

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Renewable and Affordable Energy for Apartments

Melbourne – Thursday 30 April 2026

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Wayne Farnham

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

WITNESSES

Raoul Wainright, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Public Tenants Association;

Matt Torney, Director, Strategy, Performance and Sustainability, and

Jennifer Saunders, Manager, Sustainability Strategy, Housing Choices Australia;

Alex Trudzik, Manager, Policy, Community Housing Industry Association Victoria; and

Rory Anderson, Policy Adviser, Energy and Cost of Living, Victorian Council of Social Service.

The CHAIR: Welcome to this panel hearing for the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Renewable and Affordable Energy for Apartments. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website.

While all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege. Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the committee during the hearing will be published on the committee's website.

We will run this session in a question-and-answer format. Committee members will ask some questions. If you wish to answer a question, please raise your hand. We are a bit more informal than that. To make it easier for our Hansard reporters, please state your name before you start speaking. There may not be an opportunity for everyone to answer every question. If there are any important points that you do not have the chance to make during this session, you are welcome to provide additional information in writing. I will invite each organisation to make a 3-minute opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from members. Rory, do you want to kick off.

Rory ANDERSON: Thank you, Chair and committee members. My name is Rory Anderson. I am a Policy Adviser for Energy and Cost of Living at the Victorian Council of Social Service. VCOSS is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. We work towards a state that is free of poverty and disadvantage. VCOSS strongly believes that energy is an essential service, one that people cannot live a healthy and dignified life without, even if they struggle to afford bills.

The committee has been hearing about a large number of challenges in apartments to accessing renewable and affordable energy. In social housing we have all of these challenges, but the imperative to address them is all the stronger because the tenants are some of the most vulnerable in the state, often getting by on very low and fixed incomes, experiencing intersecting hardships. Because of this, social housing residents are likely spending a lot more of their income on bills than most Victorians are. That also means social housing tenants stand to benefit a great deal from access to renewable and more affordable electricity, perhaps the most of any cohort living in apartments. It is therefore crucial that tenants in social housing apartments are not left behind. The governance and ownership structure of social housing in both community and public housing necessitates a systems-level approach and investment and reform by government, but that also means government can lead the way with this housing stock. To that end, in our written submission we suggested several solutions in social housing apartments. These include the installation of solar and batteries in social housing where possible, the sharing of benefits from that with residents and energy efficiency upgrades like better insulation and appliance electrification. We also touched on the possibility of establishing schemes such as a virtual power plant, or VPP, as operates in the SA Housing Trust homes.

Finally, just before closing, I will touch on VCOSS's recommendation to establish a social tariff for energy. Very broadly defined, a social tariff is a reduced rate available to eligible households, ensuring that bills are more affordable. VCOSS believes that a social tariff would reduce rates of financial stress experienced by Victorian consumers who cannot afford ongoing costs for energy and support people into a position of stability whereby they could afford costs and improve their dignity and quality of life. Social housing residents could be a key focus of a social tariff, being a cohort that would greatly benefit from better access to affordable energy. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Rory. Alex.

Alex TRUDZIK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee. Thanks for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Alex Trudzik. I am a Policy Manager at Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, CHIA Vic for short. We are the peak body for community housing organisations in Victoria, so that is non-profit organisations who provide subsidised social housing, as Rory was saying – I would just like to echo a lot of his sentiments – for some of Victoria’s lowest income households, who do also have other challenges and disadvantages. As Rory said, the impact of giving them renewable and affordable energy creates a disproportionately higher impact than probably a lot of other cohorts. Again, I would just like to echo everything Rory was saying about how important it is to find solutions to get renewable and affordable energy to these renters.

Our members currently manage over 28,000 tenancies in Victoria, so it is a sizeable amount. Together with public housing, that is about 90,000-odd units in the state. Collectively, as social landlords, they manage a lot of rental tenancies in Victoria.

