



Tenants' Union of Tasmania Inc.

Annual Report 2007/08

CONVENOR'S REPORT

The demand for the advocacy, advice and education services provided by the Tenants' Union has grown again in the 2007-2008 period and remains high relative to the resources of the organisation. Over the preceding year the Union provided telephone advice to approximately 2300 callers, provided face-to-face advice to almost 300 clients, and dealt with 71 new cases of a more complex nature.

A key feature of the work of the Union is the significant number of individuals who have assisted the Union and helped it to achieve so much given its highly limited resource base. This remains a credit to the commitment and effort of our staff, and the generous support of a number of volunteers.

During the year, the Union was successful in obtaining additional funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to extend its face to face advice and advocacy services to the North of the State. The service is delivered by the North West Community Legal Centre under the Tenants' Union's supervision, and complements our statewide telephone advice service.

Law reform in the area of tenancy and housing policy has continued to be a priority for the Union. During the year the Union submitted its paper on Housing Affordability to a Legislative Council Select Committee headed by MLC Terry Martin. In addition, Sandy Duncanson and I provided an oral submission to the Committee on the Union's behalf.

The Union has continued working with Dr Erica Bell of the School of Rural Health on agreed minimum standards for rental accommodation and the health impacts of living in low quality rental accommodation. A briefing paper is anticipated in the next financial year.

Over the past 18 months the Management Committee has been working hard to implement rigorous systems and processes to support the operations of the Union. This year the Union has tried hard to broadcast its work by producing a new advertisement for its work and this has been extensively sent to relevant outlets, such as libraries, across the State. In addition the Union has applied for a Tasmanian Community Fund grant to further knowledge of the service by producing a television advert.

The Union has retained robust financial processes and procedures, which have ensured that the Committee has clear, up to date information on the Union's budget position when making financial decisions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing Treasurer, Tamioka Colbeck and Bookkeeper Mick Lynch for their work in this area, which has contributed to the significantly improved financial position for the Union in this financial year.

There have been a number of changes to the Management Committee over the past 12 months. Committee member Fiona Brodribb resigned and on behalf of the Union I thank her for her work. Tamioka Colbeck passed on the Treasurer's position and Tim Bullard vacated the Convenor position. Luckily both Tam and Tim have decided to continue as committee members. The Union has added three new

committee members, Gemma Misrachi, Sue Chapple and Kristie Johnston. The Union extends a warm welcome and looks forward to working with them.

My thanks to the Committee members, past and present, for their support during the year.

Thanks too to the Union's dedicated staff, Sandy Duncanson, Meredith Upchurch, Sarah Hiller, Phil Hoffen and Mick Lynch, as well as the volunteers who contribute so much to the Union during the year.

It is the commitment of the staff and volunteers that ensures that the Tenants' Union continues to achieve its principle objective, to advocate for the rights and status of all tenants in Tasmania.

Rowland Atkinson
Convenor
September 2008

ABOUT THE TENANTS' UNION OF TASMANIA INC

AIMS:

The Tenants' Union works for the interests and rights of tenants in Tasmania and seeks to:

- Improve conditions in rental housing in Tasmania so that they meet accepted minimum standards;
- Raise awareness within the community about tenancy issues; and
- Promote legislative change where this is necessary to improve outcomes for tenants.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Tenants' Union is an organisation that is:

- Proactive in responding to changing tenancy issues;
- Offering quality advice, advocacy, information and referral services;
- Empowering people to take action on their own behalf;
- Abreast of current housing issues; and
- Keeping decision makers in the community aware of the key issues that are impacting on residential tenants in Tasmania.

ROLES:

The Tenants' Union has a number of roles. It provides:

- Advice, information and assistance with tenancy issues;
- Advocacy for individual tenants on residential tenancy issues;
- Systemic advocacy; and
- Education and training for professionals, community organisations, students and community members about tenancy issues.

OPERATION:

The Tenants' Union provides:

- A free service;
- Access to specialist knowledge on tenancy issues; and
- A service to all residential tenants (eg. public, private and boarding).

The Telephone Advice service operates during the hours of 9:30am and 4:00pm weekdays and the "Drop-in" Advice Sessions are available between 9:30am and 12:30pm Tuesday to Thursday inclusive.

FUNDING:

Commonwealth Grants from the Attorney General's Department for the financial year totalled \$60,174. This money was used for the provision of Community Legal Education, training, coordination, compliance and administration of the service as a whole.

State Grants from the Department of Health and Human Services, Housing Tasmania for the financial year equalled \$138,719. These funds were expended by providing a telephone advice and advocacy service and legal representation.

The Tenants' Union generated a small amount of income through the sale of Lease Agreements and Condition Reports totalling \$1,722, and bank interest of \$5,403.

ACCESS AND EQUITY POLICY:

The Tenants' Union continues to ensure that all tenants have equitable access to adequate tenancy advice, advocacy and community education services. Similarly the Tenants' Union works to provide equitable access for all tenants to justice through tenancy laws and legal processes and practices.

CLIENTS:

The clients of the Tenants' Union are:

- Private housing tenants;
- Public housing tenants;
- Non-government agencies (eg. community workers and other parties interested in tenants rights and responsibilities) and
- State Government agencies (eg Housing Tasmania and Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading).

Of the 2261 clients who informed us of their status, 68% self-identified as low income, 3% of clients identified as indigenous, 41% were under 30 years of age and 6% were born overseas. 71% of our clients were women.

STAFF TRAINING:

1. Training of volunteers during 2007/08 financial year:

Sandy Duncanson (Principal Solicitor) and Meredith Upchurch (Solicitor) conducted ten hours of preliminary training with four new volunteers. All became regular volunteers. In addition, both Sandy and Meredith trained and supervised Tracey Chapman whilst she was completing her Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice.

Sandy Duncanson, Meredith Upchurch and Phil Hoffen (Administrator /Advocate) attended a day-long workshop associated with volunteer recruitment and training.

All seven regular volunteers have received training and advice during the year from Sandy and Meredith.

2. Training of TUT staff during 2007/08 financial year:

Sandy Duncanson conducted fifteen hours of preliminary training with new North-West Solicitor, Sarah Hillier.

Sandy Duncanson provided Community Legal Education training to the Advocate, Phil Hoffen.

Meredith Upchurch and Phil Hoffen attended computer software training for six hours each.

Meredith Upchurch and Sandy Duncanson attended seminars totaling four hours of Continuing Legal Education, conducted by the Law Society of Tasmania. Meredith and Sandy both attended the 2007 National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) conference.

Mick Lynch attended a MYOB software training session.

SUMMARY OF SERVICE ACTIVITY:

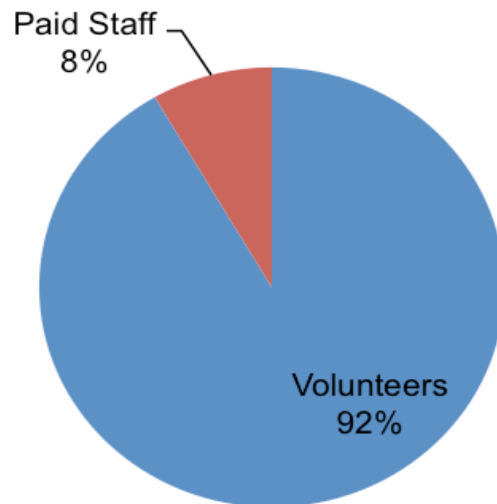
The Tenants' Union has once again had a very busy year. 2619 clients contacted the TU requesting support, advocacy and/or information from volunteers and staff. The Community Legal Education and Training reached out to wide variety of people in the community through six projects and forums, and there were ten areas of Law Reform pursued. The Tenants' Union achieved this with the equivalent of 2.4 full time paid positions. The website (www.tutas.org.au) had 25,489 page hits in the last financial year (up over 26%).

TELEPHONE ADVICE LINE:

The data provided below is collected from clients using the Telephone Advice Line. This data is extremely valuable to the Tenants' Union as it informs Law Reform Activities, assists in targeting Community Legal Education Programs and generally allows the organisation to develop a better understanding of current trends in the rental market.

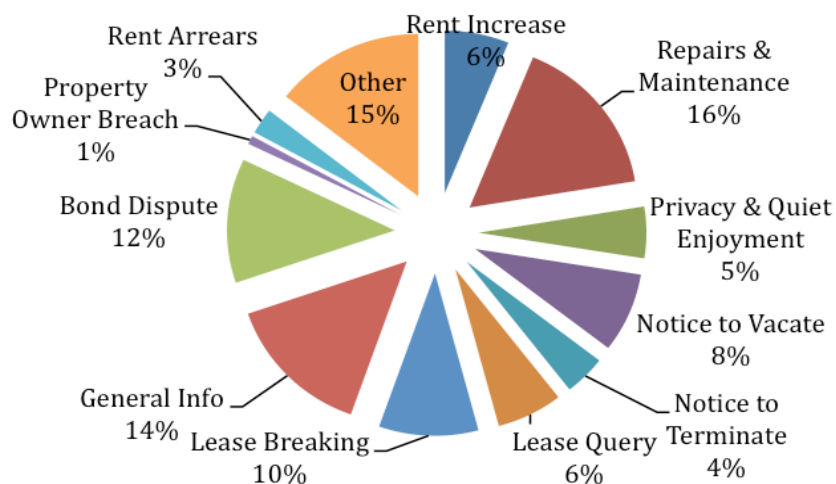
Using the available data the following charts show the volume of contact with tenants via the Telephone Advice Line in the financial year. The first chart demonstrates the important role that volunteers play in providing assistance to tenants. Volunteers now dispense over nine-tenths of all telephone advice, up from 76% in the last financial year and 52% in the year prior to that. Volunteers provided 1183 hours of telephone advice in 2007/8.

Telephone Calls Answered By:



The charts below provide a snapshot of the issues overall and then in each geographical region on an annual basis. This information has been sourced from the available data collected through the Telephone Advice Line. We ask all our clients to provide information to us that will be used in statistical reports. It is important to note that a number of clients choose not to divulge information, however we still provide them with advice and information.

