



Winter 2006

# 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

#### Email:

tenants@

netspace.net.au

## Who we are

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

Our staff comprises Sandy and Meredith, our two solicitors, Bev our new advocate, and Patti our office administrator.

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

## Management Committee

We are grateful for the ongoing commitment of our volunteer management committee, and invite interested people to contact Sandy if they would like to join the team below;

Tim Bullard (Chair)

Tamieka Colbeck (Treasurer)

Tim Graham

Michelle Gabrielle

Michelle Parker

Tuesday to Thursday.

As we all work part-time, you may want to know the times that we all work!

Sandy works Monday - Thursday, and every second Friday. Meredith works Tuesday – Friday.

Patti works Monday to Thursday, 10am-4pm. Bev works Tuesdays and Fridays.

We also enjoy the tireless support of two fabulous volunteers, Bob and Mick, without whom the service would grind to a halt. Finally, volunteer Alex is our data guru.

Finally, we would like to farewell two of our staff. Steph has left in order to go travelling with her family, and Kristy is awaiting the birth of her first child. Both women have been terrific members of our team, and will be sorely missed.




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*"...write to Steve Kons  
and tell him that you  
support the need  
for law reforms..."*

## Smoke Alarms

While it is now compulsory to have a hard-wired smoke detector in all new homes being built, there is no law that says that landlords need to provide a smoke alarm for existing properties. The TU are working on a proposal to the state government to have this section of the Residential Tenancy Act changed.

In the meantime, as statistics show overwhelmingly that smoke alarms do save lives, we recommend that you approach your landlord or Real Estate agent and ask them to install a hard-wired smoke alarm. It doesn't cost

that much, and is tax deductible for the owner. Or you could buy a battery operated one yourself and take it with you as you move from one rental house to the next. Don't forget to check the batteries regularly though!

We encourage you to write to Steve Kons and tell him that you support the need for law reforms that will make it compulsory for all rented homes to be fitted with smoke alarms.

Attorney General  
10th Floor  
10 Murray Street  
Hobart, Tasmania, 7000  
or email:  
[steve.kons@justice.tas.gov.au](mailto:steve.kons@justice.tas.gov.au)

## Rental Deposit Authority

The good news is the Rental Deposit Authority is on its way! This has been the result of consistent lobbying by many groups in the housing and social justice sectors in Tasmania, and the date of commencement is set to be January 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. This means that soon your bond will not be held by the Owner or Agent of

your rented home, but will be safely lodged with a part of the State Government. Some final details are being ironed out, but it seems likely that Service Tasmania outlets will offer the bond collection services. We will have more details of the Rental Deposit Authority outlined in our next edition of *Rent Rant*.



## “THROUGH THE ROOF” - Unreasonable Rent Increases in Tasmania

As house and mortgage costs have increased in Tasmania, rental prices have also increased. Because this has not been complimented by an associated increase in wages, housing stress has also been growing exponentially. This has ensured that the issue of unreasonable increases in rent have become of critical importance to Tenants.

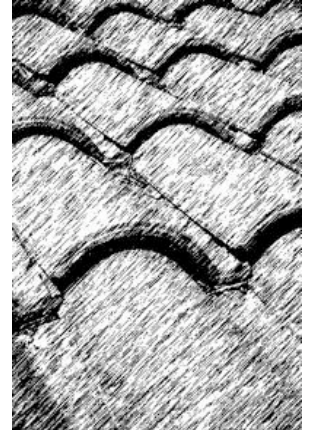
A property owner must give 60 days notice in writing of an intended rent increase and may raise your rent no more than once every six months. However, there is no law to determine exactly how much is a reasonable amount by which to increase the rent, which means that many tenants are finding their rent is going ‘through the roof.’

The Tenants’ Union will be encouraging our new Attorney General, Steve Kons, to make simple

amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act that will give clear and fair guidelines about what is a reasonable amount by which to increase the rent.

For example, in the Australian Capital Territory rent goes up in accordance with the Consumer Price Index (roughly around 4-5%), which is a much easier figure for a renter to absorb into their weekly budget. We are hopeful that a similar clause in our legislation would this put an end to the horror phone calls we have been taking, that include stories of rent increasing from \$90 to \$150 per week!

The TU will be launching “Through the Roof”, our law reform issues paper later this month, so stay tuned...



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*“...many tenants are finding their rent is going ‘through the roof’.”*

## TENANTS' UNION OF TASMANIA

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Street  
Hobart TAS 7000

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03 6223 2641

ADVICE LINE:  
1300 652 641

FAX:  
03 6223 2510

E-MAIL:  
tenants@netspace.  
net.au

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We're on the Web!

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



## Heating your home

The TU has many inquiries about whether heating is required to be provided in a residential tenancy property. Unfortunately there is no obligation for a landlord to ensure heating is available. *However*, if there is an operational heater at the time the tenancy agreement commences, and if that heater ceases to function, then it is classified as an essential service and the landlord or agent must ensure that it is fixed within 24 hours of being notified. If your landlord or agent does not fulfil their responsibilities, then you need to speak to us about the next step. So when looking to rent a property, try to find one with an operational heater: otherwise winter might be quite long and cold!

## Our Staff

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

**Solicitor:**  
Meredith Upchurch

## Training available

**Do you want to help people understand their rights and responsibilities as a renter? Community Legal Education and Advice Line volunteer training is available upon request from the Tenants' Union.**

## Heater safety tips

*If you decide to purchase a portable heater, the following are issues to think about;*

*Always position clothes, newspapers, kindling and other flammable materials at least two metres away from any heater.*

*Purchase a portable heater that automatically shuts off if knocked over.*

*Place your portable heaters away from areas of heavy traffic where they may get knocked over.*

*Always remember to turn off your heater when going to bed or leaving the house.*

**Admin Officer:**  
Patti Cosgrove

**Tenants' Advocate:**  
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.