



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

25<sup>th</sup> August 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

**RE: Review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997; Response to Consultation Paper**

The vision of Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) is that Aboriginal Victorians secure appropriate, affordable housing as a pathway to better lives and stronger communities. AHV encourages long term tenancies and invests in housing for our tenants.

Currently the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 does not enable or encourage a rental market that provides fairer, safer housing for all Victorians. Within the current system there is little regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and well being. An emphasis should be placed on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) away from VCAT, using independent mediation such as Disputes Settlement Centres. The ADR process has proven to be a much speedier and effective.

It is the belief of AHV that a Koori Tribunal, administered by VCAT needs to be established. The current VCAT system is intimidating for the majority of AHV's tenants. The process is often deemed by our tenants as far too onerous and formal. From a landlords stand point, the current legal processes are tedious and it is extremely hard to remove those who damage properties and do not pay rent.

An independent mediation system, which has a deep understanding of culture and heritage, would allow both landlords and tenants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait decent to effectively access services and promptly resolve disputes. A Koori Tribunal would be a more accessible format for inquiries to be conducted, for orders to be made and reviewed and for appeals to be heard. The process would also be a supportive environment that would provide tenants with a greater understanding of the legal system.

A Koori Tribunal would create greater respect for both landlords and tenants and encourage self determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. We appreciate your consideration of this matter and look forward to ongoing discussions regarding the review.

Yours Sincerely,

Jenny Samms

CEO