I will take the submission that CHIA Vic made as read, but I just want to emphasise one particular recommendation, and it is something that goes to what I have been saying here. I would like just to emphasise that the government have done some really excellent programs and incentives to try and get renewable and affordable energy into social housing, and a lot of those units can be apartment units. The sector, because of its rent-capped and subsidised rental nature for low-income households on fixed incomes, does operate very differently to the private residential sector. We just always ask that programs are designed with that in mind and to be really conscious and think through how different programs can be designed to create better outcomes for renters. Also, we always extend the offer to work closely with government and departments on co-designing processes to make sure that programs do meet those needs. I will just use a particular example: the solar rebates for community housing program. When it was first brought in there were a few challenges for our members to access it, basically around only being able to access the rebates post installation, which meant that members would have to front up a fair bit of capital to get the solar panels installed. That is a challenge when you are doing multiple – we are talking tens and possibly hundreds of units. That is not faced to the same degree by an individual landlord who might own one or two properties. Making a small capital investment is manageable and also makes sense for their long-term asset hold, but also they can do it because they think it will have a better impact for their renter as well.

After some time the government worked with us and with our members and changed the design of that program so that the rebate was available at the point of sale. That made a really big shift for our members in being able to access it. It just meant they were not out of pocket up-front for that capital, which meant they could really access it at a greater scale. I think that is a good example of where, when these programs are designed with the sector and social housing – the system – in mind, we can get the outcomes that everybody is intending with those, which is cheaper energy for renters. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Alex. Jennifer.

Jennifer SAUNDERS: Jennifer Saunders, Sustainability Strategy Manager at Housing Choices Australia. Matt Torney is going to be talking on behalf of our organisation.

The CHAIR: Lovely to see you, Matt.

Matt TORNEY: Thank you, Chair. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, thanks for the opportunity to appear today. I am Matt Torney. I am the Director of Strategy, Performance and Sustainability at Housing Choices Australia. We are a national not-for-profit community housing provider. We are quite large. Last year we housed more than 13,000 residents across about 7700 properties across the country, and that includes more than 2300 in Victoria, which is our largest portfolio.

You have seen our submission. I do want to make just one point very clearly today and propose three ways that the committee can act on it. The point is that in apartment energy systems the person who decides, the person who pays and the person who benefits are often three different people. We see that as a design flaw. Until reform fixes that design flaw, renewable energy transition will keep delivering benefits to households that already have agency in the energy market and will keep bypassing households that do not. We have a number of properties in Victoria that demonstrate this in our recent development portfolio – in Pascoe Vale South,

North Melbourne, Preston and Belmont – and I would extend an invitation to any of you if you would like to see some of these. All of these developments have really strong design credentials: they all have 5-star Green Star and 7-star NatHERS ratings, they have rooftop solar and they sit inside embedded networks. The solar fuels the common areas, which reduces the owners corporation costs, but it does not reduce the resident's bill. That is a gap that we see as needing to be fixed.

For the residents that we serve, most of whom live alone, many of whom are reliant on statutory incomes and all of whom have very little capacity to absorb bill shock, the cost-of-living relief that should flow from investments in renewables is not arriving. We see three proposals that can change that. The first is to make affordability measurable. From our point of view – obviously Rory mentioned this as well – affordability and any subsidy or renewable benefit should produce a net bill reduction that residents see. That could come with like-for-like price comparisons or concessions that flow straight through to the point of billing. The second point is around consumer protection. We see it as very important that consumer protection is held to the same standard inside embedded networks and virtual power plants as outside them. Choice in theory is not enough when switching is unrealistic in practice. And third, fund what actually delivers. It is really important to invest in the capabilities of organisations like ours to understand what is going to be most effective in terms of the investment we can make, given that we have limited capacity to make those investments. In our view, affordable housing should mean more than just affordable rent. It should mean affordable running costs. That test is what we see as important for this inquiry. Does the reform or any of the reforms proposed reduce the resident's bill, and can the resident understand and trust what is on offer?

