

Service Activity

OVERVIEW:

The Tenants' Union continued to experience high demand for its services. 2607 tenants contacted TUT services 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 ten projects and forums, and there were nine areas of Law Reform pursued. The Tenants' Union achieved this with the equivalent of 2.9 full time equivalent paid positions plus 0.2 staff at both the Launceston Community Legal Centre (LCLC) and the North West Community Legal Centre (NWCLC).

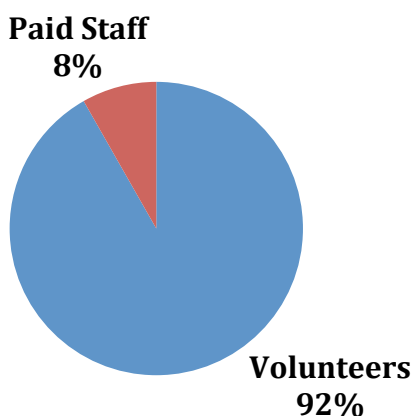
		06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Tenants Assisted:		3070	2619	2802	2780	2759	2877	2607
Made Up Of:	Drop In	246	297	287	403	358	397	518
	Cases Opened	87	71	79	71	87	85	117
	Telephone Advice	2737	2251	2436	2306	2314	2395	1972
Region:	South	64%	65%	65%	64%	66%	67%	62%
	North	26%	23%	23%	23%	21%	22%	23%
	North West	10%	12%	12%	13%	13%	11%	15%
Callers Identifying As:								
Low Income		66%	68%	69%	75%	77%	76%	68%
ATSI		3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	6%
Under 30		37%	41%	34%	37%	38%	41%	41%
Women		70%	71%	69%	70%	70%	70%	73%

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 and policy 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. 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 some or any information, however we still provide them with advice and information.

The following charts and figures 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, taking the vast majority of all calls.

Telephone Calls Answered By:



On average, volunteers provide nine three hours shifts of telephone advice per week. Volunteers also conduct supervised face-to-face advice and law graduates seeking further qualifications may provide advice of a more complex nature.

The number of telephone advice line calls fell by around 15% when compared to the previous three financial years. This can be partially attributed to the increase in vacancy rates and stabilisation of rents which has decreased the calls associated with rent increases, rent arrears and evictions. Some of the fall in calls may be explained by the increase in usage of our website on phones and tablets which now makes up 21% of all visits, up from 11% last year.

More statistics based on the data collected are presented later in this report.

FACE-TO-FACE ASSISTANCE:

Our face-to-face sessions at the Hobart office continue to be popular amongst tenants. In the last financial year 393 tenants were assisted in this manner, a fall of 1% on the previous financial year. This is still a significant number given that this service operates for only nine hours per week. In addition, our North West service, delivered by the North West CLC, saw 68 tenants*, and our Northern service, delivered by Launceston CLC assisted 57 tenants. The issues discussed face-to-face are usually more complex than those discussed on our telephone advice service. In many cases they escalate into legal casework and representation.

* North West CLC figures combine face-to-face and advocacy/casework into one figure

ADVOCACY AND CASEWORK:

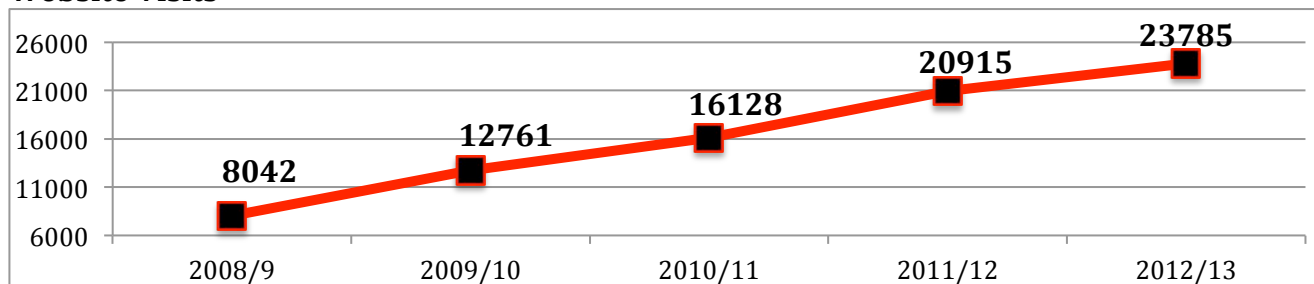
Advocacy and casework continued to be a core activity of the Tenants' Union over the last financial year. Of the tenants assisted through the Hobart service, 97 case files were opened (up slightly) and 56 cases were closed. In addition 20 cases were opened by LCLC in our Northern Service. The Advocacy and Casework service 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 landlords, real estate agents, the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading, and the Real Estate Institute of Tasmania. However, by far our most important relationship in this area is with the Private Rental Tenancy Support Service (PRTSS). For many tenants, our legal expertise combined with the on-the-ground negotiation skills of the PRTSS means tenants have a far better chance of gaining success in their disputes.

WEBSITE:

The website (www.tutas.org.au) has experienced significant growth in visitor numbers since its relaunch in September 2009. In 2012/13 there were 23,785 website visits, up by 14% on the previous financial year, and visits have nearly tripled since the relaunch.

The most popular destination on the website is Factsheets, accounting for over half of all pageviews beyond the home page. The most viewed factsheets were (in order) Leaving Leases Early, Notice to Vacate, Repairs & Maintenance, Bond and Access & Privacy.

