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Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee,

My name is Linda Snart, and I have been a private residential landlord in Far North Queensland since 2008 and employed as a residential Property Manager since 2018. I am a member of Real Estate Excellence and the Property Owners Association Queensland.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission in relation to the Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

This submission is made in conjunction with my attached response to the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (Tenants' Rights) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

I would like to comment on the key new points of the legislation as it is proposed:

Lessor's agent may arrange for emergency repairs to be made.

The proposed new section 219A is of great concern and appears to be in direct conflict of the *Agents Financial Administration Act* (AFA). Section 21 and 22 of the AFA Act states monies from the trust account (and the lessor's ledger), cannot be drawn unless there is written consent from the lessor/client, with section 21 of the Property Occupations regulations stating the agent must act in accordance with a client's instructions (unless it is unlawful to do so). The proposed section 219A contradicts this. The Committee would be aware that the Office of Fair Trading regulate Property Agents and Property Managers via the *Property Occupations Act* and the *Agents Financial Administration Act*.

Clause 49 inserts new section 219A Lessor's agent may arrange for emergency repairs to be made to introduce a new power for agents of lessors to arrange emergency repairs to be carried out under residential tenancy agreements. Under subsection 219A(1), the lessor's agent may arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out emergency repairs to the premises or inclusions if the repairs are not likely to cost more than the emergency repair limit for the residential tenancy agreement. The emergency repair limit for a residential tenancy agreement is an amount equal to 4 weeks rent payable under the agreement. Subsection 219A(2) provides that if the lessor's agent acts as allowed under the section and pays for the emergency repairs, the agent may make deductions from rent payments received from the tenant, up to the cost of the repairs, before disbursement of the payments to the lessor's account. The lessor's agent must inform the lessor of the action as soon as practicable after taking it.

Disclosing particular information

In relation to Clause 32 from the Explanatory notes states the following.

insert a new section 57A Offer of residential tenancy must disclose particular information. New subsection 57A(1) states that a lessor or agent must not advertise or offer a residential tenancy unless the information prescribed by regulation is stated or disclosed in the advertisement or offer. A maximum penalty of 20 penalty units applies. New subsection 57A(2) clarifies that a lessor or agent

must not accept a rental bond from a tenant of a premises if the residential tenancy for the premises was advertised or otherwise offered in contravention of subsection 57A(1). This is for consistency with existing section 57 requirements. A maximum penalty of 20 penalty units applies. New subsection 57A(3) provides that section 57A does not apply to a person merely placing a sign on or near premises advertising that the premises are available for residential tenancy”.

There is no draft regulation available in the Housing Bill to comment on what the regulations proposed are to comment or provide feedback.

Orders of tribunal about carrying out emergency repairs.

Proposed new subsection 221 as noted from page 43 Explanatory notes is open for dispute due to the use of reasonable time frame. Reasonable time frame for both routine and emergency repairs needs to be defined to ensure all parties understand the time frames – with allowance made for shortages of tradespeople and materials. Given this new proposed provision is subject to an application to tribunal for repair order, it is critical parties know the meaning to alleviate dispute and possible applications.

New subsection 221(1) provides that the tenant, or a representative entity, may apply to the tribunal for a repair order if the premises or inclusions need repair and: • for routine repairs, the tenant has informed the lessor or agent of the need for repairs (in line with requirements under section 217, and the repair was not done within a reasonable time after the lessor or agent was informed of the need for repair by the tenant. • for emergency repairs, the tenant has been unable to notify the lessor or nominated repairer of the need for the repair or the repair was not made within a reasonable time after the tenant had given notice to the lessor or nominated repairer of the need for repair.

Support tenants and residents to enforce their existing rights by removing the ability for lessors and providers to end tenancies without grounds.

As provided in the Tenant Rights Bill submission, the removal of without grounds is fraught with concerning outcomes. Refer to separate submission provided today to the committee and or [RTRA Act review - Queensland tenancy law reform \(realestateexcellence.com.au\)](https://www.realestateexcellence.com.au)

With the proposed introduction of two months’ notice for end of fixed term contract, and the removal of without grounds for lessors, an unintended consequence may be if a tenant is offered a new fixed term agreement contract, prior to an existing fixed term contract ending (as is best practice today), and the tenant fails to enter into a new contract, a notice to leave for this provision may be given due to the lessor risk management and lessor insurance coverage as mentioned in the Tenants’ rights Bill mentioned above. Part of the previous submission noted below.

“Real Estate Excellence provided several submissions during the RTRA Act review in 2018 (an extract supplied further down this submission). The Government need to consider another approach regarding the ending of tenancies.

