

## Chairperson's report 2010–11

31 January 2012

As is my practice from the last couple of years I will cover the period from June 2010 to November 2011 so I do not cut my flow at July 2011. There have been some significant events between June and November worthy of recording before they are forgotten.

In July 2010 National Shelter was delivering projects within a funding agreement with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA): our first in 15 years. The Rudd government was nearing the end of its first term and the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, MP, was still Minister for Housing — how things change and what a long time ago it feels.

To say the past year has been eventful is an understatement. We have since completed our contract with FaHCSIA, delivering reports on the following:

- tenancy legislation with our partner, the National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO)
- the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)
- the tax treatment of housing
- marginal tenancy and policy implications
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) community housing organisations.

As well, we conducted two national roundtables on ATSI housing, four roundtables both national and some state-based, on the NAHA and a variety of other pieces of advice. All this within a budget of \$200,000 over two years — and whilst we missed most of the specified deadlines, we delivered the full program within an 18 month period.

Much of this was due to the contributions of Shelter NSW, NATO and Queensland Shelter who all took on projects. National Shelter has no staff and it should be noted that the operation we have conducted over the past two years is unlikely to be sustainable over the long term.

As well as this, the funding enabled me to undertake an extensive travel program and to represent National Shelter in various fora and conferences. This program was also supported by Queensland Shelter who sponsored my participation at the International Social Housing Summit (ISHSUM) in Den Hague last October and who covered expenses for much of my travel.

This has allowed me to travel both internationally and within Australia to speak at events like:

- the International Social Housing Summit
- the Homelessness Australia conference
- the Australian Council of Social Service conferences
- the Community Housing Federation of Australia conference
- the Tasmanian Affordable Housing Conference
- the NT Housing Conference
- the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute NAHA conference
- the Tax Forum and related events.

In addition, National Shelter has also been invited to join the new Ministerial Council on Social Housing and Housing Assistance, and is on the steering committee of the relaunched campaign, Australians for Affordable Housing.

There have been a number of highlights or notable changes in that period.

We welcome the Hon. Senator Mark Arbib as the Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness (he is also the Minister for Sport but we haven't seen any free tickets yet). Senator Arbib had a tough act following Tanya Plibersek — who was extremely well-regarded by the housing and homelessness sectors and who also oversaw the introduction of the new NAHA, the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and who is remembered for announcing the social housing component of the federal economic stimulus program.

Mark Arbib has impressed people with his ability to come to grips with the portfolio and for his support for further reform. It remains unfortunate that having brought housing together under Minister Plibersek, we have now seen it split between several portfolios with NRAS and the Housing Affordability Funding moving to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities under Minister Tony Burke.

Both Ministers are engaged and committed but structurally, National Shelter supports the idea of a single housing minister in Cabinet linked with urban and regional development.

Speaking internationally was a highlight for me and it helps to refresh one's sense of direction when it is reinforced by international comparison. Australia still has a very long way to go to have an acceptable affordable housing regime in place, but we are moving in a positive direction. Interestingly the conservative government of West Australia now has the most progressive overall affordable housing approach.

I was personally impressed by the conference put on by Shelter Tasmania which brought together a range of inter-state organisations and speakers to help Tasmania come to terms with the national reform agenda.

The other highlight for me was the recent Tax Forum which included significant support for reforming Australia's tax treatment of housing — something which is essential if we are to ensure we have adequate, affordable, well-located and accessible housing.

In closing I wish to acknowledge the ongoing support of my Queensland Shelter Board, the Queensland Government and my staff team for the national activity I undertake — and I reiterate that we always achieve the most profound outcomes for households at all levels through national reform and engagement.

I also wish to thank Mary Perkins and Toni Vine-Bromley for their support on the National Shelter Executive. Finally we have seen some significant changes at National Shelter over the past year and I pass on my best wishes to Gary Wilson, Bronwyn Kitching and Jeffrey Dalton who have moved on, and welcome Dr Alice Clark, Dr Shae Garwood and Leigh Watson to National Shelter.

*Adrian Pisarski*