

New Tenancy Laws - Tenants Need Ovens! - Online Training & Membership

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## News from the Tenants' Union of Tasmania

Welcome back to our quarterly newsletter Rent Rant after a brief hiatus. Much has changed Tasmania's tenancy sector in recent months. The *Residential Tenancy Act* has been amended, the Tenants' Union introduced a new online training and membership and more, all discussed in this issue:

- New Tenancy Laws - What has changed?
- Minimum Standards - TUTas' position on the late amendments
- Introducing TUTas' Membership and Online Training
- Mind Your Power. Power bill issues in granny flats
- Pets in Rental Properties - New ACAC Publications

There have also been additions to the Tenants' Union staff - welcome to our new Training & Development Officer, Rebecca Taylor and Communications Officer Julia Ely, who wrote and edited most of this *Rent Rant*. Also we say goodbye and thanks to Tim Walter and Amanda Street for their work as Principal Solicitor and Management Committee member, respectively.



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## New Tenancy Laws

What has changed?

On 1<sup>st</sup> October a number of changes to the *Residential Tenancy Act* came into effect. We have updated both our *Don't Panic* booklet and the fact sheets on particular topics to reflect the amendments. Here is an overview of some of the more important changes.

Arguably of greatest benefit to tenants is the 42-day (6 week) notice period for an eviction at the end of a fixed term lease, up from a minimum of 14 days. This change was sought by the

Tenants' Union to reduce the likelihood of homelessness resulting from forced evictions at the end of a lease. Also of benefit to tenants are longer periods between rent increases and increased security measures for boarding premises.

However, it is not all good news for tenants with several [new categories](#) that can be relied on to evict tenants. Also, with the delaying of the introduction of minimum standards, the centrepiece of the legislative changes is still to occur, and we urge Parliament to prioritise this in the next sittings of both the lower and upper house (see next story).

Repairs and maintenance issues are one of the most frequently asked requests of Tenants' Union telephone advisers and solicitors and there are several changes associated with this area. Tap washers, inaccessible light globes and cooking stoves with less than half the elements working are deemed urgent repairs that are a landlord responsibility. Cooking stoves with half or more of the elements working must now be fixed within 14 days. Also, repeated fixing of unfixable items have been barred with it now compulsory to replace an item unable to be repaired, with one that does the job at least as good as the old item before it was required to be repaired.

Tenants also have better rights when it comes to [finding a property](#), with tenancies required to be advertised at a fixed price; increased financial security as there must be 12 months instead of 6 months between rent increases; and better tenure security as tenants are moved on to a non-fixed term lease immediately following the end date of a fixed term lease unless they have been given a valid [Notice to Vacate](#).

The agreed changes will be implemented gradually, with all changes applicable to new leases made after 1st October, some changes applying immediately to all older leases as well, and others only coming into effect for older leases from 1st October 2015.

For more newly introduced and pending amendments check the highlighted boxes under each topic in our [Don't Panic booklet](#).

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## Delayed Introduction of Minimum Standards

Hotplates and Ovens to go back before Parliament

It has been nearly three months since many of the [new rules](#) surrounding Tasmanian residential tenancy came into effect, and despite the many changes, both good and bad we are desperately missing the centrepiece, minimum standards.

Once introduced, the section would make hot & cold running water, fixed heating in the living room and continuous access to a toilet compulsory requirements for rental properties in this State.

Following some last minute lobbying by industry groups, the introduction of minimum standards has been postponed. While one can hardly argue, that having access to a toilet in your home is too much to ask for, lobbying groups sought to water down the minimum standard on cooking facilities.



The provision would have made it compulsory to have two hot plates in studio, and one and two bedroom properties and four hotplates in properties with three or more bedrooms. However, industry claimed, that some larger new houses only have three hot plates and as a result the minimum standard should be two hotplates for all properties, regardless of size. We can only understand industry's request for two hot plates was an attempt to keep minimum standards below a level that is commonly regarded as convenient.

Furthermore, by dropping the standard from four hot plates to two, we get the impression industry is seeking to weasel out of an agreement, that would otherwise ensure so much more fundamental (and yes, costly in some cases) rights to human dignity in housing, such as being able to have a shower, staying warm in crisp Tassie winters and going to the loo at night!

Earlier on, industry had already convinced government to back down on the minimum standard of a conventional oven, instead arguing that a microwave oven was sufficient, despite protests from community housing organisations including the Tenants' Union.

The Tenants' Union has asked government to keep the hotplates as written, but demand that a conventional oven be the minimum standard rather than a microwave. This is because we want families to be able to prepare real food, rather than chucking frozen meals into the microwave. And also to make rental properties safer as ovens are best fitted into a property and left there for wiring, space and ventilation reasons.

We await further negotiations before the legislation goes back to Parliament.

## Skill Up!

### The Tenants' Unions Membership and Online Training

In July of this year we introduced our new Online Membership and Training to broaden Tasmanian community participation in and knowledge about tenancy matters.

Free membership is available to anybody with an interest in the Tenants' Union's work and so far comprises of tenants, members of the general public, board members and workers from related areas such as housing support workers and industry.