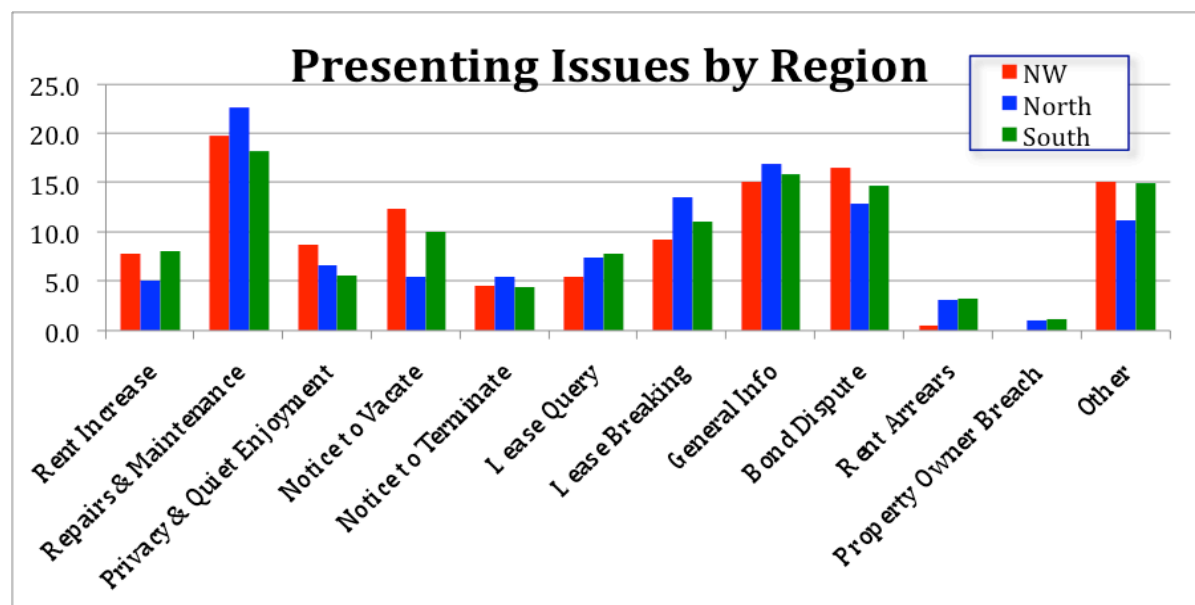
Presenting Issues - Statewide



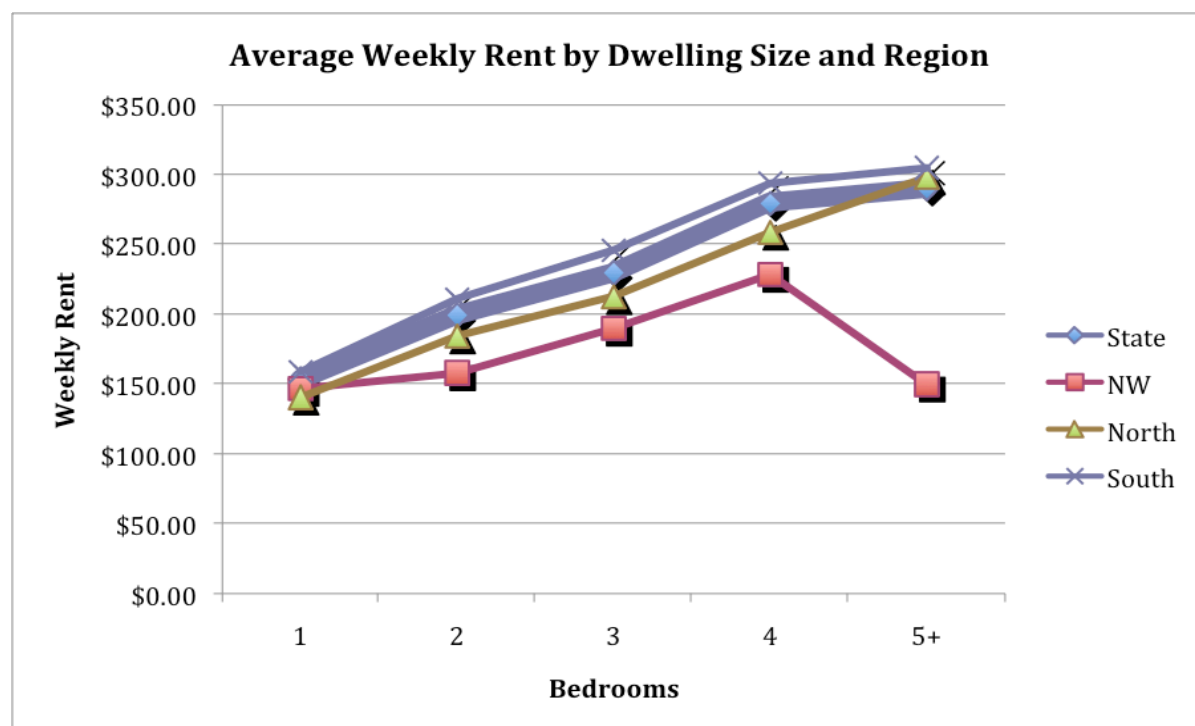
Repairs and maintenance were an issue for 16% of all clients (and 23% of Northern clients), and these figures will inform an upcoming project associated with reform of the *Residential Tenancy Act (1997)*.

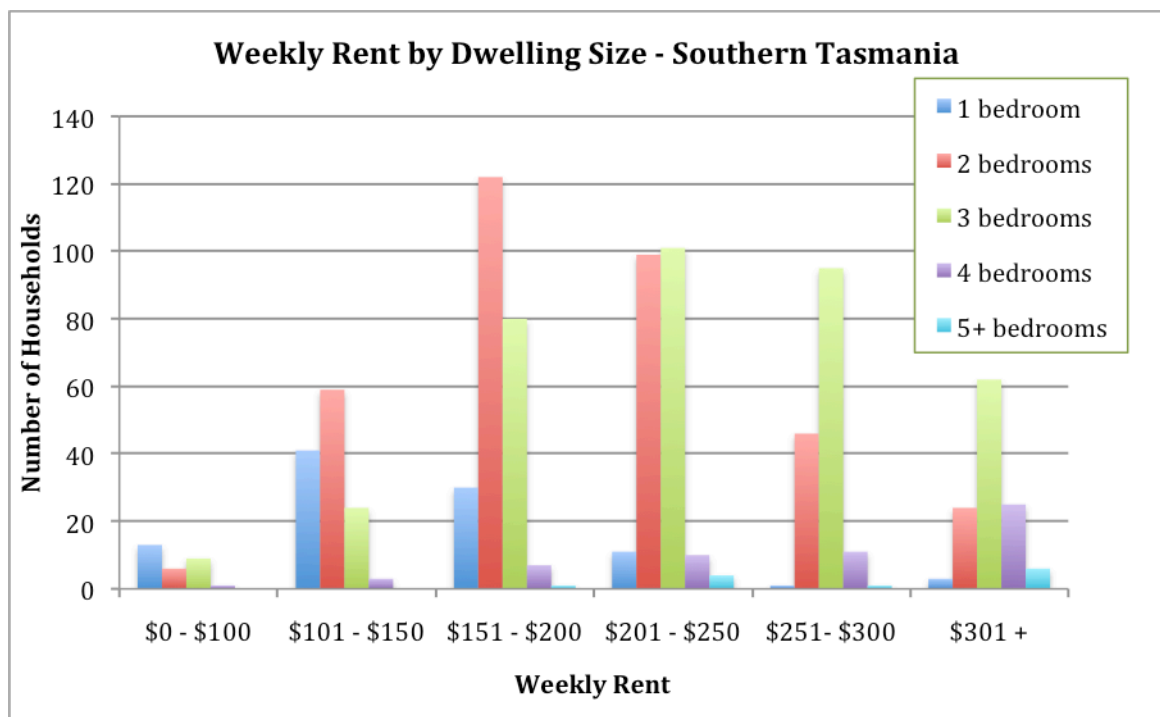
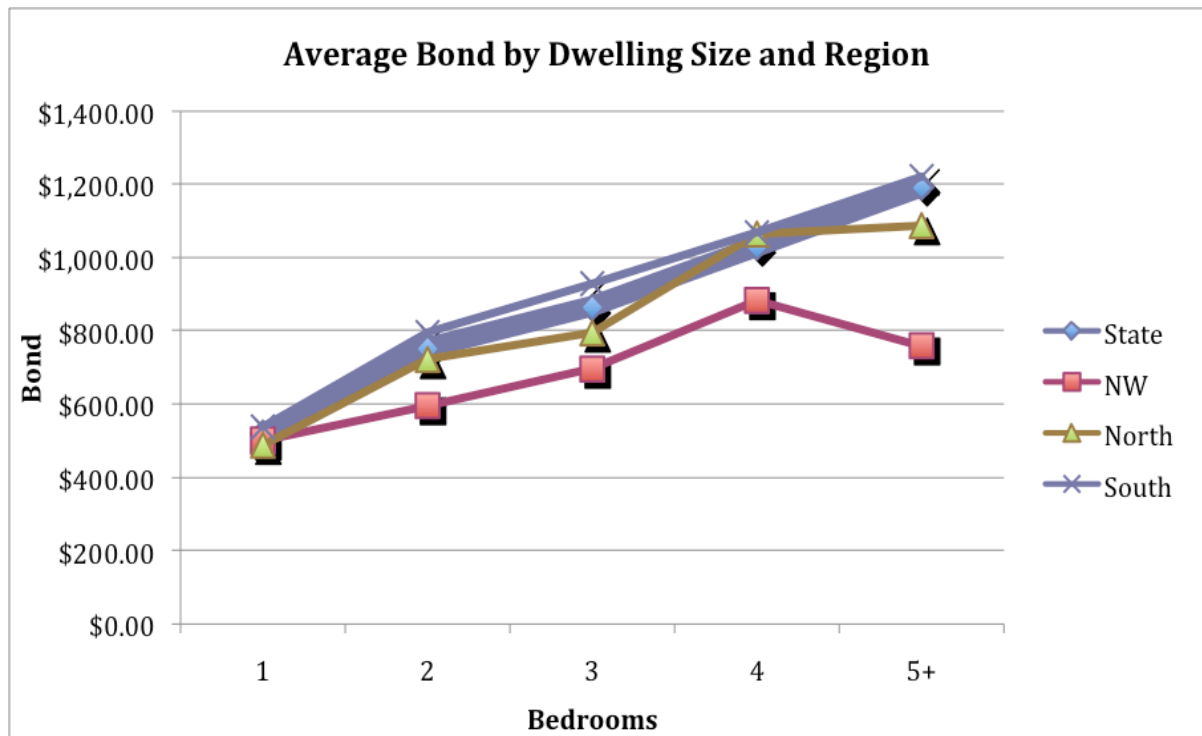
Bond Disputes remain an area of concern for many tenants, and we look forward to the (further delayed) implementation of the Rental Deposit Authority – a body that the Tenants' Union has campaigned for many years to see established.