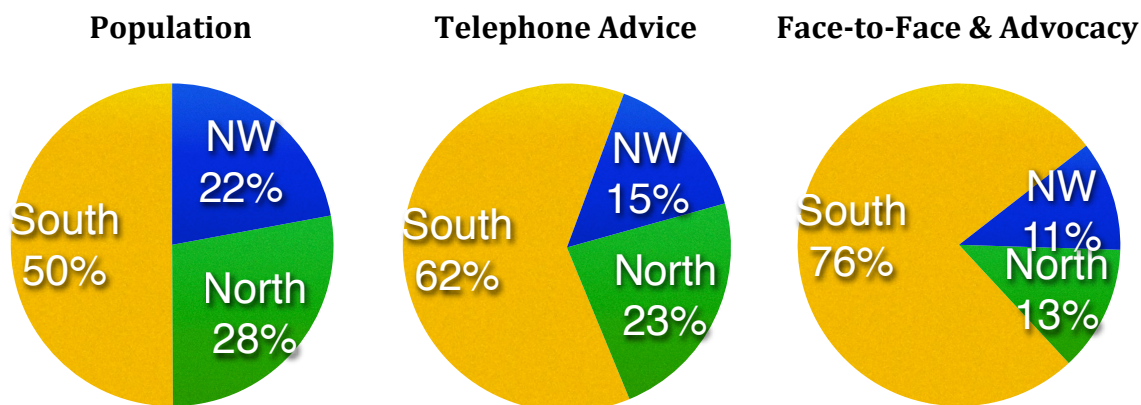
Website Visits



LIMITATIONS TO TELEPHONE ADVICE, ADVOCACY AND CASEWORK:

Following the introduction of the Northern Service through our network partners at Launceston CLC in October 2012, our reach to Northern tenants has improved immensely. The North West service through the NWCLC has too improved service access for tenants in the North West. Despite this, Southern Tasmania still makes up a disproportionately high amount of tenants using our services (see graphs below).

Ongoing service availability in the North and North West should continue to lift the profile of the Tenants' Union, but without ongoing and increased funding for services outside Hobart, access to justice on tenancy matters will continue to be imbalanced in Tasmania.



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.

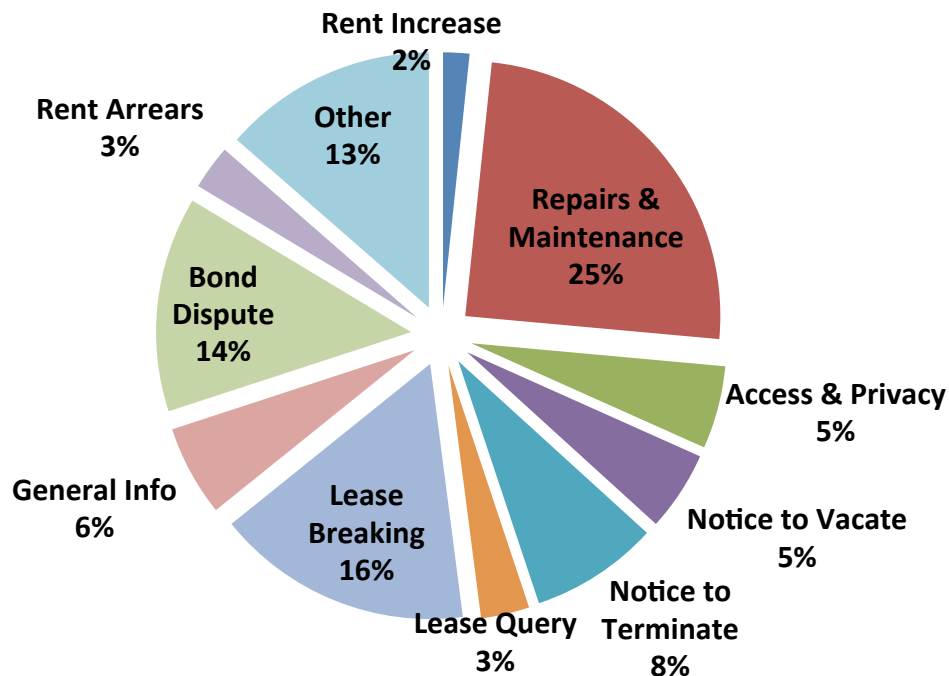
Community Legal Education (CLE) projects in the areas of community, education, government and business were completed in the 2012-2013 financial year. Nine CLE seminars (including one information stall and legal supervision) were conducted by Peter Foster, Phil Hoffen Kirsten Abercromby, Ben Bartl and IUT Secretary-General, Magnus Hammar.

- CLE for Agents at Property Agents Board, Hobart
- CLE for Tenancy Workers at Anglicare Hobart
- CLE for Tenants at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Hobart
- CLE for Tenants and Workers at Ravenswood Community House
- CLE for Tenants at Clarendon Vale Community House
- Information Stall at Tasmanian Association of Community Houses (TACH) Conference, Ulverstone
- CLE for Housing Workers at Centacare Launceston
- CLE for the public on International Housing Standards by Magnus Hammar in Hobart
- 9 Supervision Sessions for Law Students at the Student Legal Service at the University of Tasmania, Hobart

In addition, the NWCLC conducted two tenancy CLEs in Burnie and on the West Coast and both NWCLC and LCLC conducted numerous general CLEs for groups in the North West, a component of which was a section on residential tenancy.

