the Minister for Redfern Waterloo "arrogant." Mr Sartor believes that the "Aboriginal Housing Company's Pemulwuy Project is not sustainable in its current form." Mr Sartor disagrees with the proposed building of 62 residential dwellings. Mr Sartor wants the Block to be mixed purpose that includes sporting, cultural and educational facilities.

Sydney Central Courier 8 June 2005-06-16

## Surviving Share housing

The ShareHouse Survival Guide got a plug when Redfern Legal Centre's Amy Richardson gave her tips and advice for making share accommodation work on the Sunrise program on Channel 7.

For more information on surviving sharehousing go to [www.rlc.org.au/sharehousing](http://www.rlc.org.au/sharehousing).

Sunrise Channel 7 9/6/05

## Public Housing Sells Out

It was reported that townhouses that were owned by the Department of Housing in Sydney's West were sold

to private investors for the princely sum of \$103 000 each. The property is now on the market for \$315 000. With 85000 people on the public housing waiting list it does not seem to make to much sense financial or otherwise.

Daily Telegraph 29/3/05

## Smoke Alarms A Must

The NSW government announced that from May 1 next year it will be mandatory for all NSW homes to have smoke alarms. Mr Carr announced that there will be a change in law "to make fire alarms, either battery operated or hard-wired, part of the conditions of sale or rental for any home in NSW".

Sydney Morning Herald 15 June 2005

## Public Housing: Reform or Marginalisation?

The NSW State Government announced a major overhaul of public housing in April 2005.

Gary Moore, NSW Council of Social Services Director was quoted as saying:

"The plan runs counter to other elements of the government's social policy, like encouraging social mix and strengthening communities"

South Sydney Herald May 2005

## Refugees Face A Homeless Future

A national study carried out by the Australian Housing Urban Research Centre found "30% of refugees had experienced homelessness" The Centre stressed that "Housing plays a critical role in the successful settlement and integration of refugees;" However a third of people in their study had faced rental discrimination.

The Australian 11/4/05

## Public Housing: Do You Deserve It?

The Department of Housing no longer wants you long term. Under the new proposal tenants will sign fixed term agreements and will be reassessed after their agreement expires. Minister for Housing Joe Tripodi said, "the Government wants to remove subsidies from undeserving tenants"

Sydney Morning Herald 28.4.05

## Would You Like To Live With Him?

A share accommodation ad in the local paper goes as follows

A retired male owner seeking female applicants fully employed with checkable references. Police or military women welcome. Two-week trial before long-term situation agreement. Mandatory rules no religious excesses, politics, parties, smoking, pets, kids and NO male visitors". Sounds ace.

Sydney Morning Herald 18/4/05

## Public Housing In A State Of Disrepair

The Government was not adequately maintaining two out of three public housing units. An Auditor General's report showed found that the Department was lagging in implementing a satisfactory maintenance schedule. "Public Housing tenants were largely dissatisfied with the state of their homes..."

Daily Telegraph 3/3/05



... continued from page 5

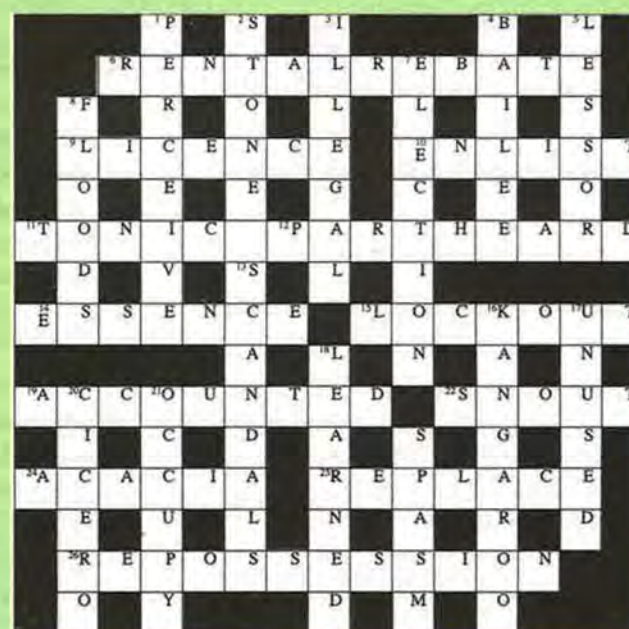
## Far North QLD Public Housing Waiting Time To Increase By Up To 2 Years!

