

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 23 August 2023

MEMBERS

Trung Luu – Chair

Ryan Batchelor – Deputy Chair

Matthew Bach

Michael Galea

Joe McCracken

Rachel Payne

Aiv Puglielli

Lee Tarlamis

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Melina Bath

John Berger

Moira Deeming

David Ettershank

Renee Heath

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

WITNESSES

Jennifer Beveridge, Chief Executive Officer,

Amy Frew, Director Client Services, and

Farah Farouque, Director, Community Engagement, Tenants Victoria.

The CHAIR: Good morning. I declare the opening of the Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into the Rental and Housing Affordability Crisis in Victoria. Please ensure your mobile phones have been switched to silent and that all background noise is minimised.

Before I continue, I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands that we gather on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and family. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here with us today to impart their knowledge on this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings, all committee members and the public here with us today and those watching live on broadcast.

For this first session I would like to introduce my committee. I am Trung Luu, Chair of the committee. To my left are Mr Joe McCracken, Member for Western Victoria; Dr Matthew Bach, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Mr Aiv Puglielli, Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region; Dr Sarah Mansfield, Member for Western Victoria; and Ms Rachel Payne, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Welcome to the witnesses on the panel today. For the Hansard record, could you please state your name and the organisation you are with today.

My apologies – also on Zoom today as part of the committee is Mr Michael Galea, Member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Farah FAROUQUE: My name is Farah Farouque. I am Director of Community Engagement at Tenants Victoria.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: And I am Jennifer Beveridge. I am the CEO at Tenants Victoria.

Amy FREW: And I am Amy Frew. I am the Director of Client Services, also at Tenants Victoria.

The CHAIR: Thank you. To the witnesses, I just want to read this out to you. All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same thing, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered as a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. The transcript will be ultimately made public and posted on the committee website.

For the Hansard record, can you please say your full name before you make your statement again, please. And just regarding your statement, can you just keep it to a maximum of 8 minutes so we have plenty of time to discuss it afterwards. Thank you. Please continue.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Thank you. Good to meet you all, and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I can see our document in front of some of you, so hopefully you have had a read of that. It kind of sets the scene and the context, and I would like to add a little more of a summary to that. Firstly, I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we meet on today and pay my respects to elders past and present and any Aboriginal people who are here with us today.

I would also like to acknowledge the 30 per cent of Victorians who rent their home. I think we often forget that, and that is what this inquiry is about – it is about the 30 per cent of Victorians who rent their home. You have heard from some of them directly; I know that yesterday you had people in. You are probably aware too that

the demographics of renting are changing, that the numbers of renters are increasing in our community. It is not just a transitional stage for lots of people, but it might be a housing tenure that people move in and out of throughout their lives, or in fact they may remain renters for all of their lives. So we need to keep in mind that the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing cannot just be seen through the lens of home ownership anymore, and we have a cultural perspective on housing that expects everybody to own their home at some point.

Tenants Victoria was established in 1974 and has sought to advocate for and support the rights of renters since then, so we are almost 50 years old. We provide a lot of information, advice and support for people who rent their home, we also provide training and secondary consultation for other organisations who support renters and of course we participate in some of the public discussion and advocacy, as we are here today doing. We are staffed by a range of professionals, including those who undertake intake, lawyers, financial counselling and outreach workers to people who live in rooming houses as well as, increasingly, multicultural renters, who as we discovered are often overlooked, particularly those who live in the fringes of Melbourne.

We welcomed the reforms to Victoria's rental laws that were introduced in 2021. They are now in their third year of operation, and the intent of those laws was really to improve the rights of renters and provide a really good safety net for them. However, in Victoria life as a renter remains insecure and difficult for many people, because we have record low vacancy rates and we are seeing high rent increases. Repairs still seem to be something that is negotiable, and often they are not undertaken or they take a long time. And VCAT, which is where people can go to have their disputes heard, is rife with delays and difficulties. So in short rental reform in this state is an unfinished business.

We heard last week some of the national perspective on renting, and in many ways Victoria is in a better position than lots of other states and territories. However, we are not seeing that in practice for the people who come to us. They come to us seeking assistance, often when they are in real trouble. We last year saw or helped over 8000 people with more than 10,000 matters, and there were a further 1100 matters that we assisted through a secondary consultation process. Repairs remain our biggest issue that people come to us with, and also notices to vacate and rent increases. If you refer to pages 5 and 6 in our document, we give some examples there of some of the exorbitant rent increases that people have been issued notices for.