The CHAIR: Hi, Raoul.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: Hi. Thank you to the whole committee for having us today. I am Raoul Wainwright. I am the Acting CEO of the Victorian Public Tenants Association. I am here speaking on behalf of the 100,000 Victorians who live in public housing and who are the last group of Victorians with an opportunity to access government assistance for the installation of solar panels on their homes. The group of people who I think everyone here agrees should have been the first to access that government assistance have, we say, become the last. Obviously I rely on the submission that we have put. I also endorse the submissions of my co-presenters here today.

There are a couple of things that I want to add. First of all, the committee has heard a lot of evidence about thermal efficiency and measures that can be taken. When you have a look at the types of properties that we are talking about – the ones that are pictured on pages 12 and 13 of our submission – these are the old concrete walk-up public housing units, which I think you will all be aware of. You can take all of the passive thermal efficiency measures that you like; you are still not going to end up with a home that is comfortable. It is going to stay very cold in the winter, and it is going to stay very hot in the summer. I think there is a large degree of acceptance of the fact that these are the most thermally inefficient properties in the state. As we heard earlier today, the cost burden of running those homes lies with the renter, so it lies with the exact person who should not have that cost burden. That is one of the reasons why we say they should have been amongst the first homes that were dealt with in terms of government assistance.

The second reason is that – we have been talking about owners corporations – the Parliament is the owners corporation for these buildings. DFFH is the property manager; you are the owners corporation. In terms of the discussion that the committee has had about how we get to a 75 per cent vote of owners corporations to actually take some steps forward, all of that is swept away in public housing because you are the people who make that decision. From our perspective, in making that decision for these walk-up properties – I am talking about specifically 8234 low-rise walk-up apartments across the state, 62 in Ballarat LGA – if you take the leadership on those and you provide the road map for how you are actually going to deliver that assistance to the renter, then that gives the ability for those private apartment blocks to follow your lead.

I want to touch on a little bit about what ReThink Sustainability told the committee. We are very attracted by their proposal for a virtual energy network. For all of the reasons I have just put we say that public housing is the perfect place to partner with them – I talked previously about the low-rise apartments – in particular the high-rise apartments, some of which, under current policy settings, are going to be in place until 2051.

We note that the committee asked the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action some specific questions to assist you with your work. We believe that the committee should follow up with questions for

DFFH. We note that Housing Choices have just said to you they run a portfolio of about 2300 properties in Victoria. They have made their first recommendation to you that there should be an impact on the electricity bill of the renter. As a landlord, they are taking a really positive approach there for the people who they rent to. In terms of the 100,000 public housing renters, they have not seen that leadership from DFFH, and we think that that is regrettable. DFFH obviously own and operate 65,000 rental units, so they have the resources to really make a difference in this area. We believe that DFFH should be asked about why there has been no action on installing solar panels on existing public housing apartments, and they could be asked about the possibility of participating in a pilot of the type recommended by ReThink Sustainability. In this area the committee has been told that the community housing solar program has installed 1251 panels. That has come at a cost to government of \$2.3 million. Over the same period we have had zero panels and zero funding for public housing. We call for that \$2.3 million to be matched in public housing as a matter of urgency.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Raoul. Can I also acknowledge Jordan Crugnale, the Member for Bass, who is joining us via Zoom. Committee, who would like to lead off with the questions? Deputy Chair, do you want to start?

Martin CAMERON: Yes, I can lead off. We just touched on before, Rory, when you opened, virtual power plants. Where are we sitting with that in Victoria, compared to other states, and is that a viable option rather than the hard yards that have got to be done maybe to get renewable energy, as in solar panels, on roofs of particular dwellings? Is that a viable option that should be looked at?

