



Annual Report 2016-2017



Chairperson's Report

Dr Alice Clark

The past year has been a very busy time for National Shelter and in particular, our Executive Officer, Adrian Pisarski. Adrian works in an environment where he attends to the operational policy and advocacy activities of National Shelter in addition to ensuring the organisation's continued existence in terms of financial sustainability. I must commend Adrian on his achievements in both areas. He has grown our associate membership base and continues to develop the excellent partnerships National Shelter has achieved through projects with industry partners, who have not traditionally partnered with a not for profit peak body. Not to mention the various submissions, media releases, meetings, projects, letters and workshops that have made up Adrian's working days.

The Federal Government predominantly talk about housing as a welfare issue, relegating policy and funding decisions to the Social Services portfolio and ministry and it is my view that this is not helpful to National Shelter's advocacy or the development of a National housing strategy that benefits all Australians, including people living on low incomes. A welfare perspective is limiting because it is only concerned with social housing and homelessness rather than looking at broader systems and constituents. This year, National Shelter has ensured that the conversation about housing for all Australians is part of policy discourse through the National Rental Affordability Index in partnership with SGS Economics and Community Sector Banking. Each year that the Index is updated and published it grows in its profile and momentum with an unprecedented amount of mainstream media coverage associated with the 2017 release. The interactive map has also developed to the extent that it will display various incomes and change the affordability indicator accordingly. I was visiting Sydney with Adrian for the release of the Index this year and I can attest to the demands of the media Adrian faced as illustrated in this photograph below, where on a short break, Adrian was both on television and sitting beneath the television!



The Unsettled report with Choice Australia and National Association of Tenant Organisations was successfully released in 2017 and also received widespread coverage in both mainstream and social media, attesting to the growing demographic of renters across Australia who are dissatisfied with the affordability of their rental housing. Through talking about housing affordability, National Shelter is able to address the interests a much larger group of Australians that includes private renters that we must leverage to help apply pressure on our politicians and political systems to bring about change.

A mainstream approach, that does not focus solely on welfare, also allows National Shelter to engage a diverse range of organisations and disciplines who are not concerned with homelessness and poverty, but who are nonetheless very interested in housing policy, politics and affordability issues including architects, planners, developers, builders, economists, academics and social impact investors. We are very much looking forward to an event to be held at Open State in South Australia in October this year to join with a panel of presenters to talk about these non-traditional partnerships and how they can shape our future cities. We can then tap into these alternative networks to increase the profile and advocacy of National Shelter and all of our members and State colleagues are welcome to attend.

A highlight of the last year was meeting with Federal Treasurer, Scott Morrison in Canberra in May, to put forward National Shelter's policy positions to him in person and also to hear more about his vision for housing policy in Australia. National Shelter will continue this high level engagement with the Treasurer and his advisors this year and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and State governments. We are hopeful that there will be real social housing targets for the States and Territories as well as Commonwealth and State investment.

I must thank our former Chairperson, Mary Perkins who left her role at Shelter New South Wales in June. Mary was an experienced and dependable chairperson who led the National Council and had a unique knowledge of the history of the Shelters in Australia and a very strong commitment to those people she calls "punters" - the people living on low incomes who simply need an affordable and safe place to call home and we shall miss Mary greatly. Mary has promised to keep in touch and as much a part of the National Shelter family as possible now that she is no longer at Shelter NSW.

We also thank Chantal Roberts who was formerly the National Shelter Secretary for her contributions to the National Shelter Council and the work of the Executive Committee. Also thank you to Travis Gilbert, our Treasurer, who has ably assisted with all of the Treasurer activities.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to acknowledge and thank Kate Cowmeadow, who has worked hard to make sure that National Shelter's profile is maintained through enews, website and social media and we are lucky that she has been able to spare that time given her current important role at SANDS.

Thank you to all of our National Council members and our associate members for your support, as well as our partner organisations and we look forward to an exciting year ahead, where we will continue to seek your assistance to ensure the work of National Shelter continues uninterrupted for the benefit of people living on low incomes across Australia.