We do a lot of great work. We are absolutely slammed, so I think one of the important things to note is that we, along with many other organisations, need more resources to do the work that we do. We did some rough calculations, and our funding is about \$3 million that comes from government. There are just short of 2 million renters in the state, so you can do the sums. It is not a big investment to provide this information, either in a more passive way on our website, where people can come and help themselves, or more directly, where we actually go through the VCAT process with people.

Some of the examples that we hear of are heartbreaking. Occasionally I will listen to the phones or I will meet somebody in the foyer of our building who wants to come and see one of our staff. One of those recently was a guy who called us after he had been without electricity for nine weeks. His power board had stopped working, and he had lived with it for a couple of weeks and then contacted the real estate agent. He was told something would be done; a guy came out and had a look at it, said he would be back to fix it – he did not come back to fix it. The guy continued make contact with the agent and the landlord. After nine weeks of this he ended up with a notice to vacate. This was a guy who had been living in his home for five years. He was connected and established in that block of flats. He did not want to move, but he also did not want the trouble that it was going to cause for him to challenge this. So we were able to give him some advice, and he was happy to receive that. You know, it is an ongoing thing. But these are the things that renters who we hear from regularly have to deal with. No power for nine weeks: I mean, how do you cook, how do you wash, how do you see? Just imagine it for you in your own home when there is a power blackout and everybody wants to know when the power is coming back on. This was something that was discrete to his property, that needed to be fixed. This is the sort of thing that at Tenants Victoria we hear over and over again.

We see housing as a human right and as an essential service, and there is a lot of regulation around essential services in this state and in this country, as there should be. We would like to see some more real regulation. At the moment it is easy for landlords and real estate agents to just disregard the regulation that sits there, because there is no real enforcement, so the law is not doing what it needs to do. The other thing that we would – I am almost done – really like some proper conversation about is: what is a reasonable renting increase? Because

30 per cent or 50 per cent or 80 per cent is not a reasonable rent increase. They are limited to once every year, and that is a good thing, but without a limit on how much it can be increased it is always going to be the renter who pays for the landlord to meet their commitments.

During the pandemic we learnt a lot of things about the renting system: small interventions work, time-limited interventions work and government policy drives action. We had a rent reduction program that was in place, and there were over 75,000 rent reductions that were registered with consumer affairs. Of course there could have been many more, but that actually demonstrates that government interventions do work. We think there are lots of quick options and so-called low-hanging fruit; we outlined some of them in our submission. Yes, we need more supply, we are not arguing with that, but for the renters who are experiencing day after day, week after week insecure, unsafe and unaffordable housing, now is the time to act.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Jennifer. If I could, Jennifer, because there are quite a few questions our committee would like to ask you. Hopefully, during these questions, you can actually explain more.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Yes, thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Ms Payne, would you like to start? If you could just keep it very short, because we have got about 4 minutes each. Thank you.

Rachel PAYNE: No problem. You mentioned under-resourcing. Can you just explain: with Tenants Victoria, is it a tender process that you do receive, putting a tender to government? Do you feel as though having that support of an ongoing funding arrangement with government – and forgive my ignorance when it comes to how these processes work – would see you able to guarantee more support being offered to tenants?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: We have three-year contracts that we are currently working through, and this is a really long-term process; it is not something that you switch on and switch off. Our core business is day after day, week after week, year after year, and we are able to take the themes, the evidence from that high-volume long-term work and put it into practice. Some of the challenges are that it is time-consuming work. Everybody wants to tell their story. They want somebody sympathetic to listen to the problems that they are having, and we do tend to limit the initial phone call to 15 or 20 minutes. So there are lots of ways that we can ensure that there is efficiency in the system that we have, but actually the demand is so great that we are doing the best we can with what we have.

Rachel PAYNE: Definitely. We heard from a lot of renters particularly that they do not feel like they have a lot of rights, and I really appreciate that one of your recommendations is to enshrine within the human rights charter that right to a home. Can you tell me practically what that might mean for accountability more towards the property owners and their accountability of enshrining those rights?