Rory ANDERSON: Thank you. It is Rory speaking. I would really lean here on the South Australian example as the one I know the most about, the housing trust homes. Our understanding of that is that it is for housing trust homes where solar and batteries can be put in place and that residents then benefit from bills that are set 25 per cent below the DMO, the default market offer, at least. Obviously, that is basically the lowest rate for energy in South Australia, as we understand it, and that would have tremendous benefits for social housing residents if an equivalent was set up in Victoria. I think in terms of VPPs generally there are co-benefits to the whole grid as well if you can orchestrate the consumer energy resources that exist to meet demand. As I understand it, the South Australian VPP has already stepped in at times when there have been unexpected shortfalls on the grid. Of course there are some caveats to where the structural limits apply, which mean it would not be necessarily possible in every single instance – the most high density, for example. But I think there would be other technical solutions where you could fill that gap – solar farms, for example – where there are options to still benefit consumers in social housing that could be linked to a VPP or complement a VPP.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Yes, Matt.

Matt TORNEY: Matt Torney from Housing Choices. In response to that, I think we take the residents' perspective there but also the organisation's perspective in helping to set those up. In our experience any of the technologies, including VPPs, may be useful, but they have to be designed in such a way to consider how the prices flow to residents and how access is managed so that there are in fact benefits. Consumer protections – you would have seen in our submission our observations about embedded networks, and the same can apply for VPPs. So long as there are sufficient consumer protections in place, these can be really helpful, but you do not want to lock in higher prices to residents in order to capture the renewable benefits. So the design is as important as the technology. In fact, in our view, it might be more important.

Martin CAMERON: Because at the end of the day you want the benefit to flow on to the consumer that is in there.

Matt TORNEY: That is right.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thanks, Chair. Matt, I will go to you. Why are you investing in your apartment buildings with embedded networks if you are concerned that this can negatively impact energy affordability for the residents?

Matt TORNEY: Thank you. Matt Torney, from Housing Choices. Embedded networks can have really great benefits for the grid, for residents and for housing choices and the development. It can lead to really efficient development at scale. The caution that we have stated is that the embedded network itself can lock in residents to more costly energy. In our situation we have negotiated, partly because of my esteemed colleague here, really great arrangements with the providers, so our residents actually do get a discount to the default offer. But we have fought hard and long to get that, and not all CHPs are our size and have access to that offer, so what we are saying is: give others access to that benefit as a function of design rather than relying on their capacity or scale to negotiate that with the providers.

Wayne FARNHAM: Just to follow on from that –

The CHAIR: Just hold that thought for a minute, Wayne. Raoul, do you want to come in now, or do you want to hear the follow on?

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: I am happy to wait.

Wayne FARNHAM: Okay. Just to follow on from that, if you have got an embedded network, then doesn't that limit the tenant's ability to shop around for maybe a cheaper price that could come forward?

Matt TORNEY: That, again, is another design flaw. But again, partly because of my colleague's diligence, we have also negotiated opt-outs. The price is one thing but the inflexibility is the other, because for public housing tenants or for community housing tenants there just is not the ability to exercise choice in practice because they may not be able to move energy provider because that would require them to move out. But in our deals we have negotiated opt-out clauses for residents so they can actually opt out.

Wayne FARNHAM: So they can opt out at any time and go to another provider if needs be?

Matt TORNEY: Yes.

Wayne FARNHAM: Okay.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: It is Raoul Wainwright from the VPTA. One of the things we have suggested in this area is if there is to be an embedded network that it could be the SEC, so that we can, at least from a consumer perspective, have confidence that the full suite of government policies is going to be implemented. One of the real gaps that we have found in recent embedded networks is just having people's concessions listed in a timely fashion.

The CHAIR: Yes, Alex.

Alex TRUDZIK: Thanks. Alex from CHIA Vic.

The CHAIR: That was very good hand-raising.

Alex TRUDZIK: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thick. Thick hand-raising.