Tenancy Statistics

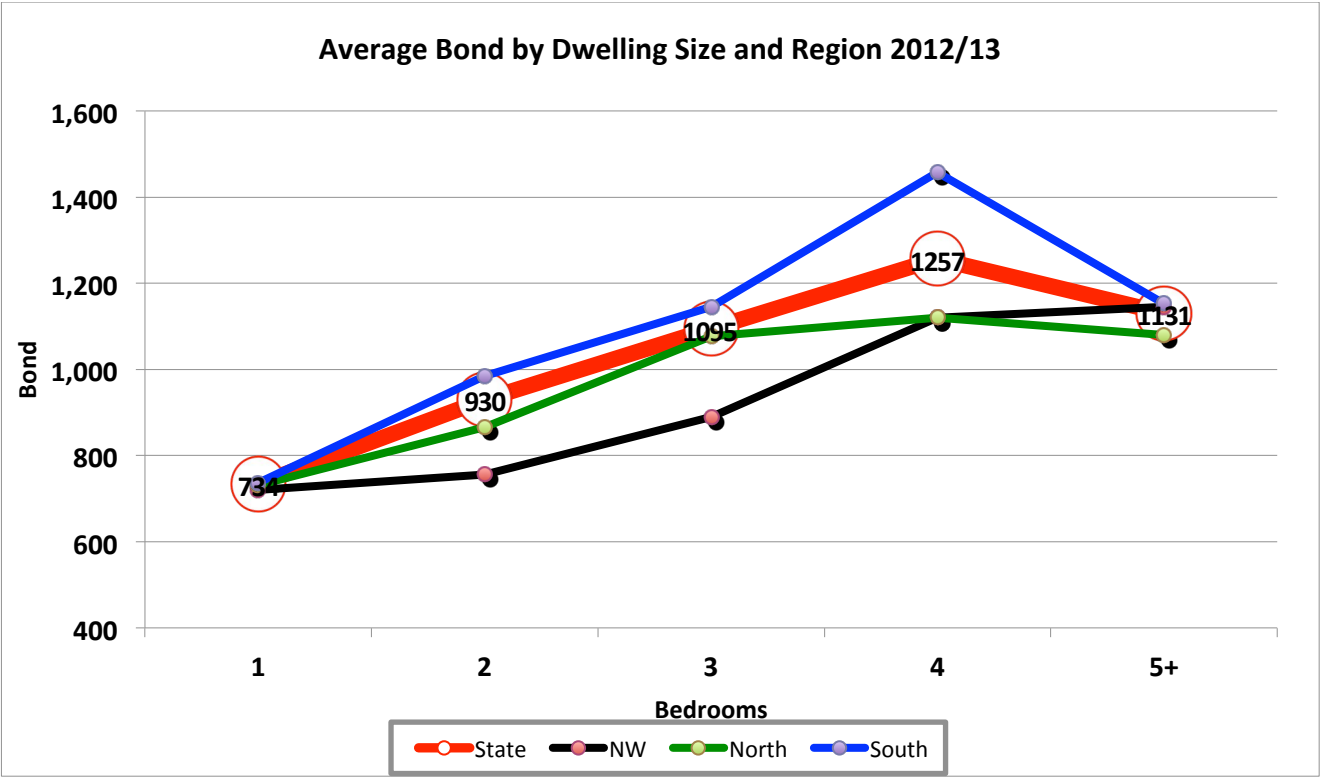
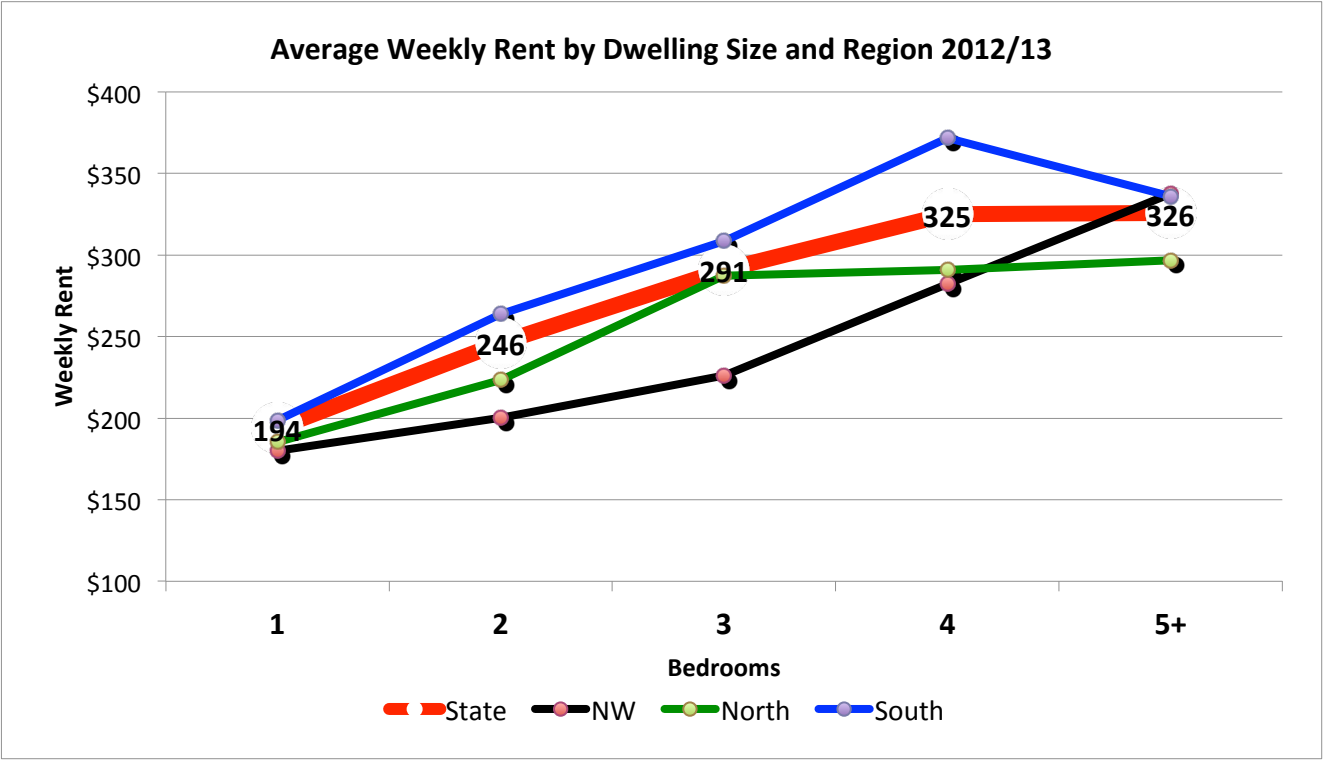
Tenancy Issues - Statewide 2012/13