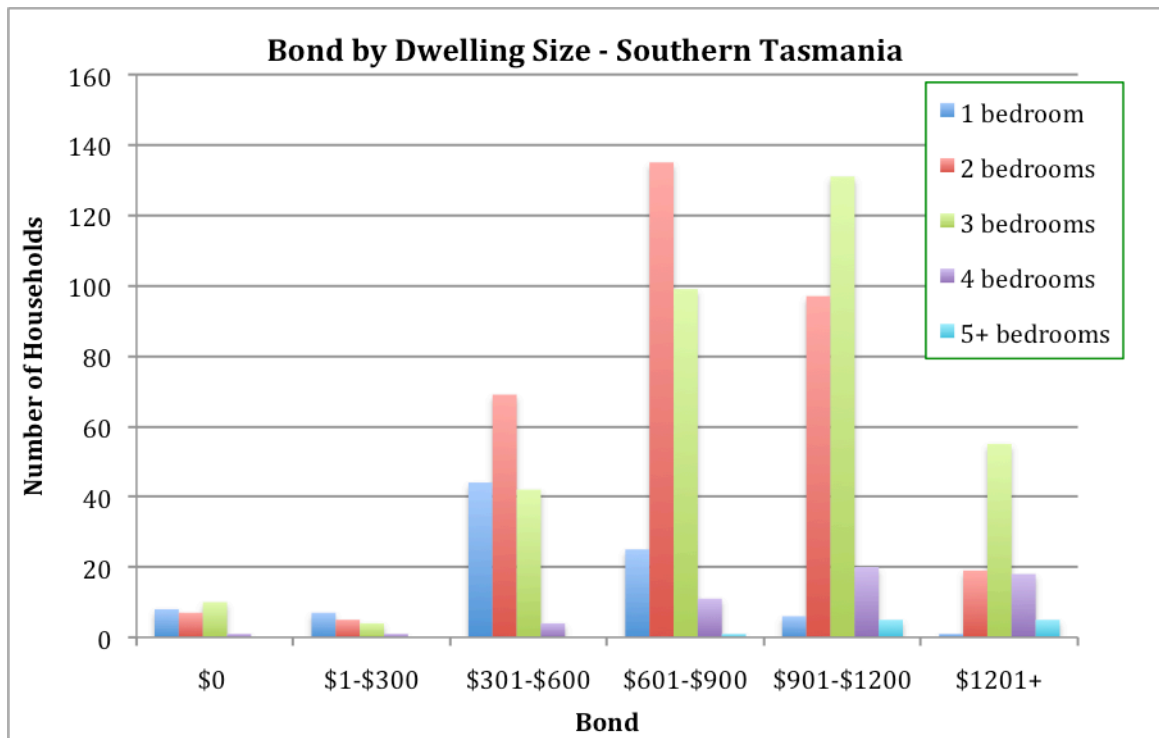
The percentage of clients contacting us regarding Rent Arrears and Rent Increases has remained stable at 9% of all issues. Whilst rents are still rising, reports of extravagant increases have reached a plateau in the first six months of 2008.

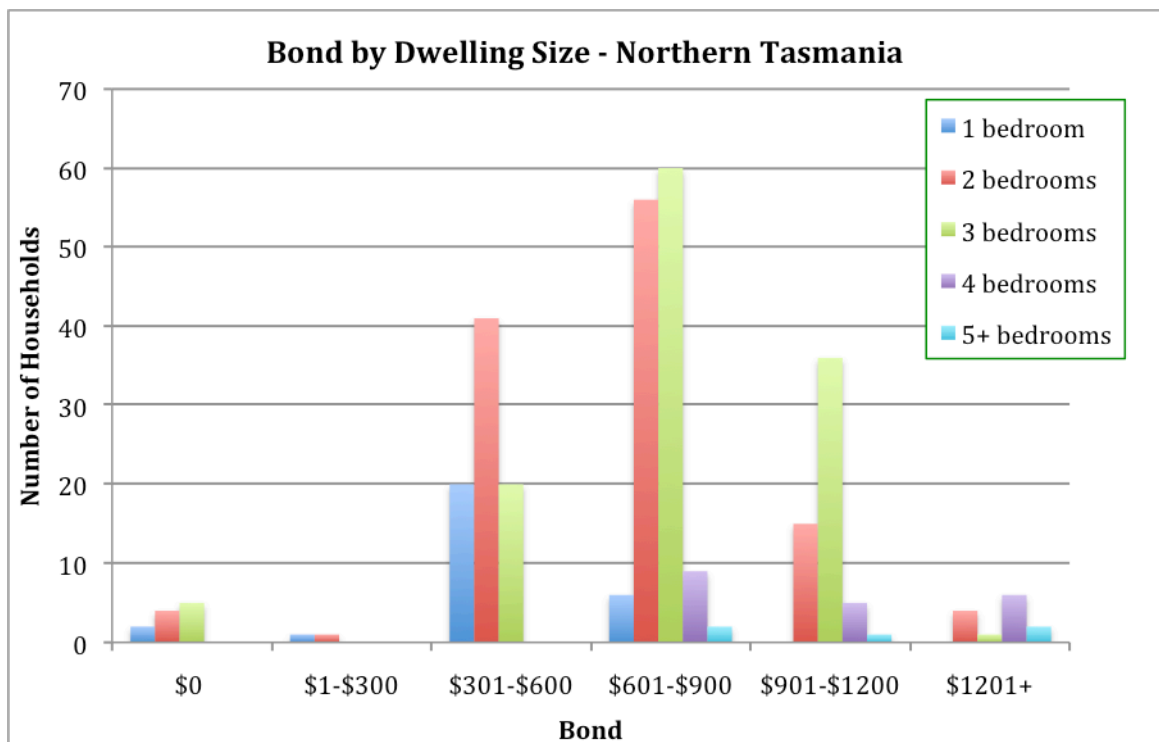
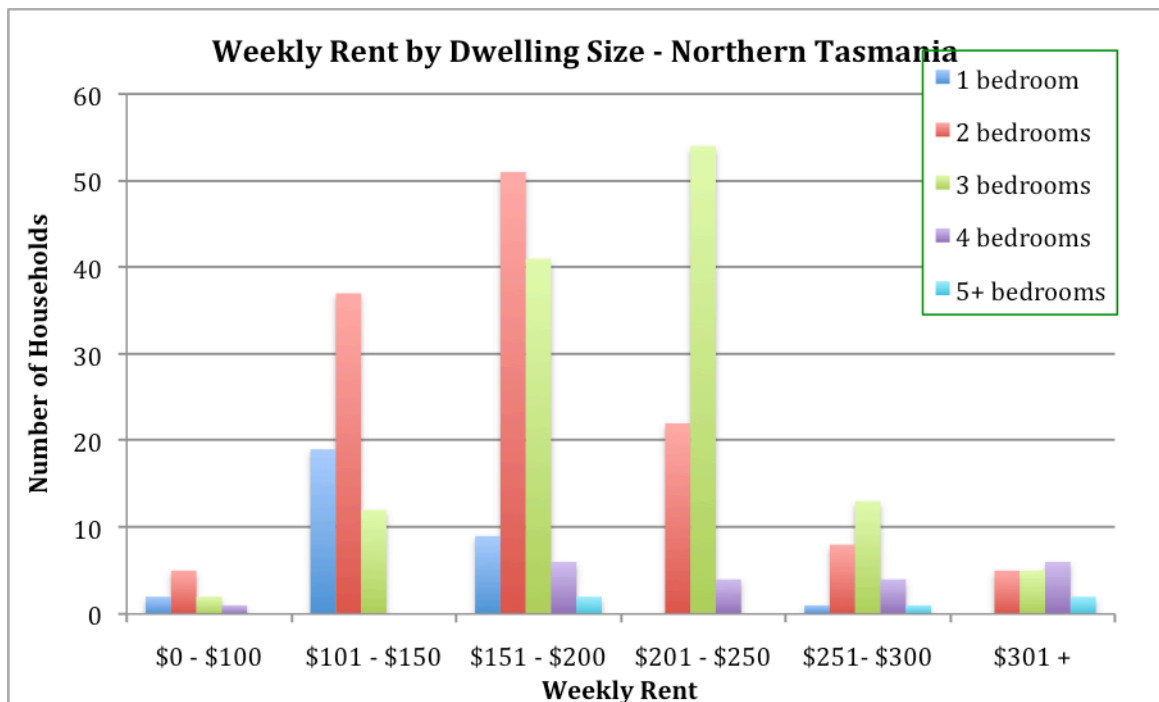


