

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence today.

I have rented for four decades, all my adult life.

I currently rent a three-bedroom townhouse in a suburb of Brisbane with my husband and two adult children, both at university. We have lived at our current home for two and a half years, since 2021.

We are on our third 12-months lease.

The first time we renewed our lease the rent increased \$25 per week, which was to be expected, and pretty reasonable.

This year however, our rent was increased 33%, an extra \$160 per week.

This was quite a shock and totally unexpected.

I attempted to negotiate a smaller increase, and made an offer of a \$130 extra a week, just \$30 less, but this was declined.

I checked with the Rental Tenants' Authority, and was told that the new weekly rent amount of \$650 was within fair market value for the area, and was therefore reasonable.

Rental vacancies in Brisbane at the time were less than 1%.

The size of the increase in rent this year is outside anything I have experienced in all my years of renting.

With low rental vacancy rates, high demand for properties and rent bidding in play, we decided to minimise disruption to the household and stay where we are as planned, in our local community, close to public transport and local services until the kids finish university. We like it here!

The property – the townhouse – is well maintained, newer and in better condition than previous houses we have rented. It has central air conditioning that works, and a dishwasher, finally! It is very compact, easier to maintain, less work.

There is however, a sting in the tail. The area, and townhouses in particular, have become highly sought after. Future large rent increases seem likely – the property next door had a \$100 weekly rent increase – and this is deeply concerning.

Large rent increases, propelled by market demand, are unreasonable. It diminishes our savings, and undermines our future prospects, to save for a small unit and for retirement, although as a household we have capacity to increase overall income in the coming months and years.

However, continued high demand for rental properties in the area and limited vacancies more widely leaves us and many others vulnerable and very exposed.

Our kids, and this is true for our friends too, don't expect to find rental properties of their own anytime soon, let alone save enough money to purchase their own property. They still live with us, and expect to do so for a good while longer.

What will help: Immediate intervention

1. We need an immediate cap on rent increases, a flat rate, or linked to the CPI.

Low rental vacancies and high demand means that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate large rent increases.

The proposal to limit rent increases to once every 12 months as a way of relieving rental pressure on tenants is absolute nonsense, as my own experience demonstrates.

2. Stability of tenancy through longer leases, for 5 and even 10 years, with an end to no cause eviction. Tenants need greater control over decision making about where they live and for how long.

Annual rent increases linked to CPI can be stipulated up front, allowing better planning and management of living situations, and greater security and well-being for tenants.

I have experienced an endless cycle of lease renewal every six or twelve months across four decades. Each approaching end of lease brought with it the possibility that I would have to, on someone else's say so, find somewhere else to live.

We have rented houses for twenty years in the same area, each time from "Mum and Dad" investors. Three times we had to leave at the end of a 6 or 12 months lease so the house could be sold vacant on possession. One time we moved to get away from a difficult landlord.

Time spent searching for a suitable place to live, attending property viewings (along with 30 or 40 or 50 other people), filling out rental applications, packing and moving, is time consuming, expensive, repetitive, counterproductive, and always, always, always, hugely anxiety producing.

Constant renewal of rental contracts every 6 or 12 months creates ongoing uncertainty and precarity. It diverts our attention away from security of home and place. Our basic, essential need for shelter is continually negotiated: it diminishes overall productivity, and undermines our sense of wellbeing and safety.

3. 'Renting' needs to be reframed in public discourse as a viable option, as the creative, collaborative process it actually is. People who rent are resourceful,

flexible, creative, adaptable, tenacious and incredibly hard working, and deserve recognition for being so.

At best, renting is a working relationship with mutual benefits for both parties. Renting (without being locked into a mortgage) has enabled me to make changes in my life when necessary, to adapt to different circumstances, to change career, at the end of a marriage, and to study as a mature age student.

By renting, I have been able to find modest housing for my family close to our school and community in an area where I could not otherwise have afforded to buy property, had I qualified for a bank loan.

How we pay for our home, whether we rent, own our home outright, or pay mortgage payments to a bank is beside the point. We all require a home and the type of tenure should not differentiate us one from the other (although of course it does).

Final comments

Renting should not be the system of duress it currently is for so many people.

Renting should not be a poverty trap. It should not require ever increasing amounts of money just to keep a roof over our head, diminishing savings, diminishing the ability of people to save for and purchase their own property, diminishing retirement funds.

More than a third of us rent, my children will too, they do not have access to the bank of Mum and Dad, it is simply not available to them.

The system cannot continue as it is: change is an absolute imperative.

Immediate rental accommodation for those who need it now, urgently, without delay. (Let's start with a tax on empty properties, there are several in my area, in walking distance.) With vacancy rates at historic lows, and a highly competitive, ever more expensive private rental market, housing is a national emergency.

The failure of the private rental market to provide affordable or even sufficient housing in a country as wealthy as Australia I find quite shocking. The provision of housing, of basic shelter for all people should be the highest priority of policy makers and governments. Immediate action is urgently needed now.

Thank you for your time.

With attachment.