

25 March 2015

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Equality Rights Alliance welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the **Senate Community Affairs References** Committee inquiry into the *Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services*.

Equality Rights Alliance

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together 62 organisations with an interest in advancing women's equality.

Recommendation

Reinstate funding to the three housing and homelessness community sector peak bodies, Homelessness Australia, Community Housing Federation of Australia and National Shelter.

Implications for the Federation White Paper

ERA is deeply concerned by the December DSS Housing and Homelessness funding decision which has resulted in the defunding of the three peak housing and homelessness bodies. The loss of funding for Homelessness Australia, the Community Housing Federation of Australia and National Shelter comes after a number of significant changes to the Federal Government housing and homelessness policy. These changes include the abolition of the National Rental Affordability Scheme, the COAG Reform Council, the COAG Select Council on housing and homelessness and the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness. This departure by the Federal Government from housing and homelessness has occurred without sufficient review, consultation or explanation.

ERA supports the Federation White Paper process to examine roles and responsibilities in relation to housing and homelessness policy. The Commonwealth has a long history of involvement in housing and

homelessness policy spanning 7 decades.¹ The White Paper process is an effective mechanism to engage the community on the most effective and efficient options for housing and homelessness reform. However, we are very concerned that the defunding of housing and homelessness peak bodies will result in the loss of critical voices which would otherwise strengthen the White Paper process. National Shelter, the Community Housing Federation of Australia and Homelessness Australia are vital conduits between government and the community sector and provide policy advice based on expertise, connection to the broader sector and cumulative experience and knowledge.² It is worth noting that the funding provided to these organisations was minimal and would not have significant budgetary implications.³

Furthermore, we are disappointed that the decision to defund these services has occurred after a rigorous tender process and shortly after the commencement of the White Paper process. The loss of these peak bodies pre-empts the White Paper and, as a result, weakens both its process and outcomes.

Australia continues to have one of the least affordable housing markets in the world;⁴ rates of rental stress are increasing,⁵ home ownership is in decline and the gap in houses that are affordable and available for low income earners sits at 500 000.⁶ This seemingly ad hoc decision to cancel \$21.13 million in housing and homelessness grants comes at a critical juncture and is marked by an overall lack of a cohesive national housing policy which would otherwise guide decisions on funding.

Finally, the fact that AHURI will no longer be funded from 2017-18 compounds the diminution of national-level housing data and research as a result of the defunding of the National Housing Supply Council.

Sincerely,



Helen Dalley-Fisher
Manager
Equality Rights Alliance

¹ P Troy, *Accommodating Australians: Commonwealth Government Involvement in Housing*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2012

² Inquiry into Affordable Housing, *Canberra Hearing*, Senate Economics References Committee, 11 February 2015, p.2

³ Approximately \$800 000 per annum

⁴ Demographia, 11th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2015, Missouri-Illinois, 2015

⁵ COAG Reform Council, *Affordable Housing 2010-11*, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney 2012

⁶ National Housing Supply Council, *State of Supply Report 2011*, Australian Government The Treasury, Canberra, 2011