



# TASMANIAN HOUSING STRATEGY

## Provide your feedback on the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft

JUNE 2023

We encourage you to read the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Exposure Draft (draft Strategy) prior to responding to the following questions. You may choose to respond to some or all questions. Completed documents can be uploaded using the submissions drop-box on the website: <https://tashousingstrategy.homestasmania.com.au/consultation>.

**Question 1: 'Our way forward' identifies several levers for achieving a more equitable housing system for all Tasmanians. Are there additional or alternative more important levers that you believe should be addressed?**

- Build more social housing in places people want to live, near services and transport links.
- Improve tenants' rights and increase rental assistance.
- Restrict whole-house SSA by outlawing in certain residential zones, and rating and taxing SSAs at the same level as commercial buildings.
- Increasing rates and taxes on 'zombie' sub-divisions on which 'substantial commencement' may have occurred, but there has been no effort to develop them in a period of 3 years.
- Increasing rates and taxes on all residential-zoned vacant land, that has been vacant for two years.
- Increasing rates on all homes which are not a person's primary residence and are not let to long-term renters.
- Buying-back houses and subdivisions which are empty and dilapidated or undeveloped.
- Legislate to require a percentage of all new subdivisions to be set aside for affordable or social housing.
- Banning restrictive covenants that prevent land from being used for public or affordable housing.
- Prioritising housing for essential workers, Tasmanians and refugees.

## Question 2: Theme one identifies the need for 'more homes, built faster'. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

The Strategy concentrates primarily on building new houses (which is very important), but largely ignores the need to free-up homes and land, which are currently being held by investors but are either not being developed or are used as holiday homes or SSA. When we are facing a climate crisis and already exceeding planetary boundaries, we should maximise the utilisation of our existing housing stock, build first on brownfield sites, convert abandoned industrial and commercial properties, and utilise unused spaces such as above shop-fronts. There are additional social and productivity benefits of restricting SSAs and holiday homes, as it prevents the gutting of popular townships whereby locals are forced to live on the margins or move away.

## Question 3: Theme two centres on 'affordability in the private market'. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

Housing should be a human right, as fundamental as food, water and power. This principle should be foremost in any housing affordability vision, and be the tenet that all policy be tested against. It follows that houses should be **homes** first and foremost, rather than investments.

In 1981 social housing dwellings made up 4.9% of the total housing stock in Australia, but by 2021 this had dropped to 3.8%. Social housing increased by 53% in this 40 year period, while dwellings increased by 98%. Dwellings likely increased by substantially more than this, as the ABS figures for 2021 are for 'households', rather than 'dwellings'.

During this period, both federal and state governments have systematically starved public housing expenditure and concentrated instead on privatisation of the delivery of affordable housing, specifically rentals. Various fiscal measures have been used including negative gearing, capital gains tax decreases, land tax decreases, build to rent schemes, headworks holidays etc.

However, private investors are rarely driven by altruism. Pursuit of profit has resulted in a huge growth, particularly in the last 10 years, of whole-house short-stay accommodation (SSA), land-banking, and a preference for short-term tenancies and reduced tenancy rights. As housing supply constricted owing to fewer public homes being built and the rise of SSA, plus population growth, prices of housing and land increased dramatically.

This had a knock-on effect on the price of rentals and a massive reduction in vacancy levels, and has resulted inevitably in existing home-owners improving their wealth at the expense of those not yet on the property ladder. The wealthy home-owners have been able to multiply wealth by purchasing land and more property investments, further squeezing house supply and accelerating price inflation. Govt measures to assist first home owners have only worsened the situation, by further elevating prices.

This effect has been further proven today (30-6-23) with the release of a new study by the Tenants Union of Tasmania, which shows that the property portfolios of owners of whole-house SSAs is worth almost double the total wealth of the average Australian household (this analysis excludes non-property wealth and assets held on the mainland and overseas and thus the true level of inequality is likely to be far worse).

## Question 4: Theme three places ‘people at the centre’ of the draft Strategy. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

### Location and sustainability

Public housing should be primarily provided in medium and high density settings of mixed types of residences, retail and service centres, in towns and townships, including over shops, rather than extending into green-belts.

To help remove the stigma of public housing and avoid NIMBYism, new houses must be attractive, well-located, well-constructed and with 7-star energy efficiency. Maximising passive heating and cooling technologies, increasing the levels of plantings (for shade and heat mitigation), retaining permeable ground surfaces and including shared open spaces, will not only help future-proof housing against climate change, but also greatly decrease operating costs (which can often keep a person poor) and make them eminently liveable and desirable. All new public, social and affordable housing should be all-electric, fitted with solar panels, solar hot water and raintanks. No gas or wood-burners should be allowed, which would merely exacerbate greenhouse emissions; plus both are linked to adverse health-effects.

## Question 5: Theme four highlights ‘local prosperity’ as a priority. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

Providing the necessary level of support needed by people formerly homeless, those leaving prison, or with chronic health and mental health conditions, will also help to reduce the resistance to such housing from neighbours. The appropriate level of support will assist people to live independently, help them maintain their homes, reduce dependencies on drugs and alcohol, reduce petty crime and domestic violence, and engage with community. Support includes providing social connections and assistance into work. A job guarantee for all, plus excellent affordable public transport, would both be highly desirable additions to this support network, and help provide an environment that is not only sustainable environmentally, but nurturing of people.

## Question 6: Are there other ways the government could make its actions and progress to meet the proposed objectives more transparent and accessible?

It is suggested that an ‘affordable housing’ definition be developed. Currently there is no set definition and housing prices have long been dislocated from any relationship to construction costs. It is proposed that affordable housing be set at a selling price of a certain percentage (eg 15%) above rebuild cost, and that this be listed as a restrictive covenant on the title of a property.

## Question 7: Do you have any comment on what this draft Strategy does well?

I was very pleased to see that the strategy had evolved considerably from the first draft, based on the consultation process. It's good to know that submissions don't just disappear into the ether!

## Question 8: Is there anything you think the draft Strategy does not cover but should, or that it mentions but could be highlighted more?

Rather than measuring our economy with the narrow metric of GDP, it is recommended that a suite of wellbeing measures be developed, foremost of which should be what percentage of people are living in safe, affordable, energy efficient housing. The target must be 100% and we should dismantle systems that prioritise the interests of investors over the needs of all Tasmanians, in order to achieve this goal.

Jenny Cambers-Smith

Huon Valley Councillor, [jenny.camberssmith@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.camberssmith@gmail.com), [REDACTED]