Amy FREW: I think when you look at the rights that are put into – we are very lucky to have a charter in Victoria.

Rachel PAYNE: We are – 22.

Amy FREW: What it really does is it holds government to account. I guess in this case you would see the flow-on effect of increased accountability on government to make sure that people are housed, whether it is through the private market or through the public system. So I think it would have the knock-on effect of government really having obligation to – as Jen was saying before, that enforcement piece is really missing at the moment via VCAT or via consumer affairs, and I think that would strengthen the arm of government.

Rachel PAYNE: If I have got time for one more, you mentioned that you have got 8000 people who you help on 10,000 matters. That to me sounds like you are having ongoing issues with particular agents and landlords, that there are recurring issues for maybe a particular renter and they may have a request for a repair. Is this something that you are experiencing?

Amy FREW: Yes. We always hope that we can help someone and solve their problem and they will go away, but unfortunately that does not happen. Again, just returning to that enforcement point, if you go to VCAT and you make an application and VCAT makes an order to do a repair, for example, if the landlord does not do that repair you have to go back again, so there are a lot of those repeat cycles.

Rachel PAYNE: Yes. Thank you. That is time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I would like to invite Michael now – if you would like to ask a question, Michael. You have about 3 minutes.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for joining us and for your very fulsome submission as well. It has been quite interesting to read through. If I can just ask: you did mention that Victoria is ahead of most other states but that there seems to be a real issue in actual application of the regulations and the enforcement. I note you have also called for better training for real estate agents. What sorts of specific measures, though, in terms of the enforcement side of things could we implement which would mean that the regulations that we have are actually adhered to and complied with?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Again I will hand that one to Amy.

Amy FREW: I think there are two parts, as I mentioned. One is the VCAT piece and one is the consumer affairs piece. At the moment with VCAT delays are really contributing to – you know the phrase ‘Justice delayed is justice denied’. Part of the framework around incentivising landlords to make repairs is the compensation part, where renters can apply for compensation. Renters are waiting up to two years at the moment for compensation matters to be heard, so that really does not incentivise landlords to make repairs. The other part, on the consumer affairs side, is consumer affairs in our view is taking an educational approach to some of the ways that they apply their powers. They are very strong in enforcement around trust accounts and things like that, so they do use their teeth sometimes, but we are not seeing them follow up and use their powers to issue infringements, for example, where repeat breaches of the Act have been perpetrated.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. You also mentioned regulation for short-term rentals, and you used some examples from around the world. Do you have an opinion on what is a better approach – whether it is legislation, regulation, rate variations or other surcharges? What is the best way to regulate the sector?

Farah FAROUQUE: We call for regulation of the sector. We recognise, though, that regulating Airbnbs is not going to solve the housing crisis. Right through our narrative is that there is no one silver bullet solution to the issues of housing affordability, and obviously, as Jennifer mentioned, supply is key. However, there is certainly academic evidence that in certain areas – for example, in metropolitan Melbourne in the city area and in certain holiday locations – there is a major issue around availability for workers et cetera. We have not formed a view on what form that regulation should take. We do not want to usurp the powers of the legislators and the policymakers in that regard, but what we do recognise is that there needs to be an intervention alongside a range of other interventions. Regulating short-stay accommodation, whilst a popular and headline-grabbing move, is not going to solve the housing crisis, but we do need intervention, because it has been the wild west to some extent on that matter. That is our position.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And if I still have time, Chair –

The CHAIR: Yes, for one quick one.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned, obviously, the 8000 people and 10,000 cases that you typically deal with in a year. How many staff do you have to do that work?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Not enough. What have we got at the moment?

Amy FREW: We have five lawyers and three part-time intake workers who provide information on the phones.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: And a financial counsellor and an outreach worker who goes to rooming houses.

Michael GALEA: It sounds like a lot of work for those people.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Yes, it is very busy. I think all up we have about 25 EFT staff, and we are building our volunteer pool as well. But yes, we are not a big organisation by any stretch of the imagination.

