



Spring 2007

The Rent Rant

Newsletter of the Tenants' Union of Tasmania Inc

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Telephone Advice
Line

1300 652 641

03 6223 2641

Email:

tenants@

netspace.net.au

What we do

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 4.00 Monday – Friday and are available for 'drop ins' from 9.30 to 12.30 Tuesday to Thursday at 166 Macquarie St., Hobart.

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.

New Devonport Office of the TU

The TU has recently established a Northern branch of its operations in Devonport. The office will be based at the North West Community Legal Service at 62 Stewart Street, Devonport.

Our new solicitor in the North-West is Sarah Hiller and the TU welcomes her to the organisation. Sarah has many years experience in private practice, Legal Aid and lectures in law at the University of Tasmania's Cradle Coast campus.

It is fantastic that the TU now has a presence in the North of Tasmania and we hope that this will go some way in providing better services and results for tenants across the North.

Sarah will be available for consultation on Tuesday afternoons. Tenants with problems are still advised to call the Telephone Advice Line on Free Call 1300 652 641, and if they have a problem that needs face-to-face help then they will be directed to Sarah in the Devonport office.

Fitzroy Place Protest

The TU is continuing the fight to see a boarding house established in Star Street, off Fitzroy Place in Hobart.

The TU and the Greens staged a protest outside the Town Hall in June to highlight the inequity resulting from the Hobart City Council's decision to reject the plan to convert a 27 bed nursing home into short term accommodation for homeless men.

TU Principal Solicitor, Sandy Duncanson said "There is an urgent need for housing in Tasmania at the moment with many people turned away from shelters because they are already full. Fitzroy Place is, in many respects an ideal site with good access to the city, bus stops and shopping facilities. It is simply unconscionable that the HCC would vote against such an important development for some of our most marginalised people."

Kick them while they're down...

Protesters outside the Town Hall highlighting the unfairness of the HCC's decision to reject the homeless men's shelter



Parliament Submission

The TU was recently invited to submit a paper to the Tasmanian Legislative Council's Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Tasmania.

Some of our key recommendations included:

- Increasing funding for public housing stock
- Limiting mid-lease rent increases
- Extending eviction notice periods to lessen the stress and potential for homelessness associated with moving
- Strengthening legislation to improve rental housing standards.

Sandy Duncanson and Dr. Rowland Atkinson also gave an oral submission to the Select Committee on behalf of the TU reiterating and clarifying these recommendations.

If you would like a copy of the submission call the TU on 6223 2591.

In addition, Meredith Upchurch (Solicitor at the TU) met with Tasmanian MP's on Housing Advocacy Day to focus attention on tenants experiencing the housing crisis in Tasmania.

LJ Hooker's Extra Fees

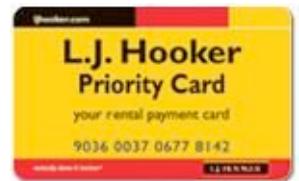
Tenants with some LJ Hooker franchises have been forced to pay charges to deposit their rent and the Tenants' Union believes it is illegal.

Under a new nationwide scheme called the Priority Card, tenants use a card to pay rent using such mechanisms as BPAY, Australia Post Bill Pay and Bank Deposit. They are charged a fee for using these facilities and there is no option to deposit for free at LJ Hooker as was the case previously.

The TU has contacted LJ Hooker in Tasmania to demand a fee-free option because under the *Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (s.17)*, landlords and agents may only charge for rent, compensation for damage and (sometimes) water during a lease.

LJ Hooker claim that the Priority Card is administered by a third party and therefore they are not charging the fees.

The TU has contacted the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading but has not yet received a response.



Copy of the card taken from ljhooker.com.au

TENANTS' UNION OF TASMANIA

166 Macquarie Street
Hobart TAS 7000

62 Stewart Street
Devonport TAS 7310

ADVICE LINE:
1300 652 641
03 6223 2641

FAX:
03 6223 2510

E-MAIL:
tenants@netspace.net.au

We're on the Web!

www.tutas.org.au

Volunteer Gong: Bob Jones Wins Peace Award

One of the TU's outstanding volunteers, Bob Jones has recently been awarded the *Mercury's* Pride of Australia Peace Award. The award was for "advancing understanding, tolerance and social harmony among Australians of any background."

Bob has been giving telephone advice at the Tenants' Union for over 4 years, and also volunteers at Lifeline and at the Tasmanian AIDS Council.

He is an asset to tenants throughout Tasmania and the TU congratulates him on a well deserved award.

Rent Increase Scoreboard

The TU is trying to get legislation amended to prevent excessive rent increases during the term of a lease.

Presently, if your lease allows for a rent increase there is no limit to the increase as long the rent does not exceed "the general level of rents for comparable residential premises in the locality or a similar locality".

Some of the more extraordinary mid-lease rent increases reported to the TU recently:

Mt. Stuart: from \$180 to \$280

Devonport: from \$100 to \$250

Sandy Bay: from \$200 to \$300

Moonah: from \$145 to \$290

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 will hold a comprehensive training course that begins next March, but if you wish join earlier just give the TU a call on 6223 2591.

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

Solicitor (North-West):
Sarah Hiller

Book Keeper:
Mick Lynch

Administrator / Advocate:
Phil Hoffen

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