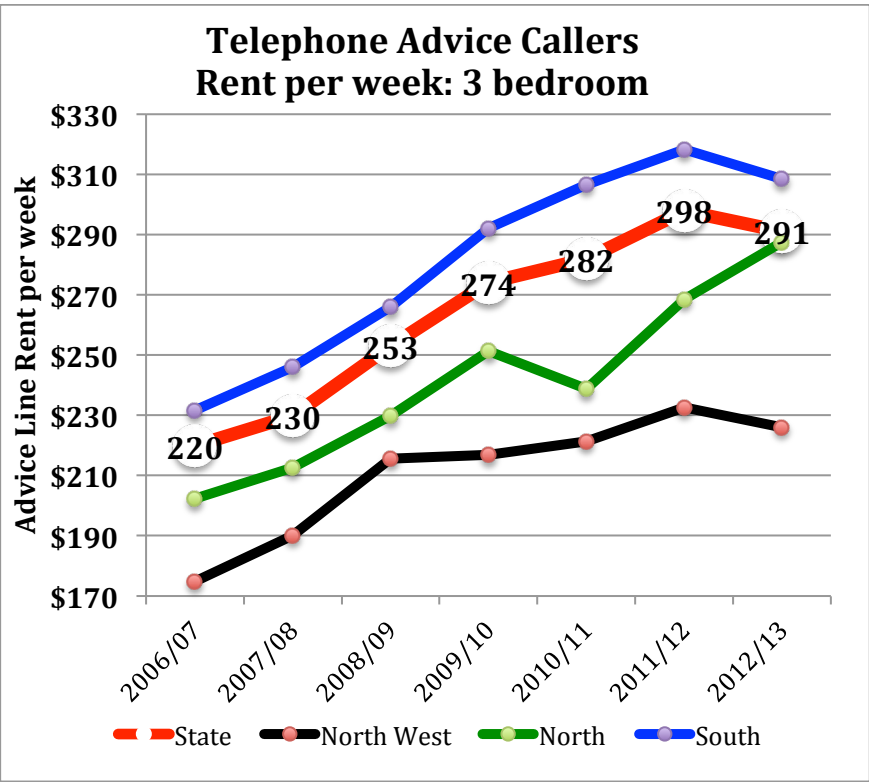
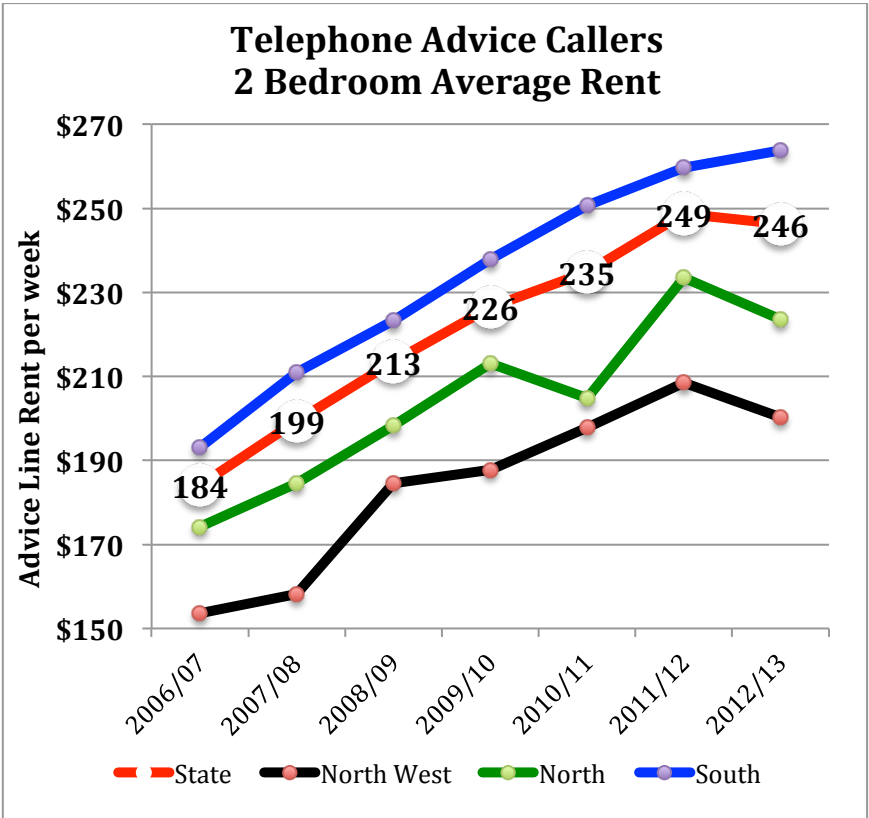
Repairs and Maintenance once again is the matter that residential tenants seek advice for more than any other issue and has continued to grow in the past few years as a percentage of all calls. The Tenants' Union see that a major solution to this problem is the introduction of legislated tenancy quality standards for all Tasmanian residential tenancies, which was recently passed by the Tasmanian Parliament and will be rolled out between 2014 and 2017.

In the past financial year, vacancy rates increased in most Tasmanian population centres, resulting in falls in rent in most areas for new leases. Tenants seeking to break their lease have found it more difficult to find new tenants at the same rent and as a result lease breaking has become the second biggest issue on the telephone advice line. This will continue in the foreseeable future, as vacancy rates continue to be higher than those seen in the first decade of the millennium.