Our members

State and Territory Shelter Members

- ACT Shelter
- Queensland Shelter
- Shelter New South Wales
- Shelter Northern Territory
- Shelter Tasmania
- Shelter Western Australia
- Shelter South Australia

National Members

- Jobs Australia
- CHIA
- National Council St Vincent du Paul Society
- National Association of Tenancy Organisations

Associate Members

- Unison Community Housing (Vic)
- Brisbane Housing Co (Qld)
- Bridge Housing Company (NSW)
- Compass Housing (NSW)
- Mission Australia National
- Uniting Communities SA
- Brotherhood of St Laurence (Vic)
- St George Community Housing (NSW)
- Foundation Housing Co (WA)
- Salvation Army National
- Southern Youth and Family Services (NSW)
- Link
- Junction (SA)

**Pensioners and
working parents have
been priced out of the
rental market in all
metropolitan areas
across Australia**





Executive Officer's Report

Adrian Pisarski

2016/17 was an active year for National Shelter and one we can all be proud to have contributed to. The Rental Affordability Index continues to grow in stature as a metric and the Unsettled report reached a greater audience than any other report National Shelter has published. This translated into a renewed engagement with the federal government highlighted by meetings with Treasurer Scott Morrison and Assistant Michael Sukkar.

We make a point of working every angle in the parliament we can and to that end we have met with Labor Shadow Senator Doug Cameron on a number of occasions and attended roundtables with the sector he has convened. We met with Greens spokesperson Senator Lee Rhiannon but also with Xenophon team members, Senator Jacqui Lambie and various members and senators from all parties and those unaligned.

We also built our membership base via associate memberships which also provide a broader consultative base in our policy development and advocacy efforts. The key to most of our increased profile and activity has been partnerships.

The Rental Affordability index is a partnership with SGS Economics and Planning and Community Sector Banking, The Unsettled report with NATO and CHOICE. Some of our advocacy has been done in partnership with ACOSS and has included a range of others (Mission Australia, Anglicare, Vinnies, Equal Rights Alliance) and our campaigning has been done with Homelessness Australia, ACOSS, CHIA and the thousands of supporters of the VOTEHOME campaign.

National Shelter continues to make a difference and the 2017/18 budget saw the collective effort of the housing and homelessness sector ensure the continuation of the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the permanent extension of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

Internally we remain a very small team on an extremely tight budget. As the Executive Officer I am reliant on the Executive and in particular the Chairperson for weekly contact and ongoing discussions about priorities and actions. Alice has been an enormous support for me over the past year and I thank her for her persistence, guidance and oversight without which maintaining the role would be difficult.

Kate Cowmeadow has been a casual staff member for the past two years and continues in this role helping manage the website, our regular bulletins to members and supporters and managing our media releases and without her role we would have a lower presence than we have maintained. We have had a stronger media year in 2016/17 than the previous year and were particularly prominent around the Unsettled report, the RAI and the federal budget. A steady stream in between but those have been our principal media opportunities.

We have also been prominent in government inquiries providing 4 submissions to the Productivity Commission into Human Service Reform. We also completed a Pre-Budget Submission and a submission on social impact investing.

We held a launch of the new Parliamentary Friends of Affordable Housing and Homelessness Group with Homelessness Australia which has grown significantly since its formation and establishes a group of MPs and Senators concerned about our issues.

I am also reliant on the work of State Shelters and our national members and increasingly on the support and inputs of associate members. National Shelter is a rich mix of States, national organisations, large and medium providers and individuals supporting a network of partnerships to advocate for affordable housing. You can find a list of our members and supporters in this annual report.

One work practice I have developed over the past few years is meeting with new and regular associate members when travelling interstate. I find the individual conversations extremely helpful in shaping our thinking about national policy. To that end, I have met over the past year with Jason Cubit from Horizon, Greg Budworth and Dave Adamson from Compass, John Nicolades from Bridge, Scott Langford from SGCH, David Cant from BHC, Andrew McNulty from Link, Narelle Clay from SYFS, Michael Perusco from Unison, Rob Hudson from BSL, Tony Keenan from Launch, Michael Lennon from Housing Choices, Maria Palumbo from Junction, Matthew Woodward from Unity and many others at conferences, national gatherings and meetings. We draw advice and support from all these sources which provides a fantastic background of information and perspectives.