An unintended consequence which appears to not have been considered is Landlord insurance and risk. Most landlord insurance policies provide no, or limited coverage for periodic tenancies. Common practice of industry since the notice to leave without grounds provision was increased to two months in 2009 is for lessors to be contacted by their agents around 2.5 to 3 months prior to a fixed term agreement contract expiring. The only reason this best practice procedure occurs is in the event the lessor wishes for the tenancy contract to end at the end of the fixed term agreement, and the two months’ notice can be provided to the tenant.

The Regulatory Impact Statement (part of the 2018/2019 review) notes Queensland has some of the highest fixed term tenancy contracts in Australia. The reason this would long be the case is due to security of all parties, best practice and particularly, landlord insurance. If a tenant is offered a new agreement contract (lease renewal), and refuses to enter into a lease renewal, the tenancy reverts to a periodic. This leaves the investor in a serious position of risk due to reasons noted above; most lessor insurance policies provide limited and no coverage in the event of loss if a tenancy contract is periodic. Due to insurance and management of risk and security, tenants may be given a notice to leave without grounds if they do not wish to enter into a new tenancy agreement (lease renewal).

Most tenants are good people, as are most investor lessors and agents. Bad things happen to good people meaning if the tenant does not want to enter into a lease renewal agreement, as they want the flexibility of a periodic lease, and the lessor does not have a proposed prescribed reason to end the tenancy, the investor is left in a dangerous position if the tenant situation and life changes. Examples include addiction, job losses, relationship dispute as opposed to violence and more. In the event the good tenancy 'goes bad', and the lease is periodic, there is great risk of loss to the investor".

The solution is to keep the status quo and afford both parties the right to end a tenancy contract at any time by giving the appropriate notice without grounds. This is a balanced approach with my previous submission suggesting penalty unit provisions for lessors if they breach section 291 (the current provision for notice to leave without grounds).

Alternatively, regulate that a "Notice to Leave with grounds that a fixed term tenancy is due to expire" will be issued if a tenant invited to renew the lease fails to respond to the offer in a timely fashion. It can be withdrawn if the tenant then later accepts the offer and the lessor agrees, with advertising costs to be met by the tenant.

The proposed amendments are silent on a ground to end a tenancy that is periodic (other than using a new proposed ground and or tribunal application). Given there is no longer the ability for parties to contract between themselves, there it would seem there is no longer a need for anything but a Fixed term lease, granting both parties the same security the community is said to want.

Provide an expanded suite of additional approved reasons for lessors/providers and tenants/residents to end a tenancy.

The additional provisions for tenants to end tenancies demonstrates an unbalance that will be created in the Act. The tenant retains the right to provide two weeks' notice without grounds, whilst the lessor has that right removed. Believe that a tenant ought to be required to provide the same 14 days notice to leave for failure to remedy a breach, not the 7 days mandated.

The proposed ground for tenants to end a tenancy because the property is not in good repair is broad and open for dispute and or potential abuse. Good repair should be defined so that all parties understand the meaning of good repair and to minimise and or alleviate dispute.

The new proposed ground for tenants to end the tenancy if the property does not comply with minimum housing standards is at similar risk as mentioned above for good repair.

Ensure all Queensland rental properties are safe, secure, and functional by prescribing minimum housing standards and introducing compliance mechanisms to strengthen the ability to enforce these standards.

Real Estate Excellence supports properties being safe and fit to live in as per the current long standing provisions of section 185.

The proposal for the entry condition report to be returned by the tenant from 3 day (current law) to an increase of 7 days is a concern. The concern is centred around possible increased dispute regarding the condition of the property upon possession and the time frame for return. A lot can happen in seven days by way of accidental damage whilst moving in, and or cleaning. For example, a storm may come through and wet all the windows making them appear 'not clean', and or a dust storm passes through, and dust is throughout the property during this extended time. Time is of the essence and is critical in all contract situations. The extended time has potential to create dispute. A different approach is to increase advice on the approved Form 1a regarding the intent, further guidance to the tenant, the importance, and timelines. This includes the importance of agreeing or disagreeing should be added to the approved form to assist all parties to self resolve any matters.

Proposed Schedule 5A (regulations) 1. states good repair. What does good repair mean? Whilst good repair has formed part of current section 185 for many years, the repeat of good repair in the regulation as part of the Minimum Housing Standards is an opportunity to define it, and or not have it. As the committee would appreciate, good repair means different things to different people. Weatherproof and structurally sound are reasonable. Who will determine good repair and the meaning? This is open widely to possible dispute and differing views and should be addressed before implementation. Good repair has also been mentioned in my submission above in the **provide an expanded suite of additional approved reasons for lessors/providers and tenants/residents to end a tenancy.**

We have a pensioner, in his own words, an old bushy who is very happy in his home of more than 20 years. No rent increase since 2011. Repairs immediately attended to. Whilst we have wanted to improve the bathroom, our tenant wants things to remain as they are and be able to live out his days. The arrangement suits both parties to the lease. Minimum Standards may well force a change that neither party to this tenancy wants nor needs

Strengthen rental law protections for people experiencing domestic and family violence.