Farah FAROUQUE: Can I add that an important aspect of our work beyond direct client services is our very comprehensive website, which is used like an encyclopedia of renting. We put a lot of resources into that

and we have dedicated staff working on that, because many people have a self-guided approach. And when we say ‘many people’, these are the more empowered renters; unfortunately that is not everybody. The more empowered renter can access our website, and in the last financial year 571,813 users came to our website. That is a significant number. That gives you a bit of an imprint on the need. And can I add that in relation to our contact page – we just did a little assessment before we came here – 80,000 users came to our contact page in the last financial year, but we were only able to service a **proportion**.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Aiv.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Aiv here. Thank you for coming in today. I would like to begin with: we have just heard mention about rent increases and the pressure they are putting on renters in the community. Out of national cabinet recently we heard an outcome that other states are going to be coming into line with where Victoria is at, where you can increase rents once per year but by unlimited amounts. In your view, is that in any way a meaningful change to address the issue of rental affordability in this country?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: That is an interesting question. I think it is part of the equation. To have something there once a year is an appropriate number of times or appropriate frequency with which it can be increased, but we would argue to not have a cap on that is the missing piece of that puzzle. What is reasonable – we have been calling for a fairness formula, because we understand that costs do go up. It is appropriate to have an increase, but what is reasonable, you know – that is for, as Farah said, others to make that decision. But we think there needs to be some kind of formula so that people know when the rent increase comes, it will not be any more than X per cent or X dollars.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Farah was on the radio a couple of weeks ago, and there was a caller who called in afterwards who is a landlord. He owns a number of properties, and he said, ‘Oh, I didn’t know it was unlimited. I thought it was 5 per cent, and that’s what I use as the basis for my increase.’ So there is a standard probably out there that is considered a reasonable standard. And we do not say that all landlords are bad people or that they are all greedy, you know, but there are a proportion who do need to have that guidance provided to them, and we would argue that should be in the form of some regulation around what is a reasonable rent increase.

Farah FAROUQUE: Can I add that our service has been tracking rent increases, as noted in our submission, since 1 July 2022 – and this is just our service alone. We have been tracking rent increases from \$30 a week to over \$500 a week, and that has resulted in some cases in houses, particularly some share houses, breaking up. Of course the other thing we note, as mentioned in our submission, is the creeping factor that it is not just people on Centrelink or that group of people who are obviously of the highest need but also people on middle incomes with good jobs and great rental histories that are facing the affordability issues right now, and the distress we hear not just from our clients but via our story portal around these issues is very real in the community.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. And so just to sort of distil – so the frequency of the increase, there is good intention there, but without a limit on how much you can increase, it is not fit for purpose.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Yes.

Farah FAROUQUE: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken: Hello. Thank you. Do you mind if I use your first names, by the way?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Yes.

Joe McCracken: Yes. Cool. Okay. I am interested in the experiences that you guys have had in assisting people with navigating consumer affairs in the whole renting process, because it seems to be unnecessarily difficult to navigate through and you almost have to be a professional renter in order to negotiate the situation if there is a dispute or if there are any challenges that you might face. I note that you have this recommendation of strengthening the capacity of consumer affairs to do enforcement work. What do you think that looks like? I know you touched on it with Michael a bit, but I want to drill down a bit on what you think that might look like and how it could be better strengthened.

Jennifer Beveridge: Yes. I will pass over to Amy to take that question.

Amy Frew: Consumer affairs already has a range of powers under the Act, but at the moment I guess the policy direction they are taking is, as I said before, more of an educative process. So obviously they have got their own website and they have got the phone line that rental providers and real estate agents can call up for advice. They are not taking the other part of their role that they could take up, which is the issuing of infringements.

Joe McCracken: Why do you think that is – from your perspective of course?

Amy Frew: I guess, looking at other regulators, and just speaking a little bit outside, there is I think a tendency of regulators to see their role as more educative rather than enforcement. I think that has its place of course, and I think people need to be told. Especially with the rental laws, the changes came into effect in 2021 and there is a bit of a learning curve, but it is two years now and we would expect that people know the law and obey it, and I think the arm of Consumer affairs should be strengthened to make sure that the rights are being enforced.

Joe McCracken: I have had a look through the 2021 changes and they set minimum standards and all those sorts of things, but I am getting the feel from a lot of different people that these standards are not necessarily enforced. Whether it is the capacity of consumer affairs to actually enforce those issues or whether it is a willingness – do you have a view on that?

Jennifer Beveridge: We would just be speculating, so you would need to talk to them about that. But what we see is that in many cases the action is not taken. As Amy said before, VCAT may make an order, the repairs are not done, the renter has to go back to VCAT, and so that becomes the mechanism that people use – or they abandon it.