Alex TRUDZIK: Back in schooldays. Just to echo what Matt and Raoul have both said, with embedded networks obviously the very end consumers and the ones most at risk are the renters, but CHOs, as leading developments in that process, are also consumers of the embedded network provision. So we did in our submission, and HCA did as well in theirs – and in preparing our submission our members gave us lots of feedback, saying they would welcome stronger regulations and consumer protections around embedded networks because not only are the renters ultimately the consumers there but in negotiating deals, as HCA have, you want those levels of consumer protections in place to make sure that you are getting a good deal. So yes, we would recommend strengthening that side of it so that the benefits that can be in embedded networks can be used without some of the downsides.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Rory.

Rory ANDERSON: It is Rory Anderson speaking. I just echo everyone's comments and will add to them in terms of the consumer protections and embedded networks. I just highlight the review that occurred a few years ago – I think it was 2022 – into embedded networks and that there has been some movement on those recommendations already by the government, and they are very welcome, but a fair chunk of work remains that was recommended by the review that probably points in the direction of how consumer protections in embedded networks could be improved.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Daniela, do you have one? Sure, Matt. Sorry.

Matt TORNEY: Just to add to that: we do not need to design from scratch. There is a model in New South Wales that does offer some of these protections.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you, Chair. Rory, I have been mulling through my mind about the new social tariff that you have proposed to reduce energy costs of really vulnerable households. How would this differ from the current system with concessions as it stands? Do you have parameters? Have you thought through eligibility? How should the tariff rate be set et cetera? I would love to unravel it a bit and get some more detail from you, please.

Rory ANDERSON: Absolutely. Thank you. Rory Anderson speaking. We would envision it to be more targeted than concessions are. I believe concessions are somewhere around a third of the eligible market. We see the social tariff as being more targeted, at about 5 to 10 per cent of the market that are currently struggling with ongoing costs. I would say that we have not got the exact data, but social housing residents probably fall straight into that category. That number is based on the number of people who currently already receive assistance from their retailer but also studies that have been done based on survey data by Brotherhood of St Laurence and Energy Consumers Australia that look at factors like the proportion of income spent on bills, people reporting struggling with bills and reporting struggling to heat or cool their home. This is an area we are exploring in our advocacy, and I think it really would come down to design – how large it is, how deep the reduced rate would be and then therefore how much it would cost to run it as well. Starting from social housing tenants as a cohort seems like it would be a high-priority area and could be delivered at a very low rate, probably at a low cost, because it is a specific cohort.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Thank you. Tied to that, the free energy period that will be coming, the 3 hours per day – this is probably a broader question to everyone here – do you see benefits available to those people?

Rory ANDERSON: I can start on that. Certainly there would be plenty of people who can benefit from that – anyone who is essentially at home during the day; older people are one example. But there are people who would have barriers to shifting their usage into the middle of the day. For a lot of people the peak is in the evening because it is a time of non-negotiable use. There are technological solutions there around appliances that could be set to work only in the middle of the day, but again not everyone has access to them. That is especially true in social housing. It is certainly one tool, and it is great that it is coming in, but it is certainly not a silver bullet.

The CHAIR: Raoul, how do you think that will go with public housing tenants, having these 3 hours of free power?

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: Debbie's story in our submission speaks to that, where she says that other people can charge up their devices during the day when the sun is out, and she does not get access to that. I think the other positive about that suggestion is that it is easily understood. There is no barrier to accessing it. I think the other thing to add to this discussion is we have a cohort of people who live in public housing who have gone to their doctors and have been certified as requiring medical cooling. It is quite a large number. That means air conditioners are installed, and then they have the secondary challenge of 'How am I going to pay for that to turn on the air conditioner?' In terms of both of these proposals, we see real positives for them in public housing.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Jordan, did you have anything?

Jordan CRUGNALE: Thank you, Chair. I think it was Alex from CHIA that spoke earlier around putting in for the rebates and then having to front up all the money to get the rebate. That has been flipped back, which

is great. Are there any other programs that need that sort of co-design at the outset, rather than something that gets worked out once it is implemented?

