

Local News

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Join the fight for tenants

By Natalie Dixon

THERE are plenty of reasons why the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) in Mackay shouldn't be axed.

Tomorrow, Housing minister Bruce Flegg will get to hear every one of them at a community cabinet in Proserpine.

TAAS representative Andrea Pozza has been given just 15 minutes to meet with the Minister and try to convince him to backflip on his terrible decision to axe their service that offers free information, advice and advocacy to thousands of North Queensland tenants and landlords every year.

Unless Mr Flegg changes his mind, the doors will close on TAAS on 31 October, leaving Mackay tenants nowhere to go for free advice other than the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) - a call centre in Brisbane. That is unless, of course, we speak up.

The Mackay Telegraph has joined the campaign to make Mr Flegg reinstate TAAS funding and we want your help.

Mr Flegg says the money saved by sacrificing TAAS will go towards building social housing. But its tenants, and not the State Government, which cover the lion's share of the cost of TAAS and its services.

The majority of TAAS funding comes from a pool of money managed by the RTA.



Koni Tsakonas and Andrea Pozza from the Mackay Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) are fighting for funding to help deliver free services and advice to the region's tenants. Photo Amanda Balmer

Money is made from the interest of tenants bonds, invested once they lodge their bond with the RTA.

According to the Tenants Union of Queensland, the RTA currently holds about 500,000 bonds with a value of \$644.4 million.

Their projected income from that interest for the 2011-2012 year is just short of \$41 million.

All the Mackay TAAS needs is just under \$200,000 a year to remain open.

This week The Mackay Telegraph contacted Mr Flegg's office asking him to detail just how much TAAS costs

the state government and if he was going to use the money from bond interest to build social housing. He didn't respond.

The team at Mackay TAAS covers an area from St Lawrence, west to Clermont and north to Bloomsbury, helping an average of 13 people a day, including the most vulnerable like those with disabilities.

Penny Carr from the Tenants Union of Queensland, who is also backing the campaign, said Mr Flegg was "dreaming" if he thought the RTA could cover the work done by TAAS. The RTA will be

forced to expand to cope with demand once TAAS closes its doors. The RTA is a centralised government agency that provides information only," she said.

"They play an impartial role in tenancy disputes and cannot provide advice to tenants, advocate on behalf of tenants or assist tenants to write letters or prepare for tribunal hearings.

"By cutting the TAAS funding, the LNP is ensuring the expansion of a Brisbane based government agency, at the expense of regional centers and making sure tenants are left out in the dark.

"This is a bad decision and a false economy. A few hundred people may get access to government housing, but over 100,000 tenants each year will be left out in the cold without access to in-depth advice and support."

If you disagree with the government's withdrawal of TAAS funding let them know. Write to Mr Flegg and premier Campbell Newman and ask them to reinstate the programme, tell them the decision to axe TAAS was an ill-informed one. Contact your state and federal member and get them fighting for TAAS too. For more information and templates of letters to send to the LNP go to www.tuq.org.au

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