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Review of Residential Tenancies Act  
Consumer Affairs Victoria  
GPO Box 123  
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Dear Consumer Affairs Victoria

## **SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO RTA REVIEW OPTIONS DISCUSSION PAPER**

The Moreland Housing Advisory Committee (MAHC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the options paper published in January 2017. MHAC is made up of community members, councillors and Council officers and provides timely advice to Council about affordable and appropriate housing in the municipality. It is the principal consultative body advising Council about its housing agenda. At its meeting on 2 February the MHAC recommended providing a brief submission to the Review and highlighting some specific options which include recommendations that align with existing Council policies.

### **Renting in Moreland**

Council recognises that access to safe and secure housing is a basic human right. Housing is the foundation of health, education and life progress for members of our community. The proportion of private renters compared to homeowners is growing, with a strong trend towards long term or lifetime private rental tenure. Many high-income professionals are attracted to rent and buy in Moreland due to the proximity to the CBD, good public transport links and a rich cultural environment. However, the market effect of more affluent residents is fewer affordable and secure private rentals for those earning below-average incomes. In 2005, 25% of private rentals were affordable for a couple on a Centrelink income. Today, it is less than 3%. The supply of rooming houses and other low rent accommodation like share houses is being impacted by increased area property values.

### **Policy settings**

The Moreland Council Plan 2013-2017 includes a strategy:

*"... to support the improvement of affordable housing options to accommodate the diverse Moreland community. "*

#### **Moreland Language Link**

廣東話	9280 1910	हिंदी	9280 1918
Italiano	9280 1911	普通话	9280 0750
Ελληνικά	9280 1912	ਪੰਜਾਬੀ	9280 0751
عربي	9280 1913		
Türkçe	9280 1914	All other languages	
Tiếng Việt	9280 1915	9280 1919	

This paper is 100% recycled

The Moreland Affordable Housing Strategy 2014-18 has a clear focus on addressing local housing stress, especially for those households who fall within the lowest 40% of income distribution. The Moreland Planning Scheme, within its Municipal Strategic Statement, broadly defines housing affordability in a way that is relevant to the conditions of the private rental market:

*Housing affordability refers to purchase price, rental price and ongoing living costs (utilities, transport) associated with the design and location of housing. Genuine efforts to deliver housing affordability on all three fronts will be strongly supported by Council.*

## **Comments on specific options**

### **Preventing Discrimination**

The experience is discrimination is unfortunately common for many Moreland residents, including Indigenous Australians, those newly arrived in Australia and people with disability. Guided by the Moreland Human Rights Policy 2016-26 aim to advance inclusion and social cohesion in the community and in response to questions 13 & 14, we support the recommendation that every tenancy application form would be required to include a prescribed information statement that educates applicants and landlords/agents about unlawful discrimination and the positive duty under the EOA to take measures to prevent discrimination from occurring. We further support awareness of landlord and tenant rights and obligations around unlawful discrimination being fostered through ongoing education or communication initiatives. Clarity on links between the RTA and the prohibitions in the EOA should also be introduced.

### **Tenancy**

The MHAC welcomes changes (options 3.2 & 3.3) that would address the imbalance of power between landlords and residents regarding the renewal and extension of lease agreements. This supports also better community outcomes, in particular with minimizing the disruption caused by moving or the fear of moving amongst families with younger children living and older residents on fixed incomes who cannot afford to purchase a home.

In response to question 58, the special circumstances where the tenant is not required to pay lease break fees outlined in option 6.5 are appropriate in acknowledging the particular circumstances of vulnerability of tenants.

### **Energy Efficiency & Sustainability**

The MHAC welcomes the development DELWP's Energy Efficiency and Productivity Strategy and would support in principle the future introduction of a minimum energy efficiency standard for rental properties (option 8.13A). Noting that the paper provides possible examples (low flow showerheads, energy efficient lighting, draught proofing, insulation, energy efficient heating), a particular focus on measures that support cooling of properties during increasingly prevalent heatwave conditions aligns with actions outlined in Moreland's Urban Heat Island Action Plan as well as the aims of the Moreland Zero Carbon Evolution Strategy.

With regard to modifications of properties, the MHAC notes there is little in the options presented regarding improving energy efficiency and reducing the costs of living at the property for tenants. The findings of Fairer Safer Housing research which has informed the Review puts doubt on the perceived lack of incentive for landlords to improve properties. Notably, the research found that a third of landlords currently did not have energy efficient heating or hot water systems in any of their properties and this grew to half that did not

have energy efficient cooling. Tenants were asked to consider a scenario in which they could pay higher rent for a property with energy efficient features (insulation, draught proofing, heating, cooling) or choose a comparable property without these extra features, at a lower rent amount. Two in three tenants (64%) said they would be willing to pay more for an energy efficient property. This points to a recognition by private renters that a more fuel efficient home will be cheaper to run.

Thank you for considering the input from the Committee. If further information is required please contact Mike Collins, Coordinator Social Planning, Housing and Community Wellbeing on [mcollins@moreland.vic.gov.au](mailto:mcollins@moreland.vic.gov.au) or 9240 2484.

Yours sincerely



Barry Hahn  
**MANAGER**  
**SOCIAL POLICY AND EARLY YEARS**  
10/2 2017