Amy Frew: I was just going to say really quickly as well I guess the onus is on the renter to bring the challenge or the action, and hopefully people are not frequent flyers in this space. So they have got to navigate the system. It is meant to be very user-friendly, but it is still a legal system that needs to be navigated. And then the power difference at the moment – the rent increases, the lack of vacancies – does not really incentivise people to uphold their rights. They would rather stay in the property and live with what they have got than agitate. We heard of the fellow before who did not have power for nine weeks, and then he agitated and was asked to leave. The status of renters is still, I think – yes.

Joe McCracken: One of the other parts that we have heard a few different comments about – can I keep going? – is the ability to navigate the VCAT system. So consumer affairs have this three-step process of resolving a dispute: have a conversation or a discussion, a written notice and then go to VCAT. It seems to me that the first two do not really bring a resolution to most of the issues. VCAT should not be the last issue, the last way of resolving an issue, but it seems as though it is. That is the last port of call, but it seems to be the most common. As you say, there is a backlog of sometimes up to two years to resolve a dispute, which is just ridiculous. Any thoughts about resolving that issue, whether it is so that VCAT is not the last port of call or whether there might be some other step in there so that we can take away some of that backlog?

Amy Frew: Yes. I think VCAT has a resourcing issue probably, but I think the other part as well and one of the other recommendations we make is around an internal review at VCAT. At the moment if you get a decision that you disagree with or you think is wrong in law, your only avenue is to appeal it up to the Supreme Court. So that is a huge jump up from a no-cost, more relaxed jurisdiction up to the Supreme Court of Victoria, where you could be exposing yourself to between \$30,000 and \$50,000 worth of costs if you were to lose. Because also in VCAT they do not have to follow the internal decisions, there is lots of inconsistency with decision-making. When you have got lack of clarity in the law, that means people are more likely to take a shot

– like, go and see what happens on the day in VCAT. I think if there was an internal review mechanism within VCAT and clarity of the law, it would be much clearer what your outcome would be, particularly in compensation claims, for example, and there would not be a need to be, like, ‘Let’s roll a dice on the day and see which member we get.’ You would have a consistent understanding of the way the law would be applied, and I think that would promote better behaviour and better decision-making.

Joe McCracken: Part of the challenge too is obviously the cost: \$70 to go to VCAT, and you are trying to get, I do not know, \$150 back on something. You have got to weigh it up and think, ‘Well, what’s the point?’

Amy Frew: Yes.

Joe McCracken: Maybe there needs to be a bar set as to what the standard might be: okay, go to VCAT if it is over \$500, and then you can deal with consumer affairs if it is – I do not know, I am just talking off the top of my head here. But reform in that area too I think is needed.

Jennifer Beveridge: Again, if we can go back to what happened during the pandemic lockdowns, consumer affairs ran a front-door negotiation and mediation process in order to get to the rent reduction, and we saw that it worked. It was an example of something that did work. It was away from VCAT. People had to go through there in order to get to the end point of VCAT. From our point of view it was not perfect but it was an example of something that worked, and at the end of those lockdowns and those emergency measures it stopped. And it is almost like we have forgotten it. We need to remember the things that we have done that have been successful and have helped people.

Joe McCracken: That is good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr McCracken. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah Mansfield: Thank you. And thank you for your very detailed submission and for the work that you do for many in our community. I am interested in unpacking the fairness formula a little bit more. You have proposed this as a measure to limit the amount rents can increase. Can you explain a bit more the basis for that recommendation about the fairness formula and how it compares to, say, other proposals like pegging rent increases to CPI, as one example?

Jennifer Beveridge: I will hand to Farah in a minute, but I think the phrase came out of an understanding that we are just one part of the system and that there is a larger system at play here, and so the ‘fairness’ is for a fair system. It is not just one-sided, but it needs to encompass all parts of the system, and that is really what we were hoping would result – that there would be a discussion, with possibly all parts of the system coming together and negotiating, ‘Well, what’s fair?’ That was where that came from, but Farah, do you want to add some more to that?