We also meet with other peaks CHIA, Homelessness Australia, Powerhousing, ACOSS and national organisations like Anglicare, Vinnies and Salvos and all of this informs the National Council meetings to develop our views and campaigns. We are on the verge of a new policy priorities statement which is shaped by state shelters, national members and all the contacts we have with the sector and beyond.

I am hopeful that while our budgets get tighter our base of support grows and we will hopefully maintain and extend our activity over the coming years.



Treasurer's Report

Travis Gilbert

As National Shelter members will be aware, the organisation has faced difficult times financially since the Grinch stole Christmas from housing and homelessness advocacy bodies in 2014.

Before I table the key extract from the Auditor's Letter I want to thank our Executive Officer and Chairperson for the significant work they have undertaken to attain financial contributions for National Shelter in the years following the withdrawal of public funding by the Federal Government. This has included amending our Constitution and membership structure and securing important project funding to continue our work.

The 2016/17 financial year was particularly tight for us and the Association has now reached 'situation critical' in terms of our fiscal position as the Financials clearly illustrate.

Turning now to the Audited Financial Statements for the 2016/17 Financial Year. The following excerpt from the Auditor's letter seems like an appropriate place to start:

"...No major errors or omissions were discovered during the course of the audit. There are a number of Debtors in excess of two years. Please review these amounts and take appropriate action... You would be aware that you are technically insolvent at 30 June 2017 with insufficient current assets to cover current liabilities. It is an offence to continue trading while insolvent, hence I recommend you take appropriate budgetary action to resolve this issue..."

The Auditor notes that in terms of Accrual Accounting, the association had insufficient cash on hand and assets to meet our liabilities at 30 June 2017. Members will note this was a risk flagged at the March National Council meeting which we sought to address by seeking payment of membership fees for the 2017/18 Financial Year in June.

National Shelter had \$78,224 in the bank at 30 June. Essentially, if we had to refund all the membership money in advance we could pay leave entitlements and superannuation but none of the creditors.

With other expenditure since 30 June (including \$13,750 to SGS Economics for the National Rental Affordability Index) and if money in advance had to be repaid we would no longer have sufficient funds to pay leave entitlements. If National Shelter secures agreement to retain fees for the 2017/18 financial year from our members, we can pay creditors, leave entitlements, superannuation etc and still have between \$30,000 and \$34,000 cash on hand.

While the situation is dire, the Chairperson and myself have sought advice from our Auditor and learned colleagues in finance. To this end we are setting in train a process with the aim of complying with the Auditor's directive and taking 'appropriate budgetary action' to resolve our parlous fiscal circumstance.

This process will be tabled with the Financial Reports and accompanying resolutions at our National Council Meeting on 18 August.

I wish to thank both our Executive Officer and our Chairperson for their assistance, patience and support as I settled into my first Treasury role.

Given the situation in which we now find ourselves, it is imperative that we seek to diversify and increase revenue to support the Association's work. It is now incumbent upon all of us to step up our efforts to seek funding for the Association going forward.

I table the Financial Reports for the 2016/17 Financial Year and seek the support of National Council Members to implement appropriate steps to remedy the Auditor's finding.

Highlights

Millions engage with #RentInOz

National Shelter partnered with CHOICE and the National Association of Tenants' Organisations to call for governments to prioritise rental security and quality issues, alongside housing affordability, as a national study reveals widespread fear and discrimination faced by thousands of Australians.

The #RentInOz Report was released on 16 February 2017 and literally millions of people engaged with the story via Twitter, news sites, and broadcast media stories. The hashtag #RentInOz trended on Twitter. With one third of Australian households renting (up from 25% a decade ago) rental affordability, accessibility and quality are growing concerns.

"Governments across Australia are rightly focused on the issue of housing affordability. Affordability is extremely important to renters, but it can't be addressed without also looking at the quality and security of housing," said Adrian Pisarski, National Shelter's Executive Officer.

