

03/05/2016

PETCARE PLACE
WODONGA, VIC 3690
PO BOX 153, WODONGA, VIC 3689
T+61 2 6055 5200
F+61 2 6055 5347

Dear Sir/Madam,

This submission has been prepared by Mars Petcare Australia in regards to the 2015 Residential Tenancy Act Review. Mars Petcare Australia has been in the business of petcare in Australia since 1966, and are currently Australia's largest manufacturer of petcare products. We believe passionately in the positive, community enhancing power of pets and our mission is to create a better world for pets everywhere.

Our submission focuses on the needs of pet owners in the Victorian rental market, concentrating on question 21 from the issues paper; "What is the right balance between the interests of tenants and landlords in respect of pets in rented premises? What reforms, if any, are required to current arrangements?"

Nearly 5 million of Australia's 7.6 million households have pets, one of the highest rates in the world. With around one-third of Australians renting, this means huge demand for pet-friendly accommodation. However, a recent REIA survey of landlords found that more than 65% would not allow pets or were unsure if they ever would¹. The fallout of this means many tenanted pet owners are either being forced to surrender their pets to animal shelters, or to breach current rental laws by not disclosing their pets when applying for a rental property.

For landlords, there is no official way to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible pet owners. There is uncertainty in the Act regarding pets in rented premises and many agents insert standard 'no pets' clauses to their tenancy agreements. Regardless of the legality of these clauses, such a ban is counterproductive. The lack of supporting regulations for pets in rental accommodation makes it difficult for landlords to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible pet owners, necessitating a blanket ban. We believe that clarifications allowing for pets in rental accommodation would be highly beneficial for landlords, tenants and communities.

Pets are proven to provide a myriad of pleasures for their owners and improve physical and psychological health², this is especially true for elderly owners and those with disabilities; groups who can often feel isolated in the community. The distress caused by having to surrender a pet due to the unavailability of pet friendly rental properties is extreme, often likened to losing a member of the family. Furthermore, communities are formed around dog parks and shared activities for pet owners, building positive reputations for those areas with positive pet policies, improving the standard of living and therefore desirability of properties in the area.

¹ <http://www.domain.com.au/advice/pet-friendly-rental-properties-are-a-good-investment/>

² <https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2009/february/feature1.htm>

Benefits for landlords are not limited to vicarious pet enjoyment. Pet friendly properties have lower levels of tenant turnover and have a broader pool of tenants, reducing time and money spent on advertising and decreasing the number of days' properties are vacant. A pet friendly property will also have increased demand from potential tenants, allowing landlords to increase weekly rent³.

Evidence shows that responsible pet owners make great tenants; often taking longer leases once they have found a pet-friendly landlord so their pets are less disrupted by frequent moves, willing to pay higher levels of rent or a 'pet bond' for a pet-friendly property⁴, and are home-centred people who have to think about care for another being on a daily basis, translating into an appreciation of their surrounding neighbours and their landlord.

We at Mars Petcare Australia believe that a few, simple changes to the existing Act could help landlords to allow for pets in their properties, while being protected from any pet related concerns. Our recommendations to support landlords and tenants are;

To assuage concerns around possible costs:

- a. Pet bonds in addition to the normal bond payment.
- b. Require tenants disclose if they have not had pet bond returned from previous rental accommodation.
- c. Landlords to require proof of dogs having passed puppy training.

To improve quality of life for tenants and pets:

- d. Landlords unable to refuse or evict tenants on the basis of owning a pet unless they can prove that the pet is causing a nuisance, damaging the property or endangering the safety of neighbours.
- e. Agents to note pet friendly additions to properties.
- f. Landlords cannot issue 'no notice' evictions.

These changes would improve quality of life for pets and pet owners, as well as improve the attractiveness of having pet owning tenants for landlords.

Sincerely,



Lisa Maguire
Director Corporate Affairs - MARS PETCARE

³ <http://www.firepaw.org/CompanionAnimalRentersPetFriendly.pdf>

⁴ https://www.reiv.com.au/news/library/news-policy/reiv-rents,-bonds-and-other-charges-submission_6-a.aspx