

The Andrews Labor Government was re-elected in 2018 on a platform that strongly supported the rights of renters and recognised the growing divide between property-owners and renters. There is a groundswell of people who are on the receiving end of policies and patterns of growth which disempower and disadvantage a large, and growing class of citizens. These people were drawn to the Andrew's Labor Government's vision of equity supported by sophisticated approaches to what are complex economic challenges.

Renters are more likely to experience a range of hardships related to their financial capacity: with diminished health outcomes, and impeded access to a range of services, privileges and rights. Access to these things are hindered as a result simply of their status as non-property-owners.

I have spent approximately fourteen years of my life in rental properties and have experienced rental and mortgage stress for a significant part of my life. I am also a trained energy efficiency assessor with a high degree of energy-literacy.

With this knowledge and experience I write in submission to the development of the Residential Tenancies Act Guidelines to say that the proposed standards are not sufficient to do much - other than ensure that heating is installed in houses which currently don't have fixed heating. It is lacking in terms of equity, health and climate change mitigation outcomes.

I have lived in bedrooms where oil heaters or radiant heaters needed to be on constantly to ensure that the room was simply bearable, where dodgy combustion heaters would fill the room with smoke and carbon monoxide on windy nights. Where my limited income (working as a student, or at times up to five jobs at one time) would disappear - under ill-fitting doors, through poorly glazed windows and completely un-insulated roof spaces.

I was a healthy young man. For those of us who are older, who have physical-conditions and diseases, or are otherwise vulnerable - for them, what was an inconvenient discomfort for me, can be life-threatening. While I traded off discretionary items - holidays, technology or clothes - for comfort, - others traded food, uniforms, or education simply to survive.

It is with this perspective that I submit that the proposed regulations simply do not address the significant issue of the efficiency of the built housing stock in the state of Victoria. Chiefly the building shell itself. While the proposed standards are welcome they really only scratch the surface of the issue and would do little to significantly change the lived experience of renters in the State.

Nor do the standards address the pressing climate emergency at hand, ignoring the urgent need to mobilise the untapped and massive potential for building improvement as not just a tool for the mitigation of climate change, but as a process that engenders sustainable economic development at the same time.

As such I propose some simple but powerful changes to the guidelines proposed:

- 1) That disclosure of the energy performance of rental properties be disclosed at the time of advertisement of the property for rent - preferably using the State Government's own VRES scorecard assessment tool**
- 2) That a standard of three-stars minimum performance be set for fixed heating.**

I support the 2-star standard for hot-water heating, but believe that ultimately, from a climate change perspective, **houses should be encouraged to install heat-pump hot water systems**. This takes into account the massive greenhouse effect of fugitive methane emissions incurred in the extraction of all kinds of fossil gas reserves. This should be recognised as an indirect influence driving

inequity as we enter a radically changing climate of increasingly intense heat waves and sudden cold snaps. In the near future hot water heat pumps are also projected to be a cheaper method than gas for the heating of water.

I view these proposals to be reasonable and incremental with minimal impost on landlords and residents.

In future, regulatory impacts should include the multiplier effect to the economy of increasing activity in the energy efficiency market place. Some years ago I attended the World Sustainable Energy Days in Linz, Austria. The difference in industry attitude to energy efficiency was marked. Tradespeople and companies viewed design of increasing standards as a collaborative effort with government, taking a perspective of five-ten years into the future. Over there, increasing standards represented untapped potential for greater economic activity.

By setting in train mandatory disclosure of building performance (preferably using a transparent, fair and accountable framework like the Victorian Residential Energy Scorecard - VRES), the Guidelines could provide a clear line of sight on future policy and regulatory trajectories to develop new business models, supporting increased economic activity and safer, fairer housing over the coming years. VRES has a number of advantages including impartiality, a focus on building shell (rather than non-fixed appliance and behavioural elements), and a growing publicly available data-set which will provide increasingly reliable capacity to account for the costs and benefits of energy efficiency interventions. This latter element will, over time, allow for more sophisticated business models to be developed focussing on energy efficiency as a value proposition to consumers and residents.

The data-set developed by VRES will also be able to inform evidence based enquiry around the broader impacts of action on these matters. For instance such a credible dataset can inform policy stances that weigh up the costs and benefits of building improvements not just to the cost of rentals and improvements, but in reduced energy bills, reduced doctors visits, reduced hospital bills and alleviation of grid constraints in the energy system. Without this credible, publicly held data-set many of these matters will remain areas of conjecture rather than credible evidence.

I hope that these proposals are read as sensible, moderate proposals to set the people and economy of Victoria up to win in the context of uncertain times - with economic demographics stridently different (and becoming more so) to that experienced by Victorians over more than a century and half since colonial settlement, and with the impacts of climate change increasingly upsetting our relaxed and comfortable existence.