Members will receive our newsletter and have access to exclusive information on tenancy issues in addition to our free online publications. Furthermore, members can be as involved as they wish by, for example joining committees, participating in the formulation of policies, bringing forward ideas on lobbying or being involved in event planning throughout the year.

The online training seeks to get you on conversant with the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (Tas)*, including recent amendments and upcoming changes. In seven lessons trainees get a broad overview of the Act before focusing on particular areas such as starting a tenancy, repairs & maintenance and privacy.

Originally designed for the Tenants' Union's volunteers and staff, the training targets people working in tenancy support and is open to anybody who wishes to enhance their understanding



of tenancy rights and laws. After setting up a training account on the Tenants' Union's website, lessons can be taken individually at the learners own pace and can be repeated. Each lesson is presented in a slide show, including a quiz at the end, and will take approximately half an hour to complete. On completion of the training the trainee will be issued with a certificate.

In 2015 we will seek to steadily increase both the online training and the membership's capacity. We look forward to feedback and requests from our current and future participants to make those services as appropriate as needed. Most of all, we would love to see more tenants signing up to a membership and taking a stance on their rights.

Sign up for membership and online training [here](#).

## Mind your Power

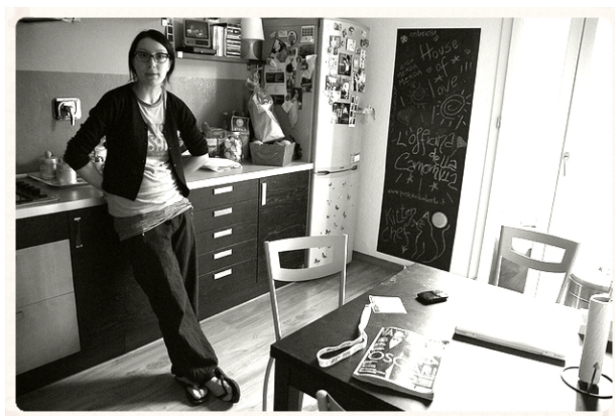
Sharing Utilities in Granny Flats



*Have you found a beautiful little flat, in a nice neighborhood, with easy-going landlords that live in the main house and have offered to share their power connection with you?*

Well it is probably going to cause a dispute and might involve a breach of tenancy legislation. Our Solicitor, Peter Foster discusses the issue [here](#).

## Renters at Home



What is it about rental housing that makes you feel at home, connected and well – or not?

The Gold Coast's Griffith University is conducting research that is collecting 'rental tales' to support and inform community engagement in planning for urban housing, better understanding about renters' sense of home and better housing policy, services and practices.

They would like tenants to contribute a tale about renting [here](#)!

## Pets in Rental Properties

While 63% of Australian households own a pet and enjoy the benefits of companionship as well

as enhanced social, physical and mental health by living with a cat or dog, most landlords are not as keen on having tenants' four-legged friends in their properties.

However, a study in the United States has found that pet owners make great tenants, who rent long term, take good care of their homes and, against common perceptions, cause little if any damage to properties compared to tenants without pets.

To help overcome the stigma of pets in tenancies, the Australian Companion Animal Council has published two brochures about making tenancies in Australia more pet friendly.

The first is a guide for tenants that advises on ways to find pet-friendly rentals. The brochure outlines tips and legal recommendations on applying for and securing pet-friendly rental, including a helpful pet application and agreement form, and recommends a list of responsible renting with measures for renting with pets.

The second brochure provides arguments for landlords and agents to allow a 'pets considered' policy for their rental properties. It lists benefits landlords enjoy by renting to pet owners and quashes common myths associated with pets in properties. Unfortunately, the delivery of greater economic outcomes from rental properties is presented as the central argument, which is why we would recommend using the brochure as a source of information, rather than providing it to your prospective landlord in an attempt to make him or her consider you as a tenant with a pet.

Both brochures and the pet application and agreement form can be ordered or downloaded from the [Australian Companion Animal Council's website](#).

## Tenants' Union Services

### TELEPHONE ADVICE LINE

Monday to Friday\*  
9.30am to 4pm  
1300 652 641  
6223 2641

*\*except public holidays. The Tenants' Union will close its phones on 23 Dec 2014 at 12pm for Christmas holidays. The telephone advice line will resume on 5 Jan 2015.*

### FACE-TO-FACE SERVICE

#### **Hobart**

166 Macquarie St  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday\*  
9.30am to 12.30pm



*\*except public holidays. The Tenants' Union will close its doors on 23 Dec 2014 at 12pm for Christmas holidays. Drop-in service will resume on 13 Jan 2015.*

#### **Launceston**

By appointment  
Call 1300 652 641



#### **Devonport**

By appointment  
Call 1300 652 641

**TRAINING AND INFO SESSIONS**

17 January 2015 - Info stall at the Putalina Festival, Putalina (Oyster Cove)



More face to face training and info sessions in 2015 are in the planning, but have not been confirmed yet. Please contact [Rebecca Taylor](#) for further information.

**ONLINE**

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

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