Alex TRUDZIK: Thank you. Alex from CHIA Victoria here. I suppose we would say with any new program that is intending to influence the residential sector, we always recommend that government be really mindful of the differences between the private residential sector and the social housing residential sector. There are other programs that are currently live where that sort of consultation and co-design has gone on, and it has been really great. We just want to flag in our submission that it is always really beneficial to have that thought through up-front. It really just comes down to the operating model in social housing is a rent-capped model for very low income households, which means that the revenue is incredibly low. Capital upgrades in the private residential sector can be made through very minimal rent increases over time because you are dealing at a much lower scale, typically a landlord owning fewer properties than a social housing provider. There are very different economics in play. It just means well-intentioned programs that are looking to improve energy going into rental properties, unless you are really clear thinking about how the social housing system will make use of those programs, can end up with some unintended consequences.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Thank you. Further, Chair, just on that –

The CHAIR: Sorry, Jordan, Raoul would just love to jump in before your supplementary.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Sure.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: Just on that design question, the thing that we grapple with is that the Commonwealth social housing energy performance initiative in Canberra includes solar panels but in Victoria it excludes solar panels. That is a point where we would have liked to have been consulted on the design of our particular implementation of that program, and we certainly would have been able to advocate for that difference.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Raoul. Jordan, your supplementary question.

Jordan CRUGNALE: It is related to the SEC being the embedded network for social and public housing. Is anyone having discussions with the SEC about this at the minute?

The CHAIR: Can you see the blank looks, Jordan?

Jordan CRUGNALE: No, I cannot. That is all right.

The CHAIR: I will translate for you, so it is all good. An excellent question, but ‘Not at this stage’ is the response I am getting from the panel. David.

David HODGETT: I am just going to jump in. Many of the submissions talked about some of the things the South Australian government is doing. Do you want to add anything we should be looking at or specifically learning from them, anyone?

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: Raoul from the VPTA. Our submission deals with this. Basically South Australia are using their public housing roofs to set up a virtual power plant, so residents get access to the solar panels on their roof. They also have the Tesla batteries, usually in the garage. From a Victorian perspective it is very sad. South Australia has really taken the lead on that and is streets ahead.

David HODGETT: Okay. Simple as that.

The CHAIR: Yes, Alex.

Alex TRUDZIK: Alex from CHIA Victoria. Not specifically around South Australia, but I would just go back to that point I made in my opening remarks around the social housing system being about 90,000-odd tenancies. There is a real market there if government wanted to explore things like VPPs or new innovative ways to bring bulk renewable energy into social housing. There is a really good, solid base there to work with. It would really encourage the government to look at things, like those that are happening in South Australia, and see how we can actually use these 90,000-odd units to drive market innovation and also creation of supply chains.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: I think the other point there is about scalability. I was talking before about the 8200 low-rise walk-up flats. They are mostly, not uniformly, the prefab concrete that was built at Holmesglen. So you know before you get in what you are going to be facing; you know when they were built and how they were built, and they are all much of a muchness. Once you have that solution for that particular model of apartment block, you can scale it quickly.

Martin CAMERON: Has our housing stock right across the board been audited to make sure that solar panels can go on roofs? Are we in the situation where when it is time to actually install them that is when we are checking, or we are doing pre stuff? Yes, Matt.

Matt TORNEY: I cannot speak for the public housing portfolio, but that is partly the rationale for our fifth recommendation, which is about investing in the data that organisations like us can do, because it is very costly. Given the very tight margins that Alex described, it is very costly on a unit basis for organisations like ours to get the data that would allow us to make evidence-informed decisions about whether an intervention would be worth it. We think, obviously, the five recommendations we made are all very good ideas, but that last one was particularly powerful, and we think that that would create the models that Raoul is talking about. You would have similar stock where you would not have to do the analysis one by one; you could actually make assumptions on how they would perform.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: But in terms of the power supply issues that the committee has been hearing about, we share those in public housing.

