



BENDIGO ANIMAL WELFARE & COMMUNITY SERVICES

caring with compassion

9 February 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission regarding the review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. As an animal welfare organisation, we particularly wish to address Questions 1 *“Under what circumstances do tenants encounter unfair treatment or unlawful discrimination”* and Question 21 *“What is the right balance between the interests of tenants and landlords in respect of pets in rented premises”* in the Issues Paper.

Bendigo Animal Welfare & Community Services Incorporated (BAWCS) was founded in 2003 and we operate Central Victoria’s only ‘No Kill’ Animal Shelter. As a private shelter, we take in surrendered animals from pet owners who for a variety of reasons are no longer able to keep their pet/s.

One of the main reasons we are contacted for surrender is people are moving house and are unable to find a pet friendly rental property.

As a small shelter, we are limited by how many of these pets we can take in and we are forced to turn away more than we can accommodate.

There are not a lot of options left for these pet owners and these pets can end up at the local Pound, already under pressure with strays coming in, with their future very uncertain.

The trauma this can cause to both pet owner and pet is great as there is often a strong emotional bond between them. Moving house can be a stressful event in itself without adding the loss of a pet/s to the equation.

The positive effects of pets in people’s lives is well known, including supporting physical and mental wellbeing. Surrendering a pet due to no pet friendly accommodation available is a heartbreaking decision that shouldn’t have to be made.

Question 1.

Changing the current Act to ensure landlords are not able to discriminate against pet owners renting their properties would assist with keeping pet owners and pets together. The assumption of many landlords is that pets will automatically damage a property is ill founded and unfair.

Tenants should have the option to prove to the landlord that they will be a good and responsible tenant.

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Question 21.

Of course landlords would need to have protection in place to ensure their tenants realised and respected the allowance of pet/s.

Some suggestions:

1. A pet bond. The bond would ensure that any damage that may be caused by the pet would be covered.
2. A pet resume. The tenant would provide details of the pet. Knowing what the pet is makes is more of an individual and not just 'a dog' or 'a cat'. Veterinary history included so the landlord knows the tenant takes good care of the pet.
3. The landlord agrees to a trial period of tenancy first.
4. The tenant agrees to remove all traces of the pet/s presence when they vacate.

These suggestions have both the tenants and landlords best interests in mind and would be simple to implement.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission for the Review.

Yours sincerely



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President

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