

A Secure, Affordable Place to Call Home

The Greens' Housing Plan, Part 2



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Housing is a fundamental human right yet more and more

Tasmanians are being left out in the cold. The need for investment and reform is urgent.

The housing emergency is placing severe pressure on housing and homelessness services. People are sleeping in cars and tents, on couches or on the streets. Young people are leaving the state to find a home and tenants faced with soaring rents live in fear of eviction.

Not for profit organisations that deliver housing and specialist homelessness services are having to turn at risk people away or refer them on to other overstretched providers for want of crisis accommodation. Increasingly, our fellow citizens are left with no housing choices.

Greater Hobart residents applying for rental properties report joining 30-40 other prospective tenants in the queue for a single property. There is an element of despair to these individuals' stories. People are starting to give up hope of finding a place to live, in and around the capital city.

Those who do reside in rental properties face sharply rising rents and express fear over the possibility of sudden eviction on to an impossibly tight housing market.

The current unregulated Air BNB, short stay accommodation free-for-all is only adding pressure, taking affordable homes out of the rental market, and reinforcing the need for targeted funding and new rules to reset the balance.

The Greens have already committed to regulation of short stay accommodation, investment in social housing and urban renewal and planning laws that deliver mixed

communities with a range of affordable housing.

Tackling the housing emergency before it becomes a disaster will require intensive and committed action from government.

Homelessness will significantly increase unless the next Tasmanian Government prioritises capital investment, recurrent services and legislative reform.

The Greens are committed to being part of real housing solutions for all Tasmanians.

THE GREENS WILL

- ▲ Invest in 21st Century Showcase Homelessness Facilities.
- ▲ Provide funding to Bethlehem House.
- ▲ Make leases and rent fair.
- ▲ End unfair discrimination against family violence victims.
- ▲ Implement indefinite lease options for tenants.
- ▲ End discrimination against renters who own pets.

21ST CENTURY HOMELESSNESS SHOWCASE FACILITIES

The Greens will invest \$30 million over four years to design and construct sixty new units of short, medium and long term accommodation.

This investment will enable the Housing Innovations Unit to oversee the delivery of state of the art, green, 8.5 star, energy and resource efficient design and construction, using Tasmanian plantation timbers and emphasising local procurement in all aspects of the developments.

We recognise well designed accommodation that emphasises modern liveability principles and respects human dignity will have a positive health and wellbeing effect on residents of the new facilities.

The newly established Office of the State Architect will play a key advisory role in project design and construction to deliver green, showcase facilities for homeless Tasmanians.

Tasmania's renters The First Project would be Bethlehem house. Our second project would be expanding Tyhne House in the North of the State, and our third, Hobart Women's Shelter.

PROJECT #1 BETHLEHEM HOUSE

The St. Vincent De Paul Society has operated heritage listed Bethlehem House as a crisis accommodation facility for homeless men since 1973.

The only crisis accommodation centre in Hobart, Bethlehem House provides 12 500 bed nights and 30 000 meals each year. It is a vital service, stretched to capacity.

With targeted public investment in a negotiated partnership project, we can provide more safe shelter and support to men who are homeless or at risk.

The Greens are committed to working with the Board and management of Bethlehem House to contribute funding towards the construction of 20 state of the art crisis and medium to long term units.

A further \$300 000 per annum will be allocated to each project for operational costs.

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF TASMANIANS IN THE RENTAL MARKET

Tasmania's renters face the most difficult market in the country. Demand has increased more than 40% year-on-year¹ and the vacancy rate has dropped below 1%.²

Rental prices have skyrocketed as demand outstrips supply, particularly in Hobart.

With such high demand for places to live, landlords hold all the power. Tasmanians searching for a home are being forced to accept substandard properties, unaffordable rents, unreasonable and, at times, unlawful conditions.

It has never been more important to enshrine the right to a liveable, secure and affordable place to live in Tasmania.

We will introduce amendments to the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 to reset the balance for tenants.

FAIR LEASES

The Tenants' Union reports that it is not uncommon for leases to contain clauses that are unlawful under the Residential Tenancy Act 1997.

Every State other than Tasmania and the Northern Territory has standard lease agreements. The Greens are committed to bringing Tasmania up to date to better protect tenants' rights under the Act.