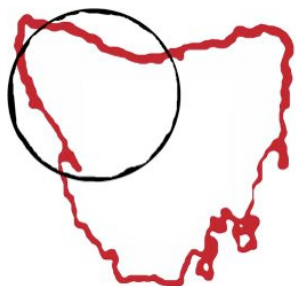
The following graphs provide an overview of weekly rental prices statewide and in the main geographical regions. There is no surprise to see a correlation between number of bedrooms and the weekly rent and bond, although there are anomalies for dwellings with five or more bedrooms due to the small sample size. Dwellings are dearest in the South and cheapest in the North West.



Although housing affordability continues to be major issue, there has been some relief for tenants in the past financial year with the average rent for telephone advice callers falling by 1% for 2 bedroom properties and 2% for three bedroom properties.



North West



% of all Calls:
15
% of Tas Population:
22

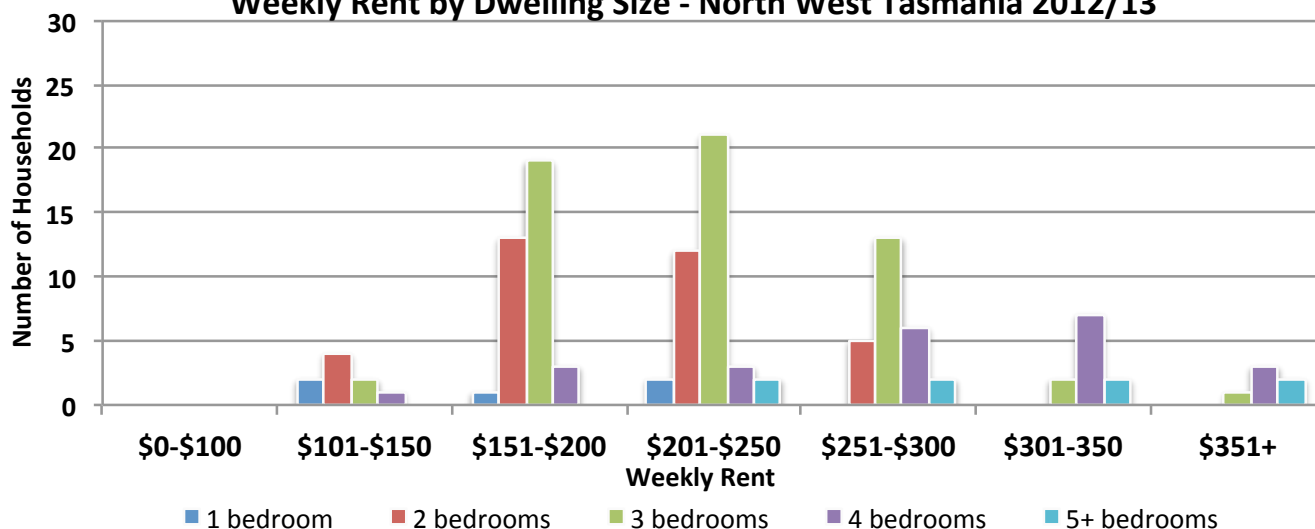
In comparison to other regions historically:

- Lower rent and bond
- More Repairs & Maintenance issues
- Less Lease Breaking

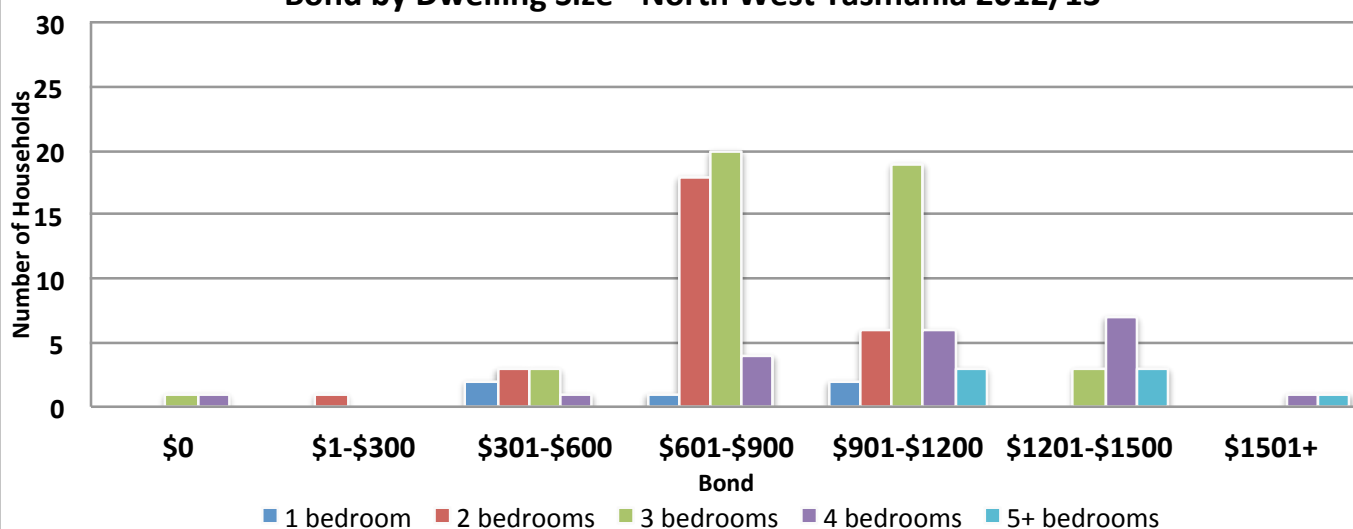
Tenancy Issue	2012/13	Prev Yr
Repairs & Maintenance	33%	20%
Bond	15%	13%
Lease Breaking	12%	15%
Other	10%	7%
General Information	8%	14%
Notice to Vacate	7%	5%
Notice to Terminate	6%	5%
Access & Privacy	6%	7%
Lease Query	2%	6%
Rent Arrears	2%	3%
Rent Increase	0%	4%