The fast growing public housing waitlist has affected remote tenants severely. At this moment in the Far North Queensland Region the number of people on waiting lists is approximately 2, 150. That's about 5,381 persons who are just trying to get into public housing, and this has the Regional Tenant Group and local tenant groups very concerned. Especially because it is believed that there are approximately 30 to 40 applications being received by the area office each month, allowing for any fluctuations over any given month. And with the current statewide waitlist sitting at 34,000, this must also mean that current wait times will also increase across the state's 17 regional areas. Some say an increase of wait times by 2 years is quite possible.

Far North QLD Regional Tenants' Advisory Group inc. Report, TUQ Newsletter, Jan 2005



## Solutions to Last Editions Crossword



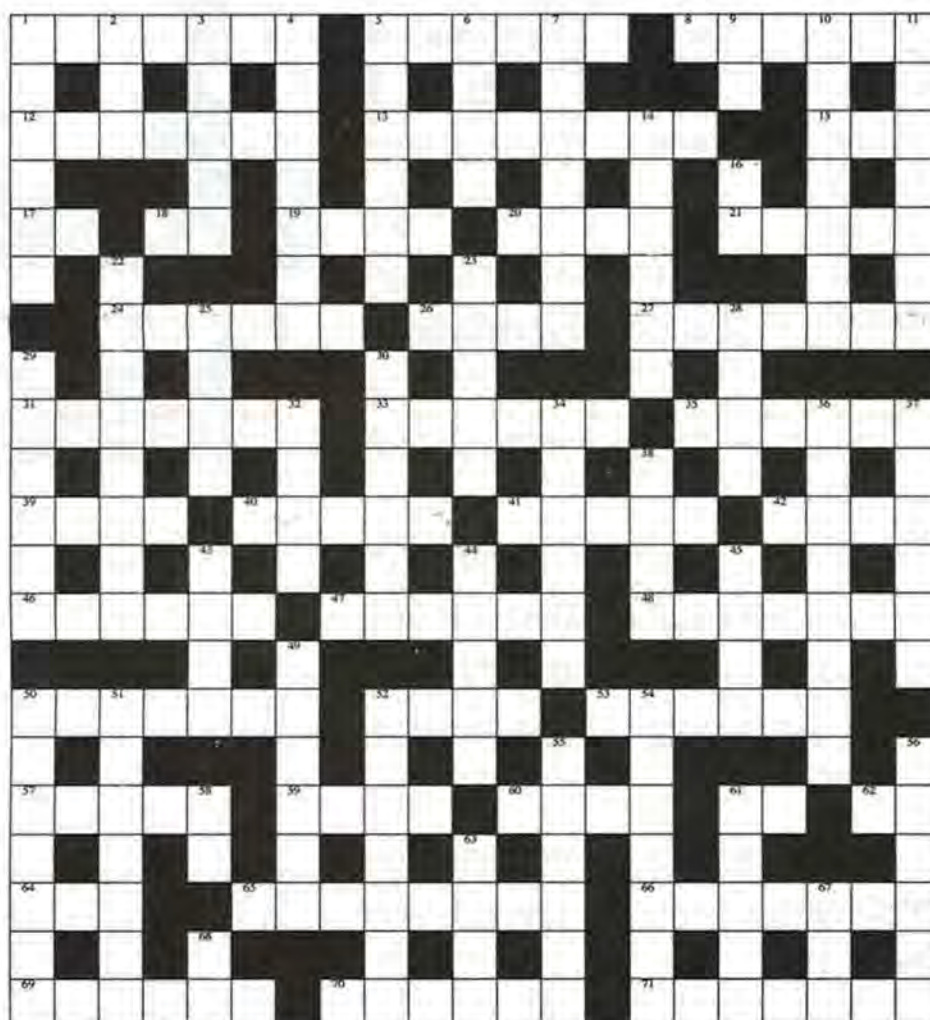




# ACROSS

1. Australian Labor Prime Minister, pioneering social reformer and the only PM to have lost office in a coup de tat (7)
5. Australian Labor Prime Minister and Treasurer for three non-consecutive terms, established the Commonwealth Bank and the Navy (6)
8. Australian Prime Minister, the only one to have led a government with one party (Labor) and then a subsequent government with the opposing party (the Nationalists) (6)
12. public housing estate in which Noddy is a tenant (7)
13. punctuation mark linking text to a subtext, such as the fine print in a contract (8)
15. the producer of the Tenant News (3)
17. stubborn animal (no, not 70 across) (2)
18. for all of whom 70 across promised to govern (2)
19. colloquially, a romantic couple (for example, 40 across and his biographer) (4)
20. Australian Prime Minister and a 'founding father' of Federation, previously a NSW Premier and subsequently a Member of the English House of Commons (4)
21. to bore (though not in the sense that 70 across is wont to do) (5)
24. the most inept or feeble (for example, 71 across) (6)
26. Australian Liberal Prime Minister, the only one to leave office by disappearing off the face of the planet (4)
27. Colourful Sydney businessman, nightclub owner, tax dodger and landlord (7)
31. Australian Labor Prime Minister and Treasurer, pioneer of the Australian welfare state who signed the first Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (7)
33. in high spirits, jubilant (for example, 70 across when George W Bush mentions his name) (6)
35. major pan-national ethnicity originally of Africa and the Middle East (6)
39. member of the more reformist of the two major English political parties of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which finally evolved into the Liberal Party (4)
40. Australian Labor Prime Minister, held office for a Labor Party record of four terms (5)
41. metaphorical strings by which Australia remains attached to the United Kingdom (5)
42. colloquially, a manipulator or svengali (4)
46. nickname of H C Coombs, renown public servant and adviser to prime ministers (6)
47. false (for example, claims made by 70 across in relation to asylum seekers, war in Iraq, native title, tax policy, etc, etc) (6)
48. famous raft which made an epic crossing of the Pacific Ocean during the prime ministership of 31 across (3, 4)
50. brand of work wear, often worn by landlords' repairmen (4, 3)
52. number of times 26 across, 31 across, 69 across, 11 down,

- 37 down and 50 down each won general elections as Prime Minister (4)
53. phases or steps in a process or procedure (6)
57. equipped with weapons (5)
59. claim of possession over goods as security for a debt (4)
60. Australian Country Party caretaker Prime Minister, took office on the death of 3 down (4)
- 61, 62 across. De Camptown ladies sing this song... (2, 2)
62. see 61 across
64. in poor health, as were 31 across, 3 down and 37 down during periods of their terms in office (3)