Increasingly, landlords are using the pending expiration of a lease as a reason for eviction. Tenants have a right to know the real reason for losing their home and to challenge it if they feel misrepresented or discriminated against.

Lease expiration is an opportunity for eviction, rather than a reason and this needs to be reflected in the Act. Landlords will still be able to give common reasons such as renovations, property sale, the decision to move into the property, or using the property for any other reason.

This will not prevent landlords from having control over what happens to their own property. It simply means that unlawful reasons for eviction, such as discrimination based on personal attributes unrelated to tenancy, cannot be hidden through vague “lease expiration” reasons.

FAIR RENTS

With house prices and Air BNB conversions soaring along with increasing interstate and overseas investment in the Tasmanian property market, unscrupulous landlords are able to ask exorbitant rents.

Tenants are being pushed closer to the poverty line as more and more of their household income is taken up in rental payments.

The Greens reject the notion that ‘the market’ should be left to determine rental affordability. Left to its own and in the hands of landlords, the market will drive an increasing number of Tasmanians into housing insecurity or homelessness.

The Greens support the introduction of mechanisms for controlling rent increases similar to the ACT model.

This model sets a maximum rate of increase at CPI – which can be contested by the landlord but must be justified on reasonable grounds.

This will be accompanied by the introduction of provisions allowing a tenant to terminate a lease agreement without penalty if it becomes unaffordable – through, for example, loss of employment.

LONG TERM LEASES

Eighty three percent of renters in Australia do not know where they will be living in 12 months time. Such uncertainty becomes a multiplier – school, work and community connections can be severed on a yearly basis, with as little as a month’s notice.

The Greens will introduce indefinite lease options to help stabilise the lives of renters. We will also amend the Act to remove the provision of ‘no grounds’ eviction of tenants, helping renters to have greater stability in their lives and within their community.

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

We will amend the Family Violence Act 2004 and the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 in order to ensure family violence victims are not penalised for the actions of an offender.

This will include preventing family violence victims from being blacklisted due to the actions of an offender, and enabling the Court to terminate an agreement if it becomes unaffordable for a victim due to family violence, separation and the loss of income.

Family violence victims should not be made to suffer further as a result of housing insecurity. We recognise that costs associated with these reforms are more appropriately associated with the State than the property owner.

As such, we will also examine mechanisms for reimbursing landlords in cases where they are subject to financial losses over a certain threshold as a result of these legislative changes. We recognise that there is a responsibility to make sure family violence victims don’t further suffer through housing insecurity. However, we also recognise that costs associated with this are more appropriately associated with the state than a landlord.

As such, we will also examine whether it is appropriate for the state to reimburse landlords in cases where they are subject to financial losses over a certain threshold as a result of these legislative changes.

SUPPORT FOR TENANTS

The current housing emergency has created much higher demand for tenancy advice and advocacy.

The Tenants' Union of Tasmania provides vital advice, support and representation to tenants. Demand for its services is surging in this new, hostile market environment for renters.

We will increase service funding to the Tenants' Union by \$100 000 per year to support more tenants in more locations.

We will also fund the Tenants' Union Northern Office, allowing for stronger statewide tenancy supports.

PETS

Having a companion animal is one of the most common joys of life. There is strong peer reviewed evidence to support the positive mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership.

More than 62% of Tasmanians have a dog or cat, the highest rate in the country. This contributes positively to Tasmania's social wellbeing yet the rights of pet owners are not protected.

Prospective tenants are being refused homes because they have a companion animal. Homelessness workers report people sleeping rough rather than part with their pet, while those who do make the hard choice place pressure over-burdened animals shelters.

The Greens will amend the Act to prevent discrimination against prospective tenants on the basis of pet ownership, unless the landlord has reasonable grounds.

INITIATIVE COST

Initiative Investment (\$m)	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year	4 th Year
Tenant Services	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
Tenants' Union Northern Office	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08
Homelessness Facilities	10.00	10.00	10.00	-
Recurrent funding	-	0.30	0.60	0.90
Total	10.18	10.48	10.78	1.08

REFERENCES

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- [2. your investment property magazine, TAS Excerpt From The 2018 January Market Report.](#)
- [3. Choice.com.au, National Shelter, and nato, "Unsettled: Life in Australia's Private Rental Market", 2017.](#)
- [4. Roy Morgan, "Doggone it: pet ownership in Australia", 2015.](#)