



22 February 2022

To the Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing
Level 5, Salamanca Building
4 Salamanca Place
Hobart TAS 7000
attn: Michael Ferguson

via email: michael.ferguson@parliament.tas.gov.au

To the Honourable Michael Ferguson,
Re: Clarification about TasWater Data

Last week, the Tenants' Union of Tasmania released data provided by TasWater that found that there were 192 residential properties across the Hobart City Council municipality that had a "high chance" of vacancy, 115 in the neighbouring Glenorchy City Council and 256 in Launceston City Council.

The 563 residential properties that sat empty during 2018-20 is a conservative figure and the true number of empty properties is almost certainly higher. This is because the data only captured residential properties with three consecutive years of either none or minimal water usage. The data also fails to capture those apartment complexes which have a single water meter. Importantly, the data cannot be dismissed on the basis that Tasmanians own "shacks" which sit empty for most of the year, as the data requested was solely for the inner-city Hobart, Glenorchy and Launceston City Councils.

In your response to the media, you were quoted as stating:¹

Without clarification on what is captured in their statistics, regarding vacant lots, houses under construction or in the planning phase or other factors that might result in low water usage it is very difficult to say how relevant the statistics provided by the Tenant's Union are.

We confirm that our original request for information was limited to residential premises in the Glenorchy, Hobart and Launceston City Councils. We did not request vacant lots, houses under construction or in the planning phase.

After reading of your request for clarification, we wrote to TasWater directly.

¹ Fiona Blackwood, 'Thousands of homes left empty in Tasmania despite critical rental shortage', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* on Friday 18 February 2022. As found at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-18/taswater-data-shows-thousands-of-homes-left-empty-/100840790> (Accessed 22 February 2022).

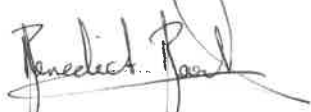


TasWater responded yesterday confirming “the numbers were done on actual residential premises – that is – ones valued as having a “Residential Dwelling” actually constructed and habitable by the Office of the Valuer General”.

The response also notes that TasWater carry out spot checks and often record notes “when they visit a property and notice anything out of the ordinary” including importantly whether the property “looks empty” (see attached).

We commend the Government for committing \$615M to social and affordable housing measures. But with most of the 3500 social housing properties you have committed to build at least two years away, we call on the Government to re-consider its opposition to an empty homes tax, which will make homes available for those who need them now.

Yours faithfully,



Benedict Bartl
Principal Solicitor
Tenants' Union of Tasmania

enc: Correspondence with TasWater

cc: Pattie Chugg
Shelter Tasmania

Adrienne Picone
TasCOSS

Rebecca White
Leader of the ALP Opposition

Cassy O'Connor
Tasmanian Greens

Fw: Request for Data about empty homes

Ben Bartl <ben@tenantstas.org.au>

Fri 18/02/2022 1:48 PM

To: [REDACTED]@taswater.com.au [REDACTED]@taswater.com.au

Bcc: Alex Bomford <alex@tenantstas.org.au>; Matthew Graves <matt@tenantstas.org.au>; Julia Ely <communications@tenantstas.org.au>

📎 1 attachments (108 KB)

Summary Workbook - LCC, HCC, GCC Low Consuming Residentials.xlsx;

Hi [REDACTED]

Late last year you provided a response to our request for data about residential properties that had a low, medium and high chance of being vacant (see below) based on water consumption over three consecutive years. The data was very useful. There are stories about the data in *The Mercury*, *The Examiner* and on the ABC today.

The reason I am writing to you is because the Government is seeking clarification from us that the data does not include "vacant lots, houses under construction or in the planning phase...".

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-18/taswater-data-shows-thousands-of-homes-left-empty-/100840790>

Could you please confirm that the data provided was solely for residential premises and did not include vacant lots, houses under construction or in the planning phase.

Kind regards,

Ben Bartl
Principal Solicitor
Tenants' Union of Tasmania

RE: Request for Data about empty homes

[Redacted] <[Redacted]@taswater.com.au>

Mon 21/02/2022 10:28 AM

To: Ben Bartl <ben@tenantstas.org.au>

Hi Ben

I have sought confirmation from the analyst who pulled the data together for me – his response is below.

I can confirm the numbers were done on actual residential premises – that is – ones valued as have a “Residential Dwelling” actually constructed and habitable by the Office of the Valuer General.

Thankfully, our Meter Readers do usually record some basic notes when they visit a property and notice anything out of the ordinary.

I have done fair number of spot checks on the data and can confirm that, although there is some definitely some noise to the data due to metering issues, MOST of the Medium/High properties I have checked have a meter reading note saying it’s vacant.

24/09 read 00286 meter tests OK, property still looks vacant

Example:

Thus, I would consider the “story” of the numbers still intact 😊 Especially considering there are properties with shared meters (i.e. strata units) that we are unable to capture with this method.

Kind regards

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

GM Governance & Assurance



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I acknowledge and pay respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the traditional and original owners and continuing custodians of the land in which TasWater resides and pay deep respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.



Have I been helpful? Please provide feedback by clicking [here](#).



THANKS IS ENOUGH



Tasmanians are often keen to say thanks to our employees for a job well done. Instead of a gift, we'd prefer that you send us a simple card, a letter or an email. We'd appreciate it.