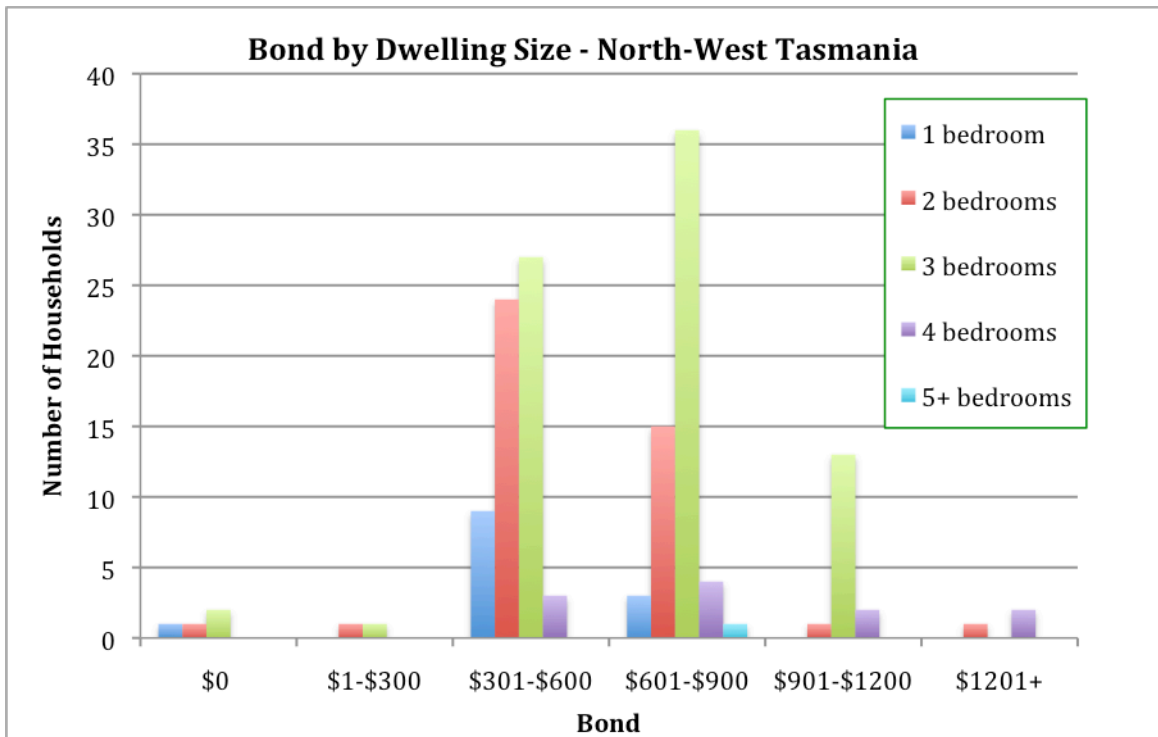
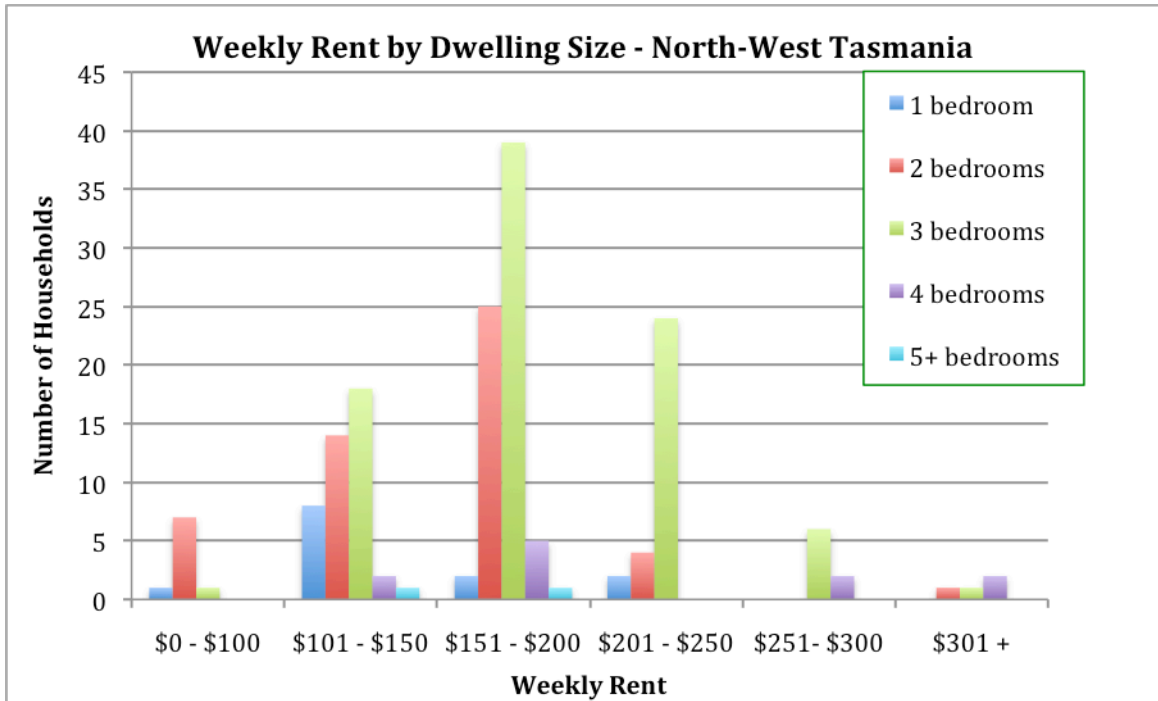
For a large percentage of Tenants' Union clients, housing affordability is a major issue. The Tenants' Union collects data on weekly rent and bond amount that is used to inform the policy work of the Tenants' Union and other organisations. The following graphs provide an overview of weekly rental prices in the main geographical regions.











FACE-TO-FACE ASSISTANCE:

The “Drop-in” Sessions still prove to be popular amongst tenants. In the last financial year the data available indicates that 297 tenants were assisted in this manner, a 21% increase on last financial year’s figures. This is a significant number given that this particular service operates for only nine hours per week.

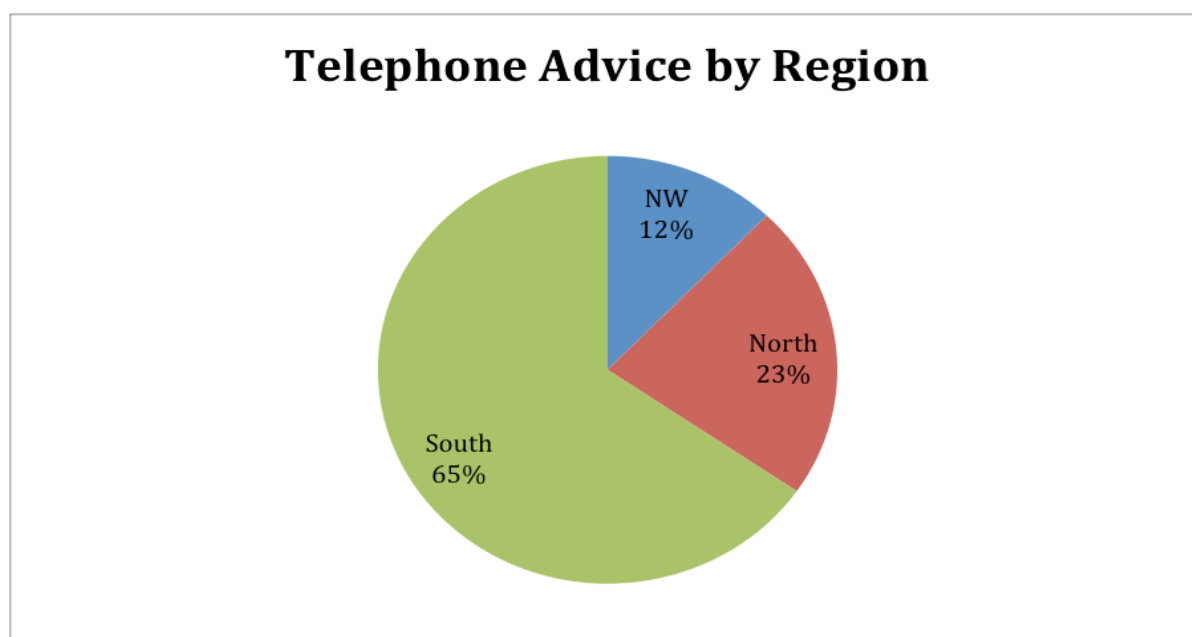
ADVOCACY AND CASEWORK:

Advocacy and casework continued to be a core activity of the Tenants’ Union over the last financial year. Of the tenants assisted through this service 71 case files were opened (down by 18%) and 49 cases were closed. The Advocacy and Casework project is particularly important as it is primarily focused on tenants with complex needs. Issues that may require advocacy and casework assistance include rental arrears, bond return, lease disputes and, most urgently, the threat of eviction. The advocacy work has been strengthened by the Tenants’ Union developing good working relationships with property owners, real estate agents, the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading, the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, and the Auctioneers and Real Estate Agents Council. These relationships allow the Tenants’ Union’s staff to advocate and negotiate on behalf of tenants to achieve successful outcomes.

LIMITATIONS TO TELEPHONE ADVICE, ADVOCACY AND CASEWORK:

Of the 71 case files opened in the year, 4 were from the northern region of the state, and 17 were from the North-West. The graph below demonstrates that the vast majority of telephone calls originate from the southern region. The presence of a Devonport branch has helped increase the profile of the Tenants’ Union in the North-West, although the Launceston region continues to suffer lower than expected figures.

Telephone Advice and Casework was down from the previous financial year due to staff sickness and an initial drop in volunteers that was rectified in the second half of the financial year.



COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION AND LAW REFORM:

The Tenants' Union is responsible for providing community legal education and training statewide to tenants and the housing sector on tenancy issues, along with an active involvement in tenancy law reform.

The funds for this are provided from the Commonwealth Attorney General's Family and Legal Aid Division and administered through the Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania.

Four Community Legal Education (CLE) projects were completed, and four were commenced in the 2007-2008 financial year. Six CLE seminars were conducted by Sandy Duncanson and Sarah Hiller.

CLE for Students at Elizabeth College
CLE for Housing Workers at Centacare, Launceston
CLE for Tertiary Students at the University of Tasmania Law School
CLE at the Georgetown Neighbourhood Centre
CLE for Housing Workers at Housing Tasmania, Burnie
CLE for Students at Don College

The Community Law Reform work undertaken by the Tenants Union in the 2007/08 year included the following areas:

Rental Deposit Authority,
Boarding Houses and Local Government
Sustainable Housing
Human Rights
Review of the Residential Tenancy Act (1997)
Changes to Housing Tasmania's structure
Contaminated Sites
Government Budget Submissions
Rent Setting for Housing Tasmania clients
Submissions to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Housing Affordability

Within these ten law reform areas, three projects were completed, and eight were commenced.

THE TASMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES:

The Tenants' Union maintained its membership of the Tasmanian Association of Community Legal Centres (TACLC) during the financial year. TACLC met on occasion to discuss program, state and funding issues. There are six community legal centres throughout Tasmania consisting of three generalist and three specialist centres. They are Hobart Community Legal Service, Launceston Community Legal Centre, North West Community Legal Centre, Women's Legal Service, Environmental Defenders Office and the Tenants' Union of Tasmania.

