



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc

Submission to the Senate Standing
Committee on Economics Inquiry into
the Treasury Laws Amendment (National
Housing and homelessness Agreement)
Bill 2017 [Provisions]

December 2017



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About TasCOSS

TasCOSS is the peak body for the community services sector in Tasmania. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low income, vulnerable and disadvantaged Tasmanians. TasCOSS represents the interests of its members and their clients to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

TasCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Economics Legislation Committee inquiry into the Treasury Laws Amendment (National Housing and Homelessness Agreement) Bill 2017 [Provisions].

TasCOSS supports meaningful efforts to improve access to appropriate, affordable housing whether through ownership, rental, provision of social housing and access to crisis accommodation. We also support genuine efforts to increase public accountability and transparency in setting and monitoring the way housing funding is used, particularly in the provision of housing for people on low incomes.

However we see some areas in the current Bill that could impede progress towards these goals. They are:

- Making funding to states contingent on them meeting certain conditions;
- Establishing effective oversight and accountability for the new agreement;
- Short timeframes;
- Lack of a national affordable housing strategy; and
- The need for state strategies to prioritise housing for people on low incomes.

Issues of concern

Funding to states is contingent on them demonstrating that they have met certain conditions. TasCOSS is concerned that, where a State or Territory Government does not meet the targets set out in the supplementary agreements, financial penalties will be imposed. These are likely to impact on funding for housing services for people on low incomes. Where a Government is failing to achieve the targets set, they should be required to provide a public explanation and develop and publish a plan to improve performance, rather than being subject to financial penalties.

Accountability

TasCOSS believes that an independent body should be established to monitor and assess performance under the new agreement. This body would fulfil the functions of the now-defunct National Housing Supply Council, although it should have more authority than that body did to collect, analyse, publish and assess progress on delivering national and state housing plans. If adequately resourced and empowered it could help to ensure that states are meeting their targets and thus eliminate the need for financial penalties.

Timeframes

TasCOSS is concerned that the current funding agreement expires on 30 June 2018 and that this might not allow enough time for negotiations on the primary and supplementary agreements to conclude. There is a risk that this would impact the provision of housing services and that this would impact disproportionately on people on low incomes. We suggest that the Bill be amended so that the new funding arrangements take effect when the multiparty agreement ('primary agreement') comes into effect, and that the need for supplementary agreements to have been negotiated be removed. The

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) would need to be extended if the new agreement was not completed by its expiry on 30 June 2018.

A national affordable housing strategy for State targets to align with

It is the view of TasCOSS that a new national housing funding agreement should sit within a broader package of reforms that address housing affordability in Australia. These reforms should include a national affordable housing strategy and a commitment to fund affordable housing supply at a level beyond indexation. State and Territory plans should link to the national plan as well as to broader reforms such as those linked to cities and infrastructure.

Housing strategies should make explicit that the increase in housing stock gives priority to people on low incomes

Section 1.34 of the Bill provides that each State must have 'a published, up-to-date housing strategy that indicates the level of housing supply needed to respond to projected housing demand, and outlines the reforms and initiatives that will be implemented to meet this need; and includes other matters (if any) detailed in a primary or supplementary housing agreement'. Like ACOSS, we recommend that this section be amended to prioritise housing supply that is affordable to *low income households*.

Other matters

TasCOSS notes that ACOSS and National Shelter have also made submissions to this inquiry, and we support the comments and recommendations in their submissions. TasCOSS would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the ACOSS and National Shelter policy platform, Housing Australia's People: A Serious Plan, a joint policy platform released in 2017.¹

¹ http://www.shelertas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NS-ACOSS-6-point-plan_April17.pdf