

Much social and economic harm is being caused to low and average income earners in the private rental market. There needs to be much stronger regulation of the real estate and property development industries to prevent this. It's not good enough for government departments and NGO's to keep merely paying lip-service to this problem, giving the public empty platitudes and token gestures. That's insulting to our intelligence. Governments need to do the right thing, and pass legislation that will protect ordinary, decent people from being predated upon by ruthless greed. Housing should not be a consumer product, or a way for the unscrupulous to build wealth at the expense of others. Decent and affordable housing is a basic human need.

I have recent personal experience in the rental market. I've been studying several rental markets in NSW for the past 12 months. Following are my experiences and observations.

- 1. Economic discrimination:** Most real estate agents will automatically reject rental applicants who receive income support payments. I was told personally by two different real estate agents in Sydney that people with jobs will always be favoured, with people on income support being disqualified at the outset in such a competitive market. This suggests we need more social housing because the private market economically discriminates against people who are unable to work or are on a pension. It prevents our most vulnerable and lowest income citizens from finding decent housing, and puts them in a situation where discrimination forces them to accept derelict or unsuitable housing conditions out of desperation. This article from a property finance blog openly brags that Australian cities are now “exclusively segregate[d] based on socio-economic spending power”. (<https://knowhowproperty.com.au/blog/how-to-use-property-demographic-data-in-investing>) That's alarming and unethical.

The use of online application software contributes to this discrimination and that needs to be addressed.

- 2. Ban all forms of rent bidding:** All forms of rent bidding need to be made illegal. It's not enough to merely ban “secret” rent bidding. That only allows real estate agents to continue to engage in the practice to drive up rents. We need harsh penalties and heavy fines for real estate agents and landlords who are reported as engaging in this behaviour.
- 3. Real estate agents are setting prices too high for profit. We need rent increase controls:** In my observations of rental markets over the past 12 months, I would say that rental

affordability is largely contingent on real estate agents setting prices too high to make profit. In one Sydney area I've been observing, the rental prices suddenly jumped up by at least \$100 per week from around September 2022. The prices have continued to rise in that area, and are now \$150 - \$200 per week more than previously – way more than CPI. I also witnessed several properties sit vacant at these inflated prices for many, many months. The real estate agents are not lowering prices to make them more affordable or to meet demand. So it would seem that interest rate hikes are not contributing to rental increases in all cases, if landlords are able to afford to leave properties vacant for long periods without needing the rental income to pay the mortgage. Therefore, profit and greed seem to be major contributing factors to lack of affordability.

In light of this, rental increases should be indexed against cost of living instead of market value. Rental increases should be regulated and capped, so they are not priced out of reach for fixed, low and average income earners.

4. **Government assistance payments:** When governments add stimulus like rent assistance increases, or home buyer grants, real estate agents automatically raise prices to absorb those increases, meaning that housing is not made more affordable for low and average income earners. If stimulus is used to assist people on low incomes, it needs to be done in conjunction with restricting rental price increases.
5. **The Federal government needs to reduce immigration:** Immigration is contributing to property price rises and needs to be drastically reduced. It creates a much more brutal and competitive market that is easily exploited for profit. There's mounting evidence that increasing GDP via immigration no longer achieves the intended result – the same as we've witnessed historically when other forms of economic management no longer delivered as intended, and value diminished over time. We should be looking at GDP per capita and adequate living standards for our own citizens, rather than allowing profits to flow to the already wealthy at the expense of the majority. We also need to stop foreign ownership of residential property, like other nations do.

This article demonstrates the majority of voters support a reduction to immigration:
<https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/resolve-survey-strongly-confirms-that-majority-of-australians-think-immigration-too-high/>

6. **Affordable housing is a rort for developers:** Affordable housing assists developers with increased density, but does little for affordability. If affordable housing initiatives are to be implemented, then the properties need to remain as affordable homes in perpetuity, not released back onto the private market after a set period of time. We need more social housing, rather than affordable housing. There also needs to be consideration given to the size and amenity of affordable and social housing so that it's fit to live in.
7. **Properties need to be fit to live in:** Many new properties being built to increase supply aren't fit to live in. High density housing like granny flats, apartments and studio apartments are often uncomfortably small, with no regard given to storage, parking, mental wellbeing, or a reasonable amount of living or green space. People on low incomes shouldn't be economically discriminated against in this way, and forced to live in cramped housing conditions, while more affluent people are able to live comfortably and enjoy more options and amenity. In addition to size, much of the rental stock being offered to low income citizens is dilapidated, unrennovated or unhygienic. People on low incomes shouldn't be forced to take sub-standard housing to increase the profits of the already wealthy, who show very little regard for the impact their behaviour has on those of lower economic status.
8. **People shouldn't be forced into communal living:** Australians should not be forced into communal living arrangements against their will simply to afford to have a place to live. This should not become the new normal. There are valid reasons why many people cannot live in shared living arrangements. It's a deprivation of the dignity, privacy and autonomy of lower income individuals to be forced into this situation, when the wealthy would not accept or avoid those living conditions themselves.
7. **Rent to buy, not build to rent:** There should be more programs to help people who want to own their own homes with rent to buy schemes. We shouldn't be allowing developers and corporations to have a monopoly on ownership. That's not a fair distribution of wealth. It's unconscionable and unacceptable to keep granting the already wealthy, and the banking industry, the capacity to enrich themselves via such a basic human need as having a decent place to live.
8. **Pets:** Changing the legislation to enable more tenants to keep pets is good for social health and wellbeing, but affordability is a much more urgent problem to address due to the stress it causes.

9. Portable bond scheme: The portable bond scheme is a really good idea, and will greatly reduce stress for lower and average income earners. However, it also needs to be implemented with measures to prevent rent affordability becoming out of reach.

10. Rental application information collection: It's also a good idea to have clear state or national legislation on what information real estate agents and landlords are allowed to collect from tenants in an application. There also needs to be a list of information they are not allowed to collect. Having these guidelines in place would greatly assist both tenants and landlords in knowing what is acceptable. Again, this policy should be introduced in conjunction with addressing affordability, since affordability is the most pressing issue for most renters.