NETWORKS:

The Tenants' Union has continued to strengthen links with the following organisations:

- National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
- Tasmanian Association of Legal Centres (TALCLC)
- National Association of Tenants Organisations (NATO)
- Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS)
- Shelter Tasmania
- Colony 47
- Anglicare
- Salvation Army
- Private Rental Tenancy Support Service
- Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading
- Housing Tasmania, Department of Health and Human Services
- Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania
- Rental Deposit Authority

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

The Tenants' Union provides advice and advocacy to tenants around the state. The southern solicitor position, based in Hobart, is funded to work 30 hours over four days per week. The northern solicitor position is funded to work 3.5 hours, or half a day, per week, and is based in Devonport.

Southern solicitor

The position involves the provision of legal advice to tenants either on a one-off basis, or ongoing, and the representation of tenants in negotiation or litigation. The position also involves the supervision of the volunteer telephone advice program, which runs 30 hours per week. Other responsibilities include involvement in the Community Legal Education and the Law Reform programs of the Union.

Northern Solicitor

This position was finally initiated in 2007, with discrete funding from the State Government. The position involves the provision of legal advice and casework to clients in the north and north-west of Tasmania, and Community Legal Education, where possible. The solicitor, Sarah Hiller, is employed by the Devonport Community Legal Service, and works for the Tenants' Union for 3.5 hours per week from that office. Despite the very limited time available, Sarah opened 17 files, and gave advice to a further 45 clients, in addition to giving telephone advice statewide.

Acknowledgements

The Tenants' Union is indebted to a great number of people who enable the organisation to deliver our services to clients on such a small budget.

The majority of people working for the Union do so on a voluntary basis. I would like to start by thanking Tracey Chapman and Alex Fry for the enormous number of hours they have spent advising clients this year. Bob Jones, Mick Lynch, Kristy Kinsella, Stacey Webb, Kirsty Abercrombie, Alex Alcock, Aneita Browning, Natalie Pausin, Katia Layne and Crystal Garwood have all volunteered on a weekly basis to collectively advise thousands of clients on the telephone advice line. It is worth noting that Mick volunteered in addition to his paid work for us!

I would like to thank the Tenants' Union Management Committee, who all volunteer their time for this very important role. I am extremely grateful to members Tim Bullard, Sue Chapple, and Jane Byrne for the time and support they have provided the Union this year, and I would particularly like to thank the office holders: Rowland Atkinson for Convening the Committee; Gemma Misrachi, for stepping into that role temporarily; Michelle Parker for her fantastic minute taking and organisational role as Public Officer. I would also like to make special mention of Tamieka Colbeck, Treasurer, who together with Mick Lynch, turned around the miniature Titanic that was the Union's finances, and Kristie Johnston for continuing that role towards the end of the year.

I think that we have had the smoothest sailing in a very long time at the Tenants' Union this year in relation to staff. Our hard working and dedicated team of Meredith Upchurch, Phil Hoffen, Mick Lynch and Sarah Hiller have been an enormous asset to the Union, and have provided an enthusiastic, innovative, inspiring and generally harmonious workplace.

I would also like to thank the Hobart Community Legal Service staff, and particularly staff members Bernadette and Lindy Terry who have provided front office and reception to our tenants throughout the year

My thanks also go to Chris Young and Karen Harris at the North West Community Legal Centre for hosting the Northern Solicitor position.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all the staff and Management Committee for the understanding, help, support, and flexibility that they have allowed and given me throughout this year in relation to my medical treatment, and made the Tenants' Union a place to which I have looked forward to returning following each of my absences.

Sandy Duncanson
Principal Solicitor
September 2008.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The Tenants' Union of Tasmania Inc ("The Union") finished the 2007-2008 financial year with an operating surplus of \$39,082. This represents a significant increase on the previous financial year in which the Union recorded a net surplus of \$22,313.

This improved financial position for the Union was due to a number of factors, the most significant ones being:

- The continuation of the more rigorous accounting arrangements introduced towards the end of the 2005 – 2006 financial years; and
- A reduction in Wages expenditure of \$16,141, largely as a result of Sandy's working part-time for some of the year.
- A significant reduction in Annual Leave Expense, as recommended by the Auditors (Refer WHK Denison: "Report To The Committee")

The State Government continues to be supportive of the Union's activities, including the continuation of the State funded services to the north of Tasmania, a one-off grant of \$8,000 for computer replacement and an on-going grant of \$2,000 per annum for computer maintenance.

Kristie Johnston
Treasurer
September 2008

Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc

For the Year Ended 30 June 2007

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Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc


Statement by member of the committee


The committee has determined that the Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose financial report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

In the opinion of the committee the financial report:

1. Presents a true and fair view of the financial position of Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc as at 30 June 2007 and its performance for the year ended on that date.
2. At the date of this statement, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:

President 

Treasurer 

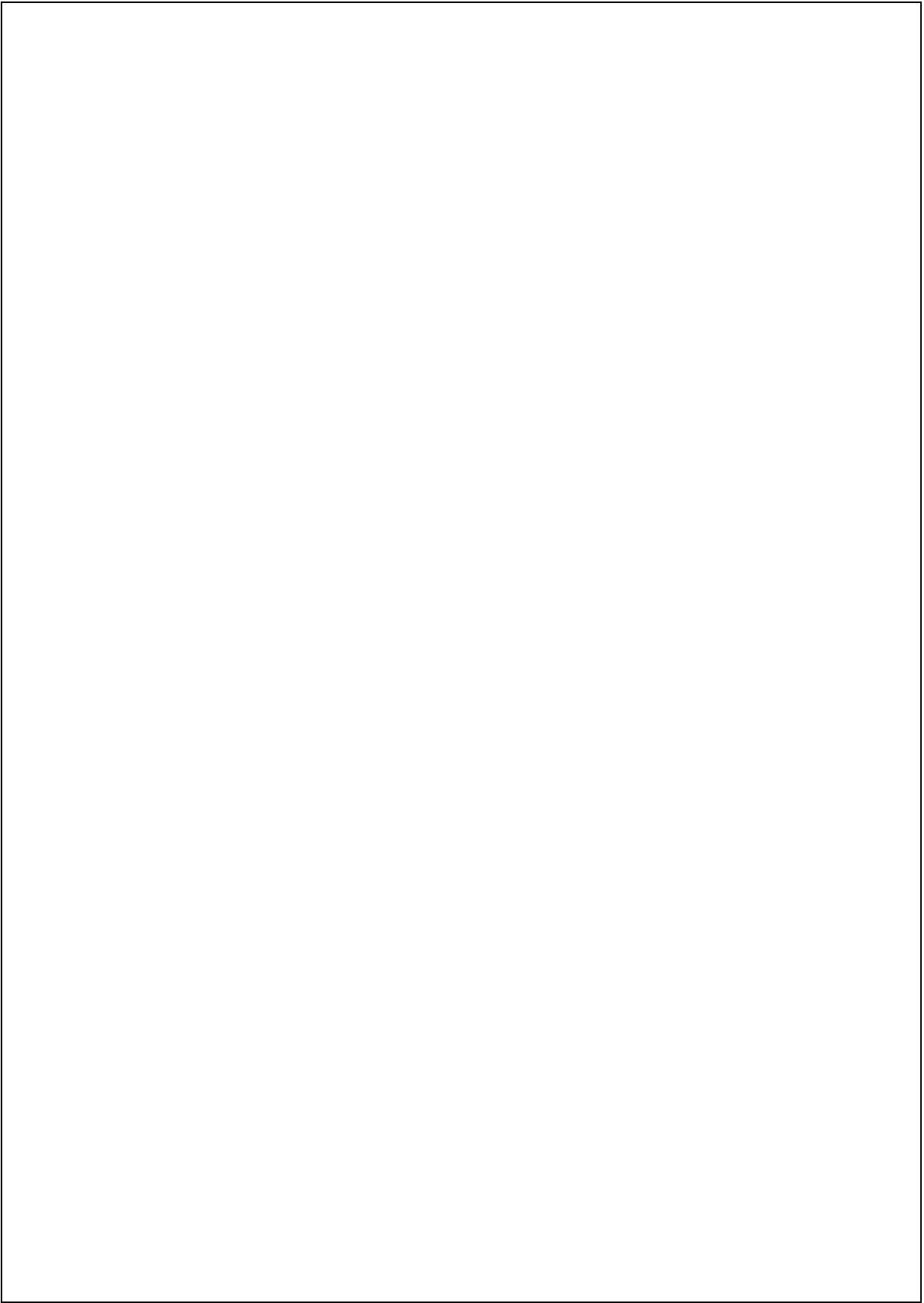
Dated 1st November 2007

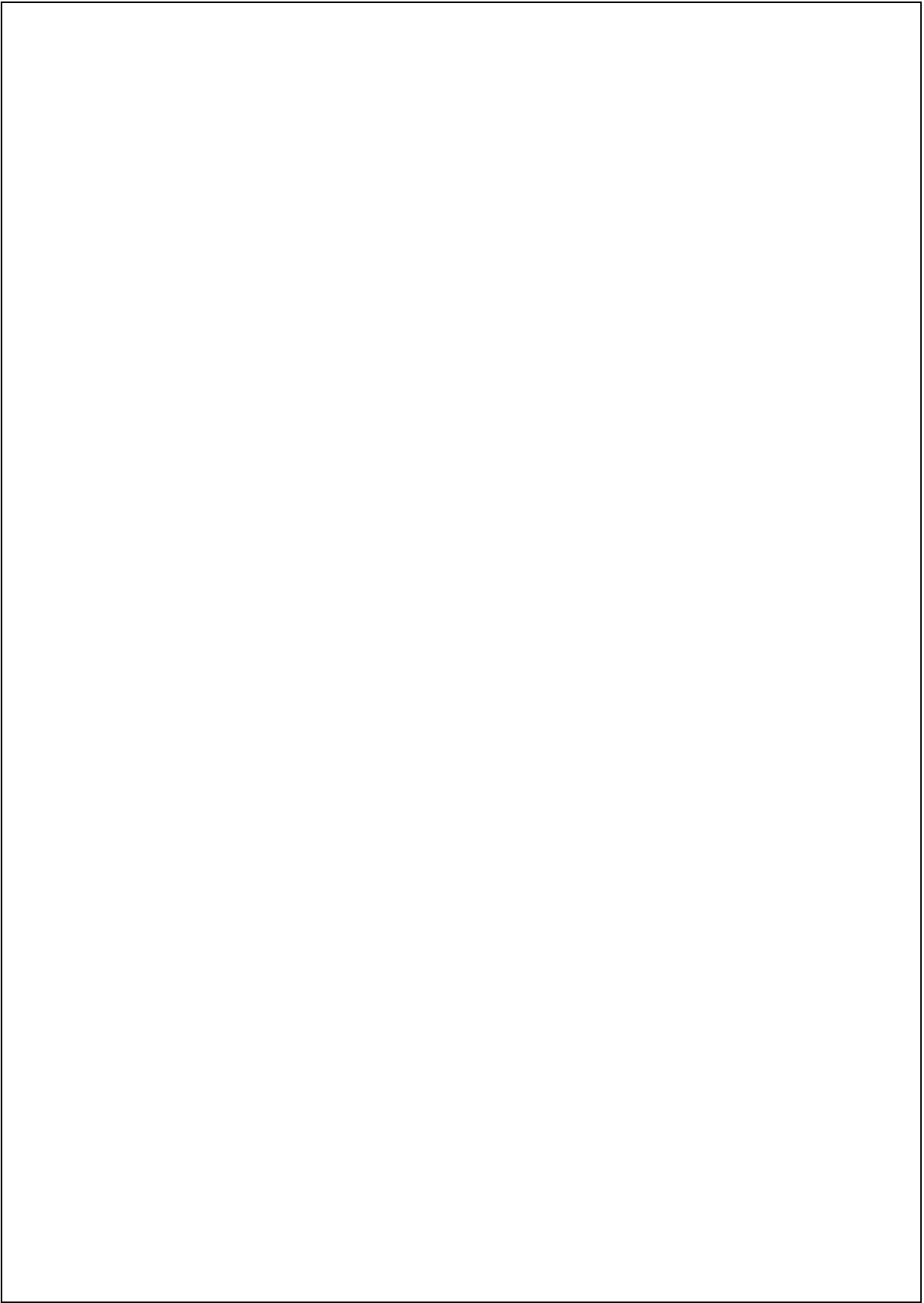
Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc

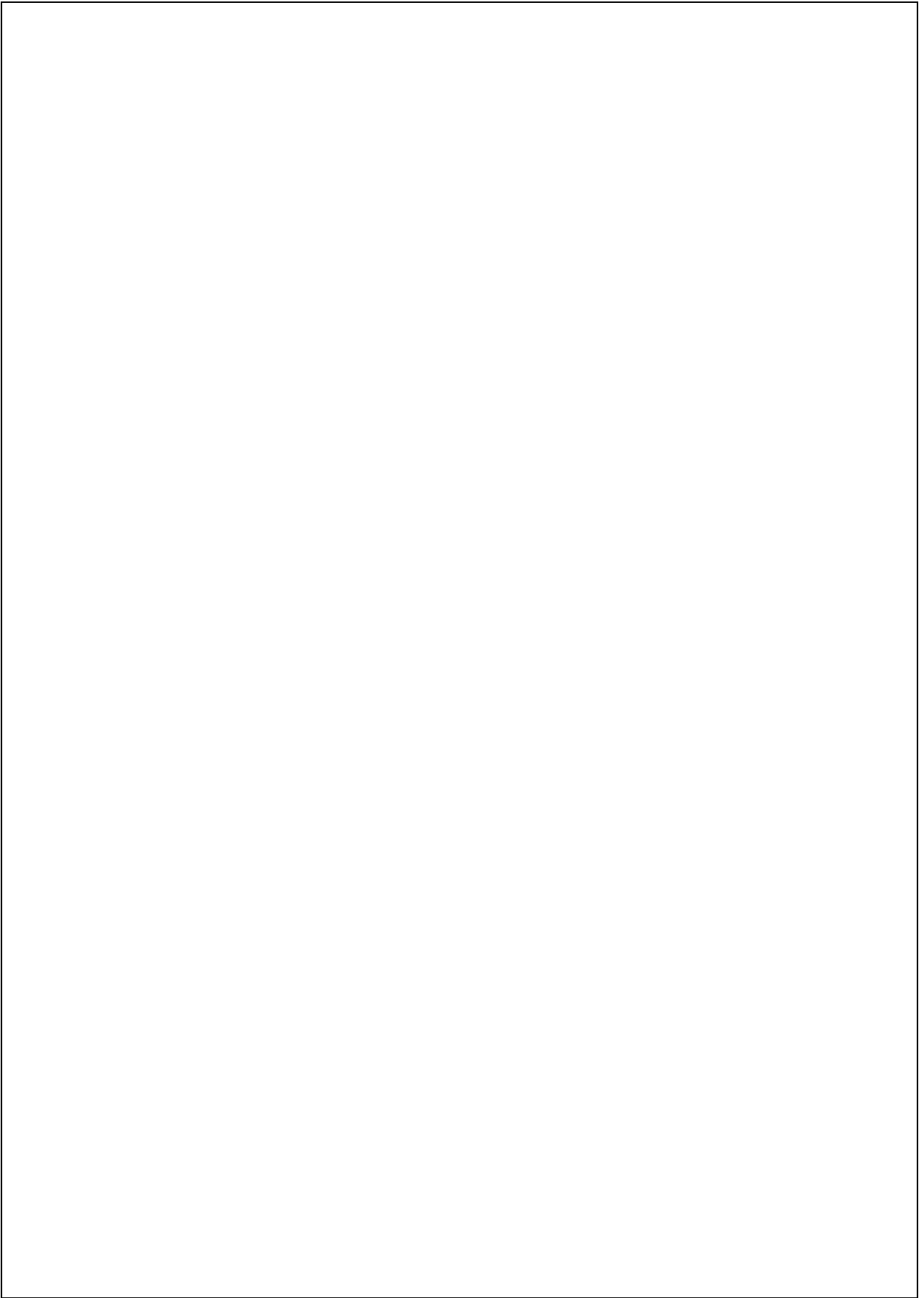
Income Statement

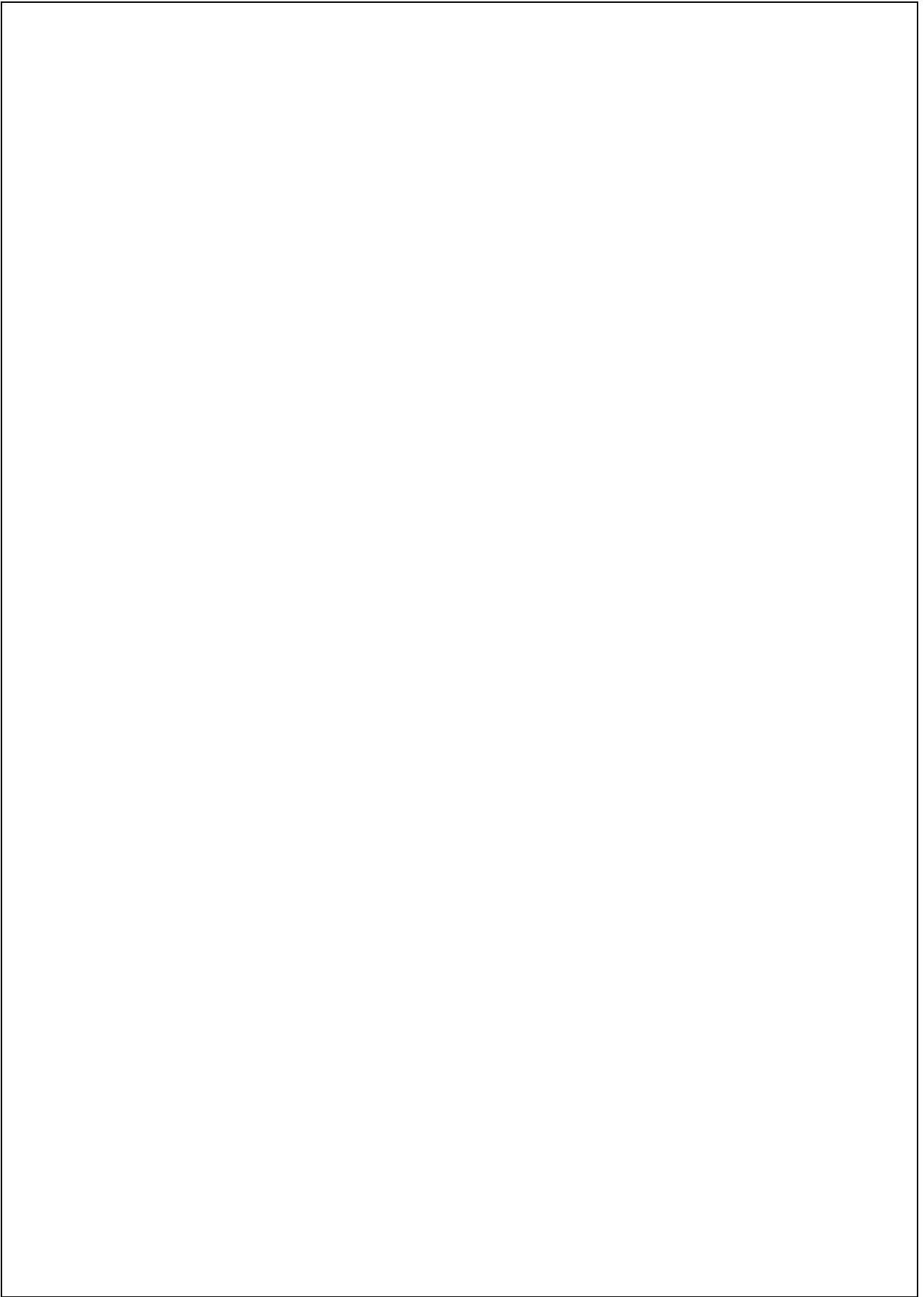
For the Year Ended 30 June 2007

	2007 \$	2006 \$
Income		
Other professional Income	-	1,230
Interest income	501	2,638
Rental income	961	1,538
Member subscriptions	241	-
Grants	59,311	55,564
State Grants North	21,950	1,955
State Grants South	116,255	109,561
Other revenue	2,533	692
Total Income	201,752	173,178
Less: Expenses		
Additional provisions	280	840
Advertising	224	546
Auditors Remuneration	1,915	2,110
Bank charges	334	290
Cleaning	739	407
Commissions	-	(677)
Computer expenses	1,246	2,587
ATO rounding	(1)	(1)
Depreciation	2,126	2,446
Electricity & water	1,910	503
Committee Expenses	58	383
Fees and Levies	353	284
Furniture	398	-
Equipment Expenses	35	-
Insurance	3,530	6,879
Internet	1,220	-
Lease rentals on operating lease	11,486	13,217
Leave pay	7,857	8,710
Long service leave	809	(882)
Maintenance	241	106
Legal & Professional Fees	-	5,134
Office supplies and consumable	1,385	315
NA Office Facilities	250	-
NA Wages	503	-
NA General Operating Costs	330	-
Postage	700	932
Printing and stationery	301	3,307
Rates and Taxes	3,967	1,691
Salaries	115,020	124,889









Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2007

1 Accounting policies

(a) General information

The financial report is a special purpose financial report prepared in order to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of the Association Incorporation Act of Tasmania. The Committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity and therefore there is no requirement to apply Accounting Standards (and other mandatory professional reporting requirements) in the preparation and the presentation of this report and none have been intentionally adopted.