65. Australian Country Party Prime Minister, held office for a Country Party record of 4 months (1, 1, 6)
  66. to enact again (7)
  69. Australian Liberal Prime Minister, the only PM to have been a senator (6)
  70. Australian Liberal Prime Minister, the second longest-serving PM and pioneer of the 'non-core' promise (6)
  71. Australian Liberal Prime Minister, the only Liberal PM never to have won an election (though he did pray for victory) (7)
- DOWN**
1. Australian Labor Prime Minister, leader of Australia's — and the world's — first national Labor government (6)
  2. grasping, parasitical vegetable, often found clinging to old institutions while simultaneously undermining them (no, not 70 across) (3)
  3. Australian United Australia Party Prime Minister, previously Treasurer in 11 down's Labor government (5)

4. Australian United Australia Party and Liberal Prime Minister, held office for a record total of 19 years (7)
5. Australian Liberal Prime Minister, the only PM to be commissioned to form a government without the confidence of the House of Representatives (6)
6. occupies a seat in an official capacity (for example, as a judge or as a Member of Parliament) (4)
7. sincere in intent or manner (like 31 across) (7)
9. interjection indicating hesitation or inarticulateness (2)
10. more cheerful (for example, 40 across after a beer) (7)
11. Australian Labor Prime Minister, had the misfortune of being elected just in time for the onset of the Great Depression (7)
14. person who delights in the suffering of others (for example, an employee of the Department of Housing's Legal Branch) (6)
16. one of the aspects of the psyche, well-developed in 40 across (2)
22. thrashing or waving wildly (like 26 across's limbs in the foam off Cheviot Beach) (8)
23. Sea to the north of Australia where a decisive naval battle was fought during the term of 37 down (5)
25. another stubborn animal (again, not 70 across) (4)
28. Australian Labor caretaker Prime Minister, held office for the shortest period of all PMs (4)
29. Australian Country Party caretaker Prime Minister, nicknamed 'Black Jack' (6)
30. Australian Prime Minister for three non-consecutive terms, a 'founding father' of Federation and founder of the first Liberal Party (6)
32. period of the first fixed term of a public housing Renewable Tenancy agreement (4)
34. catches sight of (for example, for the purpose of recording in a public housing Incident Diary) (6)
36. the most pushy or dictatorial (like 70 across, at least in relation to public servants and welfare recipients) (7)
37. Australian Labor Prime Minister who led Australia through most of the Second World War, only to die just weeks before VE Day (6)
38. Australian Prime Minister, the first to hold office as a 'Liberal' (4)
43. a frozen, lifeless mass, found always at sea (no, not the Australian Labor Party) (4)
44. Australian Nationalist Prime Minister, the only PM to lose both government and his own seat at a general election (5)
45. tight-fitting (like 40 across's Terrigal beach wear) (4)
49. peer or colleague, implicitly male (6)
50. Australian Labor Prime Minister and champion of economic rationalism (7)
51. more agile or quick-footed (as 70 across has proved to be compared with four Labor leaders so far) (7)
52. spicy herb, sometimes grown in public housing community gardens (7)
54. a rule or law of mathematics or logic rather than of government, often expressed by an equation or formula (7)
55. gained by work or service (6)
56. Australia's first Prime Minister (6)
58. colloquially, trouble (usually deep) (2-2)
61. aspiration, hope or aim (for example, homeownership) (5)
63. concept, thought or notion (according to 70 across, no new good ones have been created since 1950) (4)
67. 31 across would tap this out of his pipe (3)
68. see 58 down