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	2012/13	Change on Prev Yr	5 year Change
Ave Rent	176	197	202	213	222	218	-1.8%	23.9%
Ave Bond	646	784	804	824	849	887	4.5%	37.3%
2 Br Ave Rent	158	185	188	198	208	200	-3.8%	26.6%
3 Br Ave Rent	190	216	217	221	233	226	-3.0%	18.9%
CPI (Aust)							2.4%	12.2%

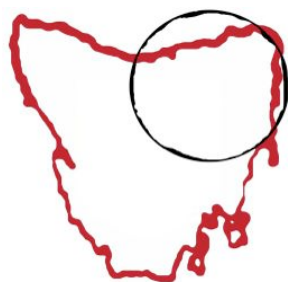
Weekly Rent by Dwelling Size - North West Tasmania 2012/13



Bond by Dwelling Size - North West Tasmania 2012/13



North



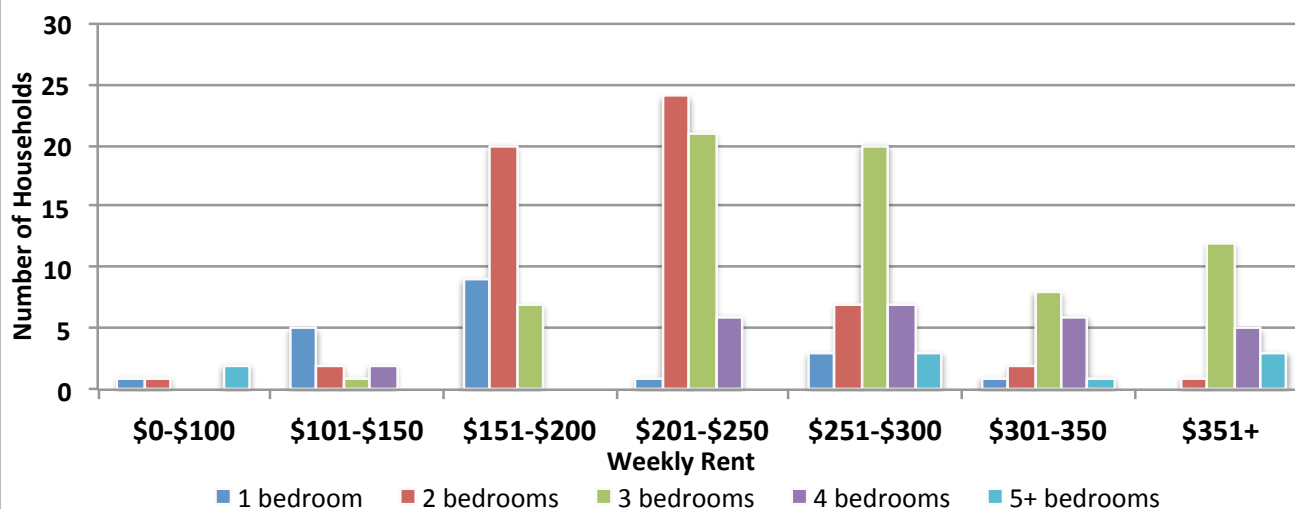
% of all Calls:
23
% of Tas Population:
28

In comparison to other regions historically:
More Lease Breaking
More eviction queries

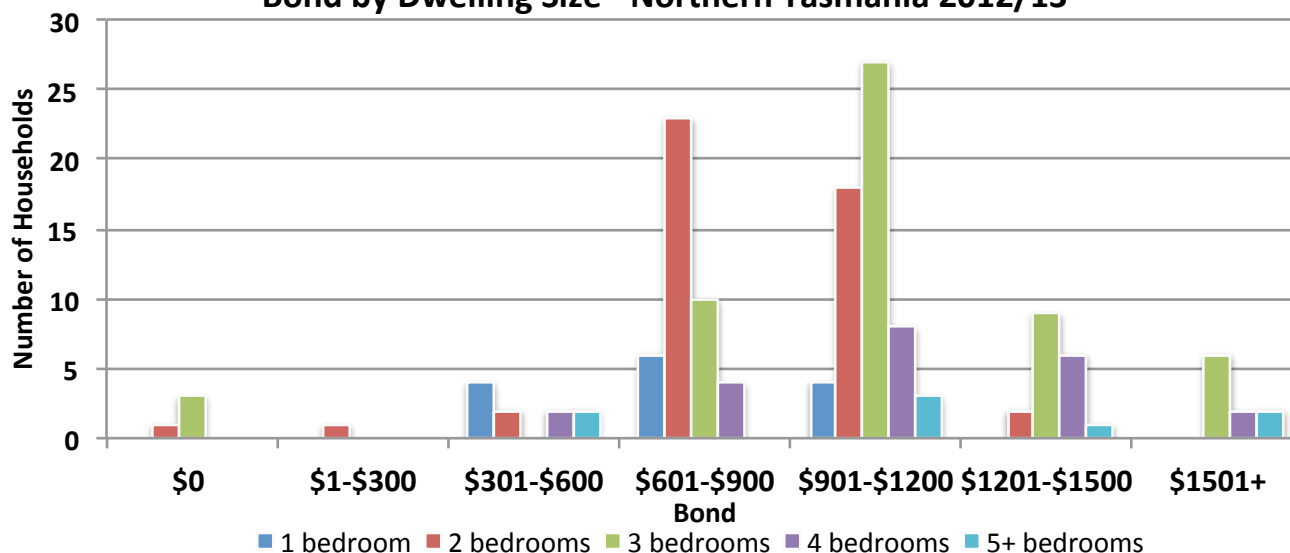
Tenancy Issue	2012/13	Prev Yr
Repairs & Maintenance	25%	23%
Lease Breaking	19%	18%
Bond	15%	11%
Notice to Terminate	11%	4%
Other	10%	6%
Access & Privacy	5%	8%
General Information	5%	15%
Lease Query	3%	6%
Notice to Vacate	3%	5%
Rent Arrears	2%	2%
Rent Increase	1%	2%