I generally support these mechanisms to assist victims suffering domestic and family violence, on the basis that evidence is provided.

Sadly, have had a situation in which Domestic Violence was alleged, but neither Child Safety nor the local Community Centre were prepared to put anything in writing, citing Privacy and scared of retribution for their own staff. Instead, my personal safety was put at risk and resulted in a QCAT hearing to remove one party from the lease, with the Community Centre turning on our agency for adhering to the RTRA. The Lessor bore the stress and financial loss of rent for 6 weeks as the house was abandoned.

I advocate that Property Managers and Lessors need to be afforded the same professional courtesy by Government Departments and NGOs in these often fraught situations. Not dismissed or derided.

Notice to leave for serious breach.

Clause 57 amends current section 290A is encouraged to include general tenancies and not just public or community housing. Whilst clause 61 insertion of new section 297B which allows for application for termination for because of serious breach under a residential tenancy agreement is welcomed, the committee is urged to consider the obvious benefit to have this provision included in a new ground for notice to leave to expedite such serious matters.

This needs to include disturbing the quiet enjoyment of neighbours, having had the unpleasant experience of tenants violently threatening neighbours and myself as the property manager. Objectionable behaviour currently requires a QCAT order. If Police have to be called, the Police report would be sufficient grounds to issue a Notice to Leave for serious breach.

Application for termination for misrepresentation

New proposed section 312A allowing for tenants to apply to tribunal for an application for a termination order because of lessor or lessors' agent giving false or misleading information is encouraged to be clarified and further defined. For example, the services provided may be withdrawn for just reasons outside the lessor control, and a matter relating to the premises that is likely to affect the tenant's quiet enjoyment is ambiguous. What about council roadworks and or a unit development being built behind the property in another street? Matters of which a lessor and or agent would not reasonably be aware. Whilst the provision states the lessor or lessor's agent gave information about, example should be provided with the new section.

New section 347B states tribunal may make the order if they are satisfied the false or misleading representation justifies termination of the agreement, the goal is to avoid the Tribunal and resolve dispute via self resolution and or the RTA conciliation process if required.

Support parties to residential leases reach agreement about renting with pets.

In essence, the proposed provisions appear to have reached a reasonable and balanced approach for all parties.

However believe there does need to be a ground to allow Lessors to refuse a pet when the property has previously suffered costly damage due to pet damage arising from a previous tenancy.

Please refer to QCAT Claim No. T20/19 (Mareeba). Whilst a Warrant of Possession was granted to terminate due to the damage caused by pets (inside cats and unauthorised puppy without litter trays in a Queenslander), our Lessor was ordered to return the full bond of \$1700 and pay an additional \$800 towards the tenant's moving expenses. The damage to the property was not met by insurance, and it cost the Owner more than \$4000 in repairs and loss of income for three months whilst the work was done. Understandably, no pets permitted since.

Re. *"if the pet is not a type of pet ordinarily kept inside, a condition requiring the pet to be kept outside the premises"* from page 41 of the Explanatory notes. Who determines the type of pet not ordinarily kept inside? This is open to dispute and needs to be clarified.

Notice to leave for Contract of Sale – periodic tenancy.

The new proposed Schedule 1 Notice periods for notice to leave for a sale contract for a periodic tenancy change from current 4 weeks to 2 months is of concern. The current section 286 of the RTRA Act allows for notice to leave to be given to a tenant with section 329 allowing four weeks' notice to end the tenancy. The change from 4 weeks to 2 months is potentially going to affect some sales contract situations, particularly with owner occupier contracts. The tenant in this situation (periodic tenancy contract) can give 2 weeks' notice to terminate the agreement. Situations may occur whereby tenants are given 2 months' notice as per the proposed provision, and the tenant terminates on their grounds and give 2 weeks' notice. The lessor (seller) will be in a position of a vacant property, and if contracts cannot be renegotiated, open for substantial loss. The other concern which may occur is reluctance of owner occupiers to buy properties that are rented which places the lessor property owner selling under potential duress if the sale is forced due to financial

and or other hardship. They may then have to apply to have the tenancy terminated for excessive hardship ground.

Please contact me if any additional information is required, and or any questions are raised as part of my submission.

Yours sincerely

Sent via email : [REDACTED]

Linda Snart

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