# Tenants Have Rights!

## How to avoid problems

- ✓ Start by reading your residential tenancy agreement. Get some help if you can't understand it.
- ✓ Tell your landlord, or the landlord's agent, about any problems and tell them what you want. You should confirm anything you agree to in writing and send your landlord a copy.
- ✓ Remember that the agent works for the landlord.
- ✓ Keep a written record of what happens between you and your landlord or agent, including what each of you said and when.
- ✓ Keep copies of your:
  - Residential Tenancy Agreement
  - Condition Report
  - Receipts for rent and bond money, all letters and written records.
- ✓ Never sign a blank form or any papers you don't understand.
- ✓ If you receive notice of a Tribunal hearing you should always attend.
- ✓ If you stop paying rent you can be asked to leave. Rent strikes do not work.

**Remember: your landlord can't evict you - only the Tribunal can.**

## For more help

**Contact your local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service.**

### Sydney Metro

Inner Sydney	9698 5975
Inner Western Sydney	9559 2899
Southern Sydney	9787 4679
South West Sydney	4628 1678 or 1800 631 993
Eastern Suburbs	9386 9147
Western Sydney	9891 6377 or 1800 625 956
Northern Sydney	9884 9605

### Coastal

Illawarra/ South Coast	4274 3475 or 1800 807 225
Central Coast	4353 5515
Hunter	4929 6888 or 1800 654 504
Mid Coast	6583 9866 or 1800 777 722
Northern Rivers	6621 1022 or 1800 649 135

### Greater Western NSW

North West	6772 8100 or 1800 836 268
South West	6361 5307 or 1800 642 609

### Specialist

Older Persons Tenants' Service	9281 9804
Parks and Village Service	9281 7967

### Aboriginal Services

Western NSW	6882 3611 or 1800 810 233
Southern NSW	4472 9363 or 1800 672 185
Northern NSW	6643 4426 or 1800 248 913
Greater Sydney	9564 5367 or 1800 772 721

### Tenants' Union Hotline

Mon-Fri 9.30am-1 & 2-5pm	1800 251 101
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[www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au)

For fact-sheets and for further information about the Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Program



Get a new  
ease on life...  
join the  
**Tenants'  
Union!**

### Membership Application

#### TAX INVOICE

I would like to apply for membership of the Tenants' Union of NSW Co-operative Limited ABN: 88 984 223 164

Name / Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (home) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (work) \_\_\_\_\_

This is a: (please ✓ one)

☐ new membership ☐ renewal (Membership Number) \_\_\_\_\_

I am a: (please ✓ one)

☐ tenant ☐ tenant organisation  
☐ non-tenant ☐ non-tenant organisation  
☐ other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Annual fee runs from 1 January to 31 December.  
New members can pay half fees after 30 June.  
First membership fee paid covers cost of share.

**unwaged \$8.00 waged \$16.00 organisation \$32.00**  
(all include GST component)

Please find enclosed cheque / money order to the Tenants' Union for:

Membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

I am over 18 years of age. I support the objectives of the Tenants Union of NSW.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

return to: Tenants Union of NSW, 68 Bettington Street, Millers Point 2000