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	2012/13	Change on Prev Yr	5 year Change
Ave Rent	200	210	229	223	252	254	0.7%	27.0%
Ave Bond	766	756	750	828	980	992	1.2%	29.5%
2 Br Ave Rent	185	198	213	205	239	224	-6.2%	21.1%
3 Br Ave Rent	213	230	251	239	269	283	5.2%	32.9%
CPI (Aust)							2.4%	12.2%

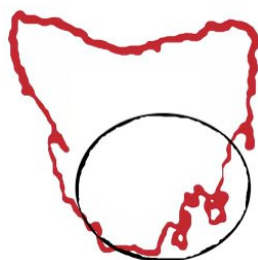
Weekly Rent by Dwelling Size - Northern Tasmania 2012/13



Bond by Dwelling Size - Northern Tasmania 2012/13



South



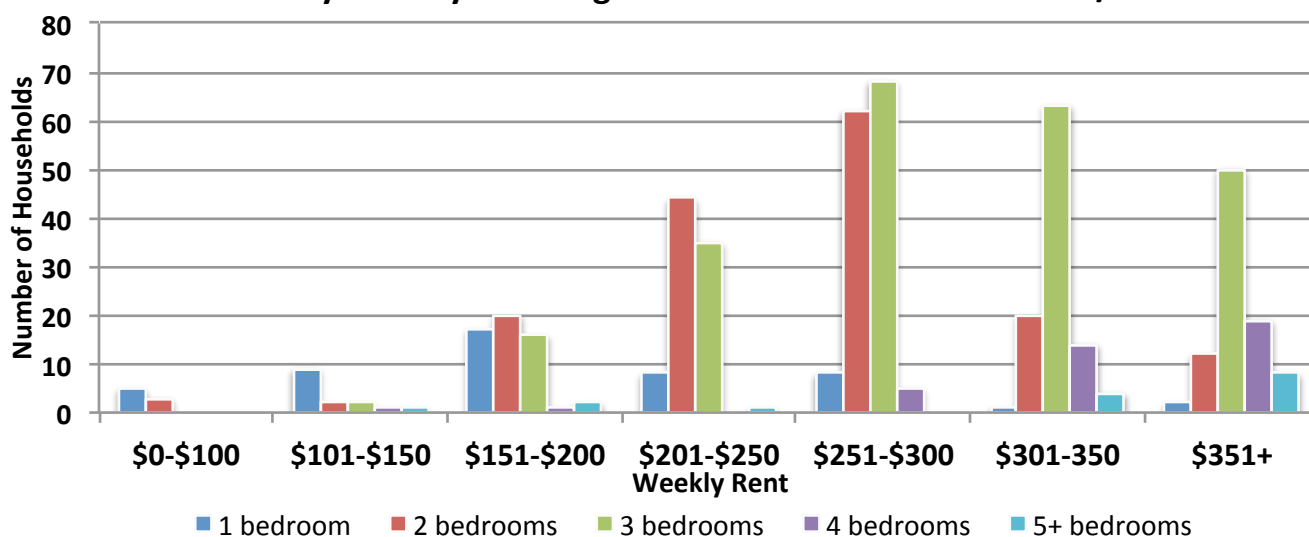
% of all Calls:
62
% of Tas Population:
50

In comparison to other regions historically:
Highest rent and bond

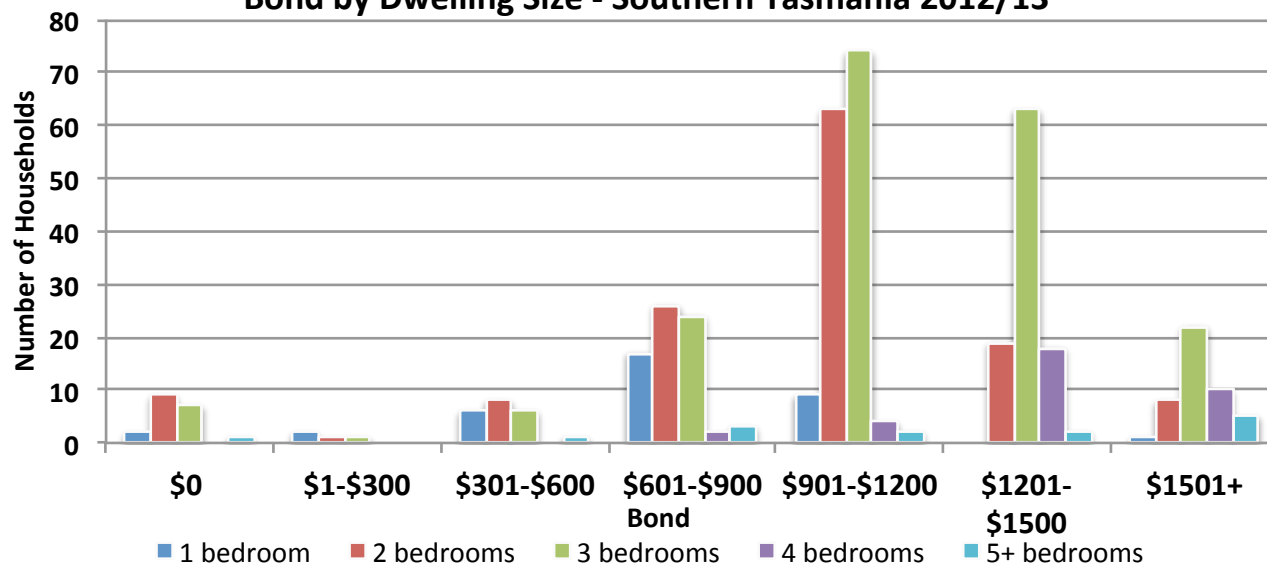
Tenancy Issue	2012/13	Prev Yr
Repairs & Maintenance	26%	22%
Lease Breaking	16%	18%
Bond	14%	11%
Other	10%	7%
Notice to Terminate	9%	4%
Notice to Vacate	7%	6%
Access & Privacy	6%	6%
General Information	4%	14%
Rent Arrears	3%	3%
Lease Query	3%	5%
Rent Increase	2%	4%

