

24 July 2023

Real Estate and Housing Policy Team

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts on the current review of housing in NSW.

Due to circumstances in my early to mid-twenties I was not able to purchase a property for my family and me, and financial constraints since means that shy of winning a copious amount in a lottery, I never will. Early on I was blessed with having a good relationship between the landlords and real estate agents in the properties my then husband and I were renting.

In more recent years unfortunately my experiences have not been as favourable.

I regrettably agreed to move mid-lease from 1 property as the owners had to sell and was financially punished for helping them out. This experience taught me several valuable lessons; one being to make sure that I put the claim in for my bond before the landlord/leasing agent could, others were more of social/personal lessons in human nature.

The next property I moved my children and myself to was due to be a knockdown/rebuild for the owner and therefore was always going to be a closed period rental agreement. Unfortunately, this information was not disclosed by the leasing agent upon agreeing to the rental. Had I known earlier that this property would be a restricted period due to the costs associated with moving I would not have signed this lease and would have accepted another property I was successful for instead.

The next property the landlord decided to end our lease with 30 days' notice for no reason other than to allow his son and partner to move into the unit. This left me with another round of moving costs, new bond, removalists, time off work, the stress of locating another suitable family property in a very short period of time as well as the added stress of the actual move.

Based on my experiences I believe the following should be considered for implementation in the upcoming review.

The current system where applicants enter the amount of weekly rent they are willing to pay upon applying for a property should be scrapped. This is effectively a silent auction. Either auction the property off in an open forum or the advertised price is the only amount that is accepted. This is something that would need to be governed by an independent or government department.

Pre-applying for a rental should be illegal. The amount of personal and confidential information that needs to be provided to leasing agents/landlords prior to even looking at a property is disconcerting.

Once a property is listed as an investment property it must remain as an investment property until such time as the incumbent tenant chooses to move out. The landlord is free to sell the property however the buyer must be aware that the property must remain as a registered investment in the best interest of the current tenant. Obviously should there be lawful reasons for the eviction of the current tenant these would supersede other requirements. I believe this would help open the market to more buyers as investors would need to be committed to the purpose of the property.

Failing this, any rental that is intended for a definite closed period for any reason should need to be disclosed when advertised ensuring that applicants are aware that the property is only available for a short period. This will assist applicants in an educated decision and allow them to factor in additional moving costs (financial, physical, emotional, as well as leave that may need to be accrued in their employment) that will be required at the conclusion of the agreement.

Regardless of the end date of a lease, should a tenant be evicted for the landlords' personal reasons (ie: to sell, allow family/friends to lease, to occupy the property themselves) then the tenant should be given a greater allowance in time to be able to organise another property that is equivalent and suitable for their needs. 30 days does not allow enough time to find and organise a move and the tenant may end up with an unsuitable property. Minimum 90 days notice with an option to extend for the tenant if required, however the tenant can give final notice at any time within the landlord driven notice period.

The amount that a landlord can increase rent by should be restricted and set by a governing body. For example, rent can not be increased by more than 5% or no more than by \$20 a week with a renewal of a lease. Also evicting a tenant to allow a landlord to increase their rental income by a higher rate should be illegal.

Should a landlord evict for personal reasons then the property should not be allowed to be re-listed for rent for a minimum time frame.

As many people know housing is at a premium now. One way to combat this limited availability is to build more high-density housing. I have lived in a unit with my 3 young adult children, and I was fortunate that it was spacious, the square meterage would rival many houses in the area. When developers are putting in their applications and designs for a complex, greater attention should be given to the living & bedroom sizes. I believe that one reason people shy away from high density dwellings is that the living/bedroom sizes are not suitable for growing families. Like the requirement for low income housing to be available also having a number of units with similar square meterage as the existing houses may make this a more viable option, especially allowing for more 3 and 4 bedroom units to accommodate families.

An investigation into empty properties could be instigated (ie: overseas investment properties), as well as looking at the forced sale or development of effectively abandoned and dilapidated housing would increase options. A restriction in the availability of vacation housing I believe is also required as this is having a major impact in a number of areas in New South Wales.

As a renter there is the real and constant fear associated with the knowledge that my family and I could be displaced with little warning and we live never really feeling at home because of the real possibility that it won't be home any longer. The sheer costs involved in being forced to move time and again. There are the obvious financial costs (new bond/additional bond, removalists if used, using accrued leave from employment) however there is also the physical cost with moving as well as the emotional and mental cost. It is incredibly stressful not knowing from year to year if you need to make these arrangements, it is incredibly emotional finding yourself in a situation not of your choosing when forced to leave a property through no fault of your own. It is difficult for single parent households who generally are on an incredibly tight budget to compete in silent auctions for another property. It is difficult for families to keep their children within the same locale/schooling/extra-curricular activities when being forced to move. Living whilst knowing you have so little control over your living arrangements is a horrendous way to live.

I know that landlords are a necessary part of an economy and I also know some of them will do what they can in the best interest of their tenant. Unfortunately, these landlords are becoming few and far between in a society whose focus has become more self-serving over recent years.

I look forward to hearing more about the measures that you decide to implement, and I hope that my submission is given due consideration on how best to provide for all current and future residents of NSW. I can be contacted to discuss further if required.

Warm regards,

Ariana Hale