Farah Farouque: Yes. Well, we were deliberately not prescriptive, so the term ‘fairness formula’, as Jen explains, has a certain rationale. But we cite in our submission the ACT model, which is pegged to the CPI plus 10, and the fairness formula as demonstrated in the ACT has not stopped rent rises et cetera. It stops the egregious rent rises we have seen. We have not tried to dictate to the legislators or the policymakers, and in fact people have challenged us on that: ‘Oh, can we have the actual mathematical calculation of the fairness formula?’ But we have deliberately not done so because we feel that it is an expression of the need to limit egregious rent increases. So it offers a guidance and a ceiling, and in the ACT we see that it does not prohibit a landlord from acting. They can go to the tribunal if the renter objects. So it is a very modest market intervention that we are proposing.

And to the point that the economists make about the price signal, we would not recommend that it be tied. If there is a new lease, a new rent can be negotiated, so that addresses the price signal point. If one were to refer to **(the Senate rental inquiry)** submission from Professor Hal Pawson, an expert in housing from the University of New South Wales, they talk about that price signal argument around rent increases. Andrew Barr, the Chief Minister of the ACT, has made the point that it is to address the most egregious forms of rent increase.

We also have minimum standards here in Victoria, so in a sense another argument against such a measure is that if they cannot increase the rent, they will not address repairs. Aside from the broader issue of repairs we have in Victoria, we have minimum standards. They are mandated. All rental properties must meet minimum

standards, so the match-up of a fairness formula with minimum standards, we think and have argued, can get a fair outcome, and it is really a very modest option in the range of options, including some that people on the other side have proposed. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dr Bach.

Matthew BACH: Thanks. Thank you all for coming in, and great to see you again, Jennifer. Yesterday, Farah, we heard about mushrooms in bathrooms, so we take your point on repairs and fungus removal. I really liked some of your comments earlier, Amy, about VCAT, and I had sort of jotted down 'Justice delayed is justice denied'. I might move a little bit later on that that is the heading of one of our chapters, because we have heard so much about VCAT and the appalling wait times, often, to get what seem like very minor matters settled but matters that are for renters of great significance. We have heard about bonds being weaponised – that was the expression of one of our panellists yesterday.

Can I very quickly, because I know we are basically out of time, touch on something that you said earlier, Jennifer, that we have not yet touched on in our questioning, and that is the matter of supply. I understand that that is not a key feature of your submission, but nonetheless you touch upon it, and we have heard a range of potential ideas and there are a range of ideas in the public discussion about supply. I have my worries about the growing sprawl of Melbourne and pushing people further and further to the edges. Would you mind just touching upon some of your thoughts about where we should be thinking as we fashion some recommendations around supply?

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: You are probably not going to like my answer, because I am not going to get bogged down in the issue of supply. We are not experts in supply. We are spread very thin about what we are experts in. We have enough work to do engaging in the rental system, so I think we leave it to those who know more than us about what the supply should consist of. We need more supply, we know that. There are not enough houses for people. When people leave a property because they cannot afford a rent, they are stepping into insecurity of housing. They do not know what comes next for them, because there is not enough that is affordable. So I think we need more supply, we need more social housing, and that we are falling behind the benchmarks in other states and territories in this country. What we are seeing is that there is no safety net for people who cannot afford the rent increases in the private market, cannot get the repairs done; they need to leave and there is nothing else for them. So they do put themselves into a precarious situation with their housing, which is no good for anybody. It is no good for them contributing to life and our community. It is no good for the rest of us, because we have these situations where people are really focused on survival rather than thriving. So we would encourage more supply, we would encourage more social housing and we also would ask that something be done now for those people who are in really precarious situations, who cannot wait for 1 July next year, when new supply is going to be started.

Matthew BACH: Well, for the record, I like that answer very much. Thank you.

Jennifer BEVERIDGE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Bach. I am just mindful of the time and that we do have other witnesses coming up, but I do thank you for your attendance and your submission. I think your submission actually gave some very good insight. I know you touched on conditions, vacancies and rent raising, as you mentioned, and I know you do not want to adversely affect the rent of properties. Also, providing advice in relation to fairness or a reasonable increase in rent, compared with the CPI plus percentage, which is balanced on both sides – I think that is a very, very important submission. Again, thank you very much for your time.

This brings the panel to a close for this session. I would just like to move on to the next session now, and I do thank you for your time and your submission today.

Witnesses withdrew.