	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	2011/12	2012/13	Change on Prev Yr	5 year Change
Ave Rent	229	243	267	282	291	287	-1.4%	25.3%
Ave Bond	840	907	1003	1040	1096	1091	-0.5%	29.9%
2 Br Ave Rent	211	223	238	251	260	264	1.5%	25.1%
3 Br Ave Rent	246	266	292	307	318	309	-2.8%	25.6%
CPI (Aust)							2.4%	12.2%

Weekly Rent by Dwelling Size - Southern Tasmania 2012/13

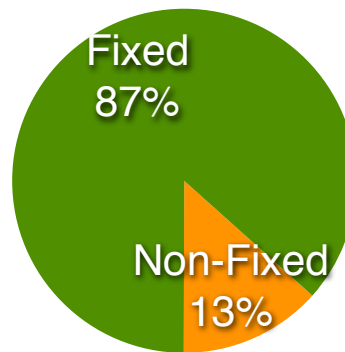
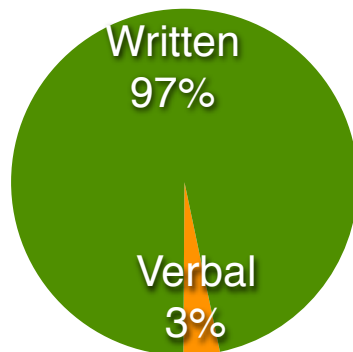


Bond by Dwelling Size - Southern Tasmania 2012/13

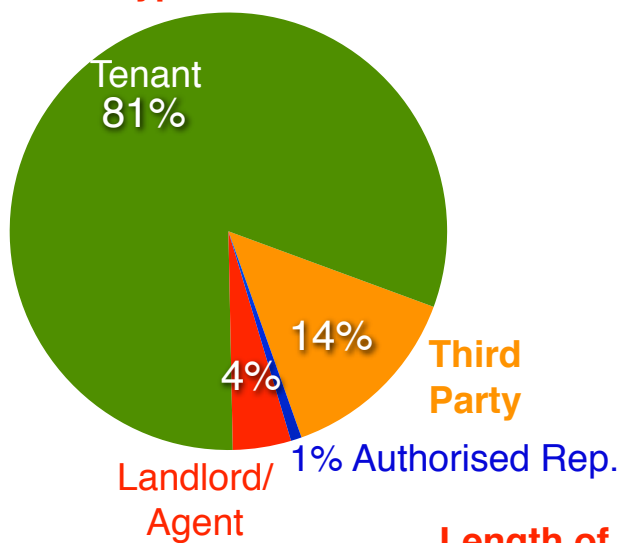


Statewide 2012/13

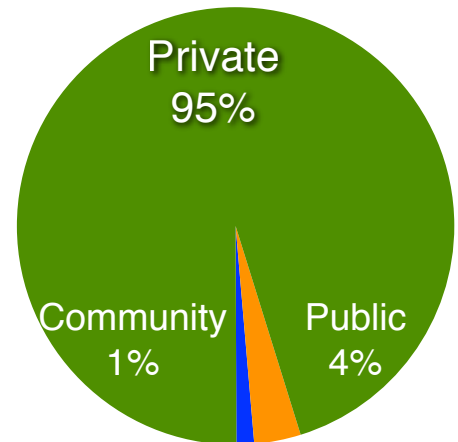
Type of Agreement



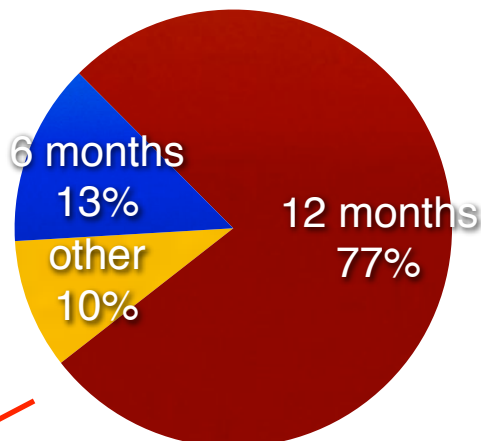
Type of Caller



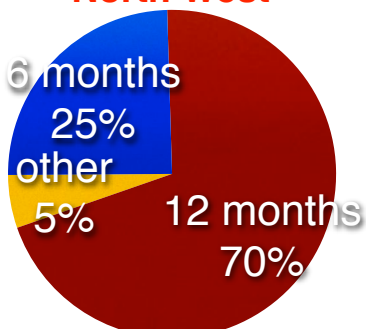
Landlord



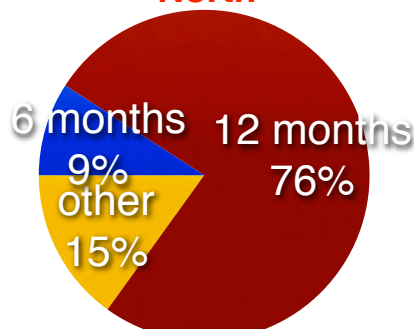
Length of Fixed Term Lease State



North West



North



South