"It's hard to imagine a product or service this poor in any other sector. As consumers of rental properties, tenants have to deal with major quality issues like mould or flooding and are systematically denied access to a timely remedy," said Alan Kirkland, CHOICE CEO.

"Worryingly, we found that renters with more experience in the market were less likely to complain when something goes wrong which illustrates the entrenched culture of fear among renters. This is all the more of a concern when you consider the rising number of long-term renters across Australia," said Ned Cutcher, National Association of Tenants' Organisations spokesperson.

Key findings included:

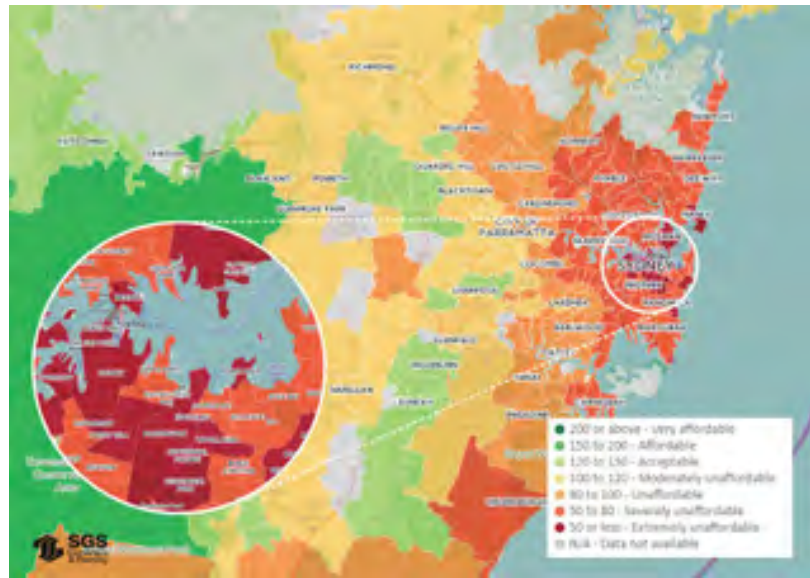
- 83% of renters in Australia have no fixed-term lease or are on a lease less than 12 months long
- 62% of people say they feel like they can't ask for changes
- 50% of renters report experiencing discrimination when applying for a rental property
- 50% of renters worried about being listed on a residential tenancy database
- 20% renters experiencing leaking, flooding and issues with mould
- 8% of renters are living in a property in need of urgent repairs



Rental Affordability Index

National Shelter, Community Sector Banking and SGS Economics and Planning have released the Rental Affordability Index (RAI) on a biannual basis since 2015 as an indicator of rental affordability relative to household incomes.

The Index is becoming a key tool to illustrate patterns of rental affordability and stress, and extensive media coverage has helped to raise the profile of private renters as a group very vulnerable to housing price pressures.



Media releases

- Housing needs greater focus and capacity in Ministry
 - Launching *A Place to Call Home* a housing issues paper for people with disabilities
 - Morrison approach simplistic and ignores role of Commonwealth
 - Welfare chief warns Ministers of looming spike in homelessness
 - November 2016 release of the Rental Affordability Index
 - Commonwealth leadership and fairness test keys to improving housing system
 - Save NPAH media release
 - NAHA is critical
 - Aussie renters facing insecurity, poor quality housing and discrimination
 - Government must not squander reform potential for housing
 - National Shelter welcomes ALP statement on affordable housing
 - Pre Budget release
 - A shandy Budget, refreshing but not completely satisfying
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Submissions

- Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the future of Human Services - mark 1
- Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the future of Human Services - mark 2
- Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the future of Human Services - mark 3
- Pre-Budget Submission
- Submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the future of Human Services - mark 4

Key events and meetings

- National Congress of First Peoples' Round table to establish a peak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island housing
- Pre and post Budget round tables with Treasurer Morrison and Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar
- Round table with Opposition Spokesperson for Housing Senator Doug Cameron
- Engagement with Greens regarding housing policy

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