



Autumn 2007

# The Rent Rant

Newsletter of the Tenants' Union of Tasmania Inc

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Administration  
03 6223 2641

Telephone Advice Line  
1300 652 641  
03 6223 2641

Email:  
tenants@  
netspace.net.au

## Who we are

Tasmania, like every state and the ACT, has a tenants advice service. We are a state and federal government funded body that gives advice to renters about their rights and responsibilities under the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997*.

We give advice over the phone 9.30 to 4.30 Tuesday – Friday and are available for 'drop ins' 9.30 to 12.30 Tuesday to Thursday.

We also run Community Legal Education seminars, and work on Law Reform in areas relating to tenancy. If you are interested in accessing training, or in assisting with one of our law campaigns, please contact us.

## Sub-standard Housing Study

For some time now we have been concerned about anecdotal evidence that indicates that sub-standard housing is becoming a major issue for some tenants.

The Tenants' Union is delighted to announce that Dr Erica Bell will be conducting a study to document the effect that the absence of minimum housing standards has on the health and welfare of Tasmanian children. This study will focus on the private rental market. Particular emphasis will be placed on the situation of small children in rural areas, and children who are experiencing disadvantage.

For more information on this study, contact us on 03 6223 2591.



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*"The TUT believes that  
all people deserve  
access to appropriate  
housing..."*

## Boarding House Blues

The Tenants' Union has been in the news a lot lately, with our campaign to try and prevent the Hobart City Council from blocking the development of a Boarding House in Fitzroy Place. The TUT believes that all people deserve access to appropriate housing, and we know that renters are finding it increasingly difficult to

find homes that they can afford. We look forward to a successful resolution of this issue, and we hope that our campaign helps overcome some of the prejudices that people on low incomes face every day in the property market.

## Rent Bidding

Over the last six months the Tenants' Union became concerned by reports that rent bidding was becoming a standard practice for a few real estate agents.

We are pleased to note that the State Government agrees that rent bidding, or rental auctions, is a practice that should be stamped out in Tasmania. The onus for keeping this practice at bay has been placed with the soon to be constituted Property Agents Board.

Meanwhile, we urge all people who encounter this practice to report it to Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading. They can be reached by phone on 1300 654 499.

We also recommend you put your complaints in writing, so that they can be passed onto the Property Agents Board when it is operating.



## LAW REFORM UPDATES

### Unreasonable Rent Increases

The Attorney General has referred out paper *“Through the Roof” Unreasonable Rent Increases in Tasmania* to Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading. At the time of writing we are still awaiting contact from CAFT, who have now had five months to consider our submission...

Meanwhile, rents are continuing to escalate, and some of the notable increases we have been informed of are;

Moonah – from \$170 to \$230  
Prospect Vale – from \$400 to \$450  
Sandy Bay – from \$170 to \$230  
Hobart – from \$275 - \$310

### Rental Deposit Authority

The Rental Deposit Authority (RDA) has been a long time coming, and all we can say at the time of writing is that it is supposed to be up and running by the end of 2007.

*The following information is taken from the Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading website.*

Once the RDA is established it will be illegal for a private owner to receive your rental bond money. Instead, you will be able to lodge your bond money at a Service Tasmania Shop, with your real estate agent or directly with the RDA.

One of the key aims of the RDA is to ensure the fast processing of bond refund claims. When you move out of a property, the RDA will return the bond money as agreed by you and the private owner or real estate agent.

If it is not possible to reach an agreement on the return of the rental bond, then fair and equitable processes will be in place to quickly resolve issues.

Once the RDA is established your private owner or real estate agent will have 6 months to lodge rental bonds on any existing tenancy agreements.

For now, continue to give the rental bond money to a private owner or to your real estate agent. But don't forget to get a receipt and a condition report before you part with your cash!




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*“...we are still awaiting contact from CAFT, who have now had five months to consider our submission...”*

## **TENANTS' UNION OF TASMANIA**

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We're on the Web!

**[www.tutas.org.au](http://www.tutas.org.au)**



## **MOULD in your home**

Mould is an issue that frequently causes distress for renters. Not only is it an eyesore, it can cause allergic reactions and increase problems for people with asthma.

There are various things that tenants can do to help keep down mould, such as cleaning mould prone areas with white vinegar, keeping curtains open if it is a sunny day, and keeping air circulating through the home. Apparently it is more effective to keep one window slightly open all the time, than lots of windows only some of the time.

However, we often find that regardless of what tenants do, mould keeps growing back. If the owner or agent is unresponsive, then we suggest you contact your local council and ask for a report from an environmental health officer. They will be able to say if the mould is related to problems with the building, and whether it is damaging your health. Your doctor may also be able to say if the mould is damaging your health. The Council may then decide to order the owner to fix the problem. If that doesn't happen, you could apply to the magistrates court.

If you want more advice on this issue, please call us.

## **Call for volunteers**

**Do you want to help people understand their rights and responsibilities as a renter? Or would you simply like to help out with some office duties? We provide training for people who want to become Advice Line or Office volunteers. If you are interested in joining the team, just give us a call! We hold training sessions on a needs basis throughout the year. With a core staff of just 2.4 FTE, we rely heavily on volunteers to help us support Tasmanian tenants.**

## ***Our Staff***

**Principal Solicitor:**  
Alexander (Sandy) Duncanson

**Solicitor:**  
Meredith Upchurch

**Book Keeper:**  
Noeleen Caplice

**Manager:**  
Beverley Jefferson

The Tenants' Union of Tasmania is funded by the Tasmanian Governments' Department of Health and Human Services and the Commonwealth Attorney Generals Department.