The CHAIR: Are we going to have a scenario, with all new homes being delivered under the Big Housing Build meeting a 7-star NatHERS energy rating, where we are going to have really two classes, whether they are social housing tenants or public housing tenants, and some that are going to have much greater out-of-pocket expenses just from the property that they have been allocated? Is this going to become a real equity issue of 'You're lucky enough to get a new build in Sebastopol' as opposed to 'You're moving into Ashburton concrete walk-ups' and it is really going to impact people's standard of living and the pressure that they are under? Is that what we are creating here, Raoul?

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: I am just going to say yes.

The CHAIR: Alex, do you want to jump in? You are so agreeable, Raoul.

Alex TRUDZIK: Thank you, Chair. Alex from CHIA Victoria. I echo what Raoul just said. But yes, there is work currently. There is funding currently for the first round of the energy efficiency in social housing program, SHEPI. It is the federal government co-contribution program. That is going to, we hope, make lots of energy efficiency upgrades in older stock. But there is the question of older stock that will not obviously have been built to the same energy efficiency standards as with what is currently happening with new builds. We would just say also on that we would like government to be having a very strategic look at the entire social housing portfolio, making informed strategic decisions and giving signals to the community housing sector but also thinking through its portfolio through Homes Victoria on what stock needs to be renewed. Rather than always just looking to bring older stock up to current standards with energy efficiency, we would like to see an asset growth strategy, with growth being the really central pillar of that strategy: how is the social housing system going to grow in the coming years to meet the overwhelming demand there is for social housing? We would love to see that as part of any kind of program that did look at an audit of the energy efficiency of properties. That should be a factor in that thinking as well.

The CHAIR: Clearly in Ballarat we have got the Delacombe housing transformation in Leawarra Crescent, where we have actually bowled over a whole lot of older properties that were made in the 70s, and every single one of them will be 7-star with the solar stuff. That is a huge investment that we are making there, and how we do that more broadly is something we need to think about. With about a minute to go, I am going to look to the panel. I am going to go to you, Jordan, first. Do you need any anything else? You are good.

Wayne FARNHAM: I have got one last one.

The CHAIR: Go for it, Wayne.

Wayne FARNHAM: We talk about thermal efficiency a lot. If you are building a new unit complex or anything like that, do you get input into the design and how they are situated? I reference this because I have just had one build in Warragul where the orientation, in my opinion, for thermal efficiency was totally wrong, because they all face east–west and there is nothing facing north. North is the best thermal efficiency you can get. Do you providers actually get input into that? Raoul had his hand up first.

Raoul WAINWRIGHT: We were talking about this just the other day. The Footscray older persons high-rise on Gordon Street runs east–west. We are talking to the tenants who get the west sun all summer and suffer, and no-one gets the northern sun in winter. I just want to point out, after 20 years of living in a concrete house, just how thermally inefficient the structures are and how having an approach of ‘We are going to passively fix them’ is not really going to work from a practical perspective. That being said, we really value those homes, and we want to keep them; we just want more on top of them that are better.

The CHAIR: Matt.

Matt TORNEY: Matt Torney from Housing Choices. Most community housing providers would have design guidelines. In fact we are updating our design guidelines at present. I think there are two things to think about there. For CHPs, and for all of us actually, the intention is to provide as many high-quality homes as possible for the people we serve, and so you do have to sometimes make trade-offs about how you procure those homes. Where we are the developer, we do have really great design guidelines that account for thermal efficiency. I know that in the past lots of CHPs have entered into arrangements to do turnkey developments where there was maybe a trade-off between the quality that they would attain if they were the developer and what was available. So I think with those, yes, the ideal is that you have these great design guidelines and that you provide the highest quality that you can achieve, but sometimes the pragmatics mean that you want to provide the most housing you can.

The CHAIR: Looking at the time, I must call this session to an end. If there is any further information that you would like to contribute to our inquiry, please reach out to the secretariat. Thank you very much for taking the time with your excellent submissions as well as being here in person today. We will now end the broadcast.

Witnesses withdrew.