As the committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity there is no requirement to apply applicable Accounting Standards, Australian Accounting Interpretations, or other authoritative pronouncements of the Australian Accounting Standards Board in the preparation and presentation of these financial statements.

The report is prepared on a accruals basis and is based on historic costs and does not take into account changing money values or, except where specifically stated, current valuations of non-current assets.

The following specific accounting policies, which are consistent with previous periods unless otherwise stated, have been adopted in the preparation of this report:

(b) Comparative Figures

Comparative figures have been adjusted to conform to changes in presentation for the current financial year where appropriate.

(c) Property, plant and equipment

Other fixed assets are carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation.

The depreciable amount of all fixed assets are depreciated over the useful lives of the assets to the association commencing from the time the asset was held ready for use.

(d) Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents include cash on hand, deposits held at call with banks, other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less, and bank overdrafts. Bank overdrafts are shown within short-term borrowings in current liabilities on the balance sheet.

(e) Employee Benefits

Provision is made for the association's liability for employee benefits arising from services rendered by employees to balance date. Employee benefits have been measured at their nominal amount. The Associations policy is to provide 13 weeks leave after 10 years service and to pro-rata after 7 years.

Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2007

1 Accounting policies (continued)

(f) Income tax

No provision for income tax has been raised as the association is exempt from income tax under Division 50 of the Income Assessment Act 1997.

(g) Revenue

Revenue from the sale of goods is recognised upon the delivery of goods to customers.

Revenue from the rendering of services is recognised upon the delivery of the service to the customers.

All revenue is stated net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST).

(h) Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Revenues, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of GST, except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office. In these circumstances the GST is recognised as part of the cost of acquisition of the asset or as part of an item of the expense. Receivables and payables in the balance sheet are shown inclusive of GST.

2 Cash Flow Information

(a) Reconciliation of cash

	2007	2006
	\$	\$
Cash at the end of the financial year as shown in the cash flow statement is reconciled to items in the balance sheet as follows:		
Cash and cash equivalents	62,888	31,238
	<u>62,888</u>	<u>31,238</u>

(b) Reconciliation of Cash Flow from Operations with Profit after Income Tax

	2007	2006
	\$	\$
Net income/loss for the period	22,312	(26,360)
Cash flows excluded from profit attributable to operating activities		

Tenants Union of Tasmania Inc

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2007

2 Cash Flow Information (continued)

Reconciliation of Cash Flow from Operations with Profit after Income Tax (continued)

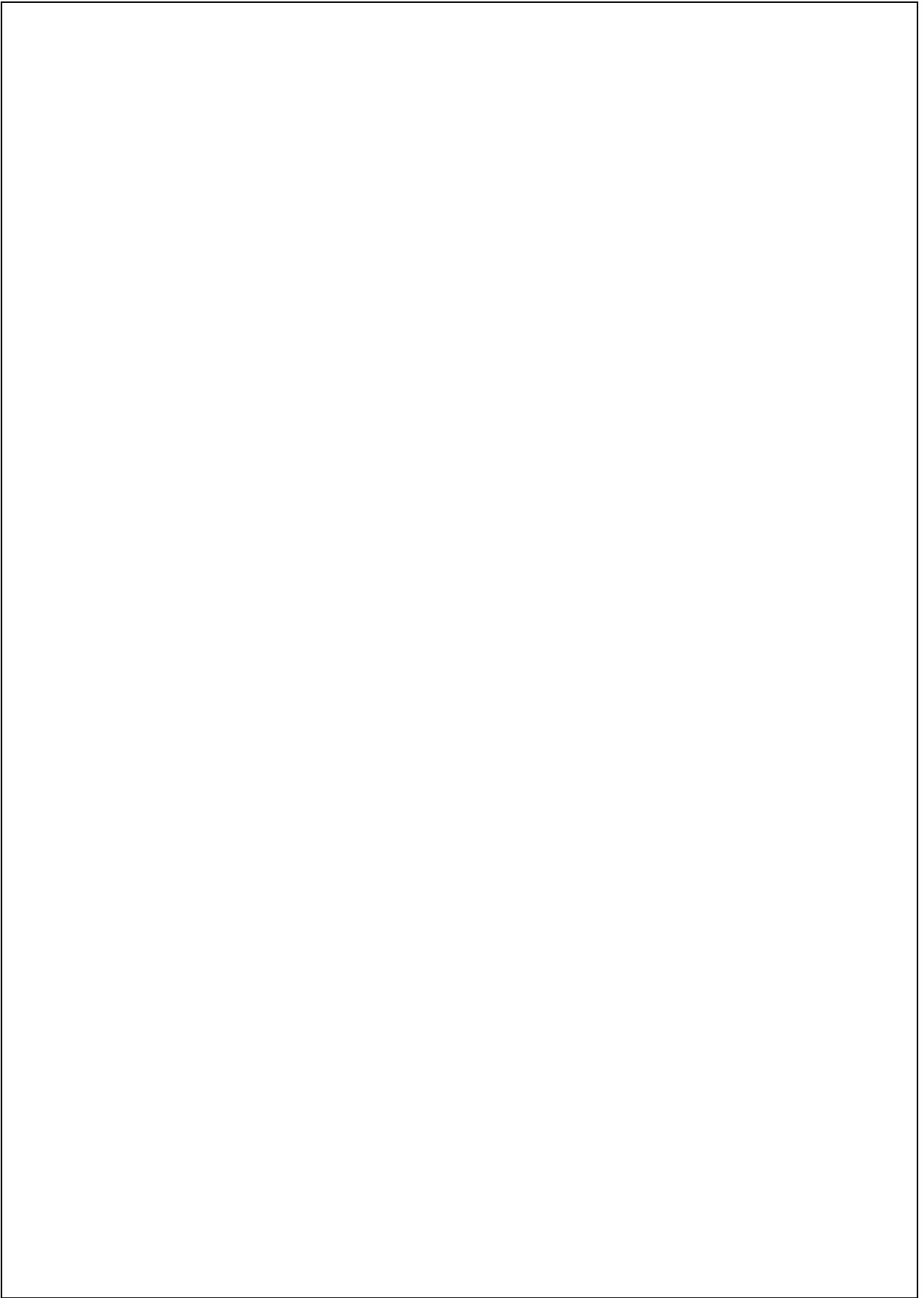
	2007	2006
	\$	\$
Non-cash flows in profit		
Depreciation	2,126	2,446
changes in assets and liabilities, net of the effects of purchase and disposal of subsidiaries		
(Increase)/decrease in trade and term receivables	119	15,164
(Increase)/decrease in prepayments	1,527	(226)
(Increase)/decrease in reserves	-	(45)
Increase/(decrease) in trade payables and accruals	49	(7,632)
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	8,151	1,757
	34,284	(14,896)

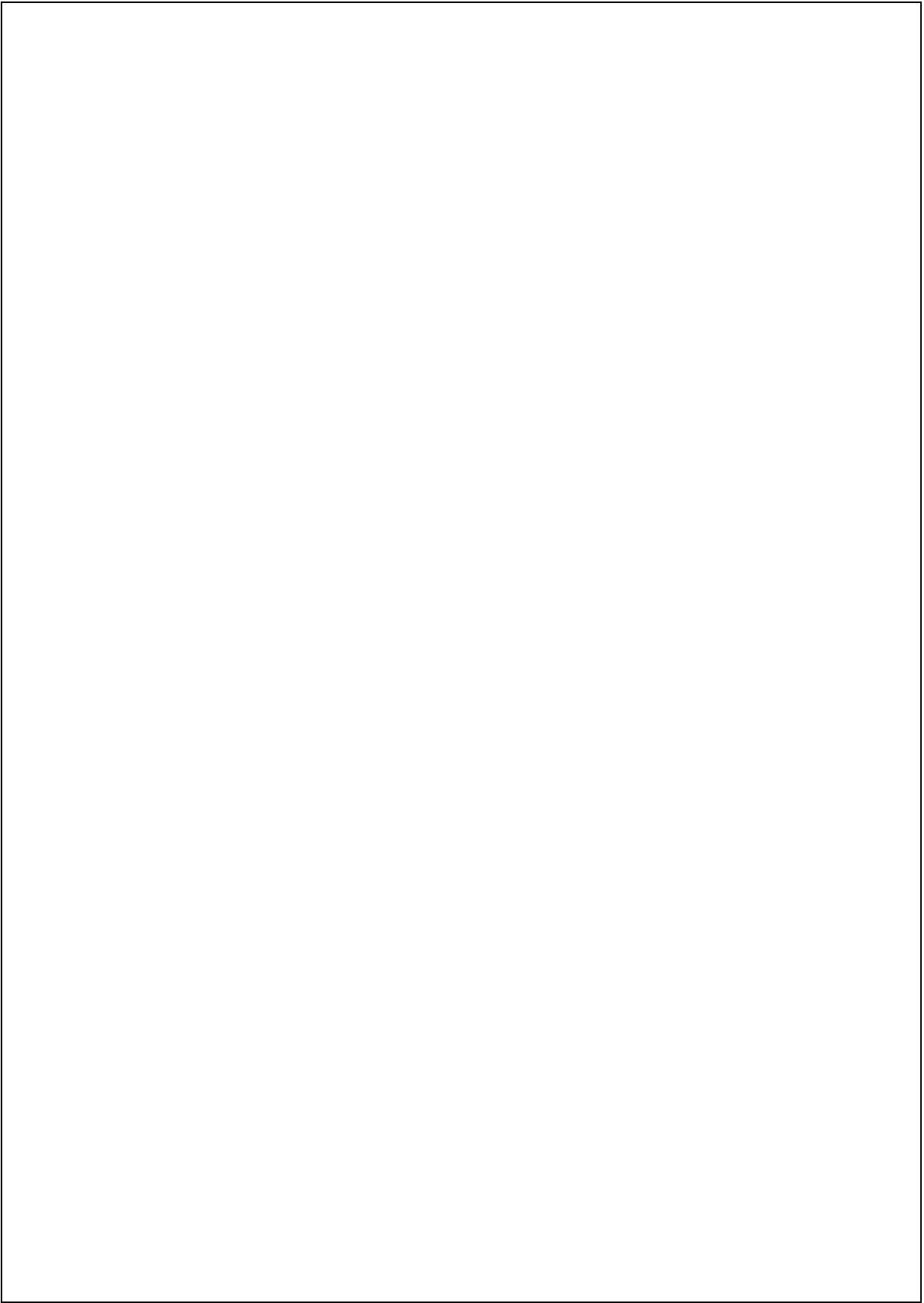
3 Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets

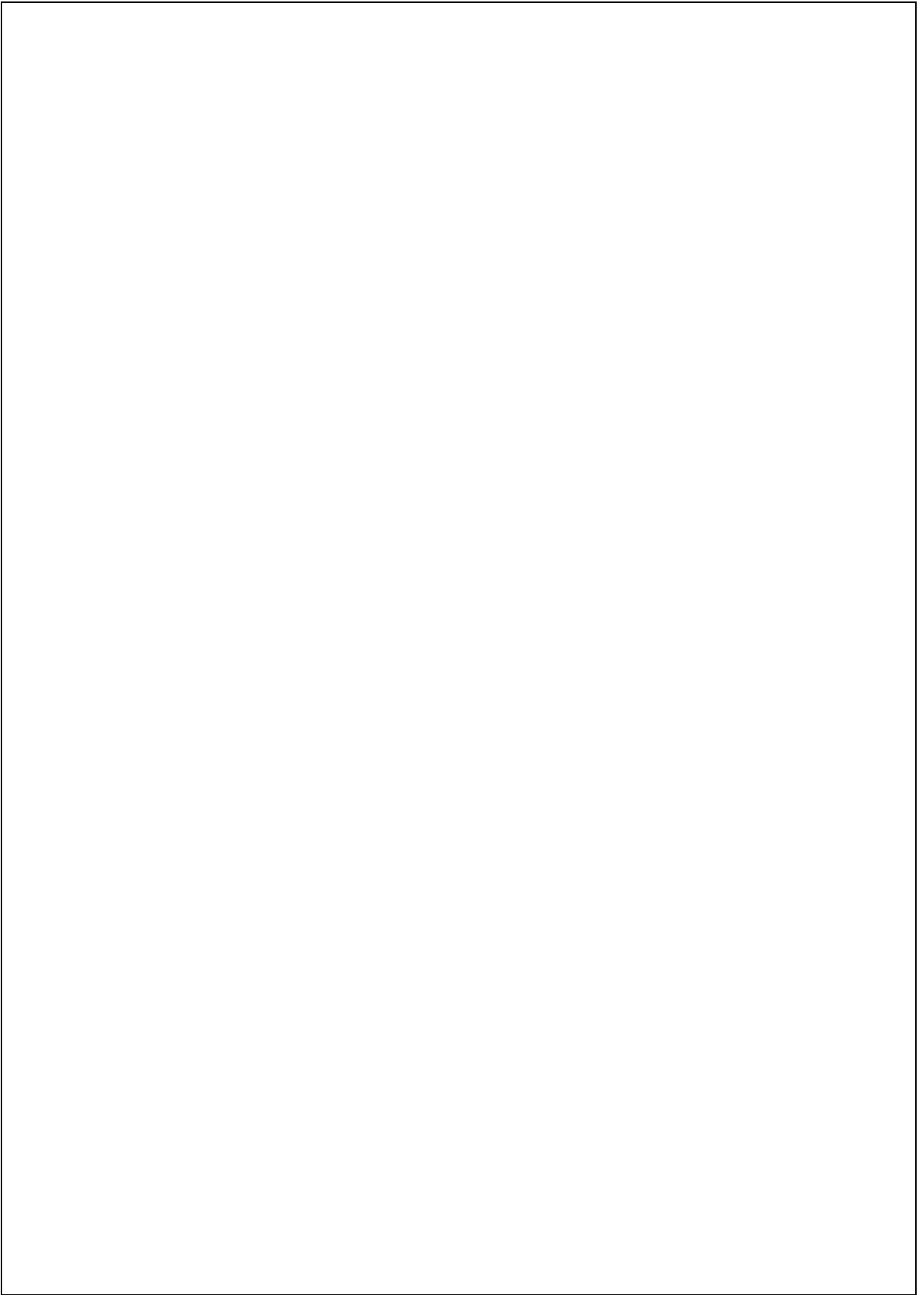
There were no subsequent events that would effect the financial statements as at 30 June 2007.

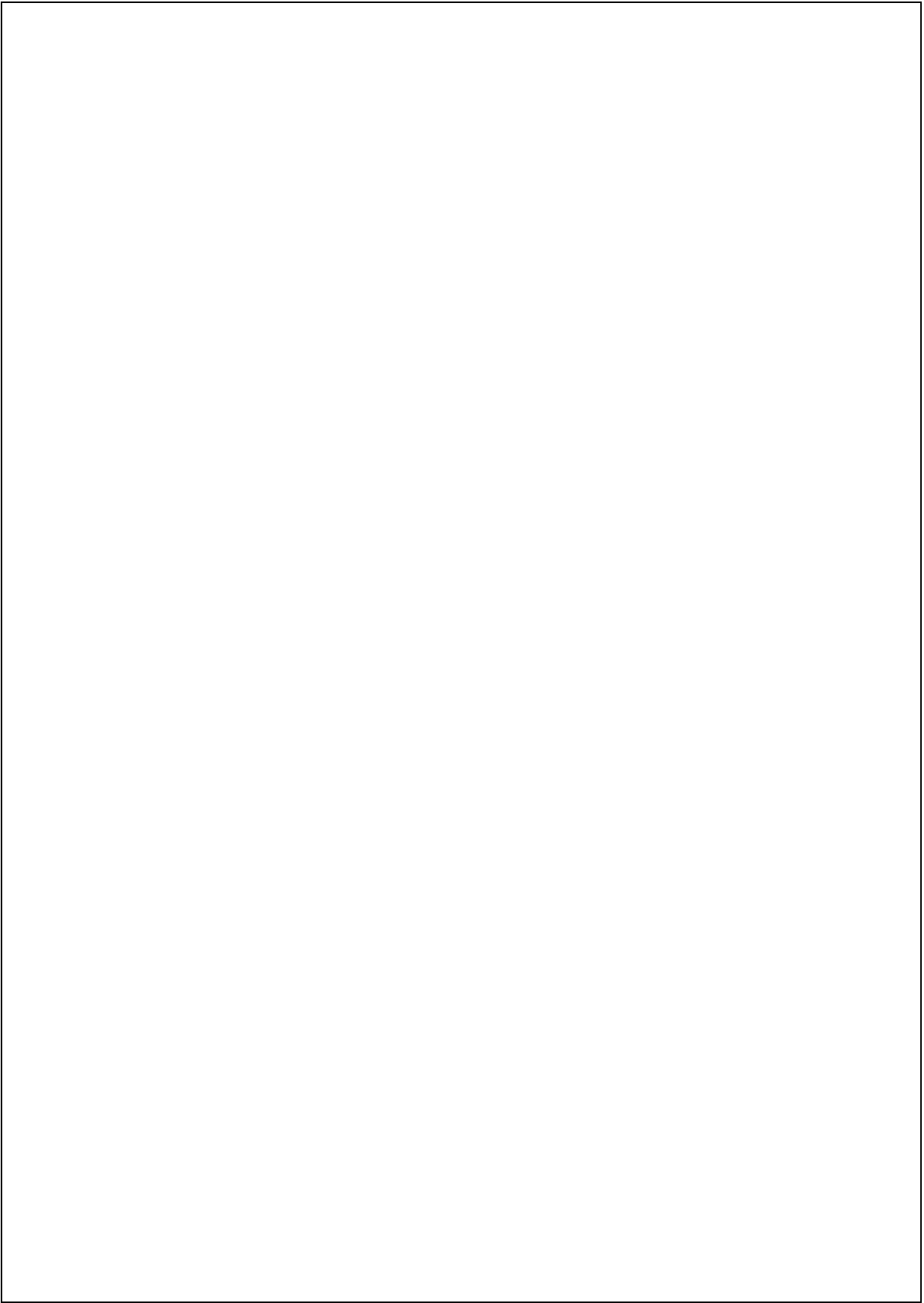
4 Subsequent events

There were no post balance day events that would effect the financial statements as at 30 June 2007.









**Tenants' Union Tasmania Inc
Committee List 2007**

Tim Bullard
Convenor
4a Davey Street
South Hobart, Tasmania 7004


Tamieka Colbeck
Treasurer
432 Clifton Beach Road
Clifton Beach, Tasmania 7020

Michelle Parker
Public Officer
6 Jabez Crescent
Lenah Valley, Tasmania 7008

Fiona Brodribb
Member
152 Nelson Road
Mount Nelson, Tasmania, 7007

Rowland Atkinson
Member
23 Pine Street
WEST HOBART TAS 7000

WHK DENISON
Accountants & Auditors



Alison Flakemore
Audit Partner

Dated this 6th day of November 2007