

**Queensland Shelter
Stakeholder Consultation**

Summary Report & Q Shelter Update

June 2008



Introduction and Purpose

In July 2007 the Minister for Housing announced new funding arrangements for Queensland's housing peak bodies. Queensland Shelter received additional funding, while the state government ceased funding the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition, Queensland Disability Housing Coalition and Queensland Community Housing Coalition.

Queensland Shelter is now expected to undertake a wider range of roles to represent the sector. To help prepare for this broader role and increased expectations, Shelter commissioned 99 Consulting to consult with its stakeholders.

During late 2007, interviews were held with a range of stakeholders, from the peak organisations affected by the review to local service providers and Shelter branch delegates. A written survey of members, completed by 45 respondents, provided additional information.

Findings from this consultation and research have been grouped in this report under three headings:

- A. Proactive policy
- B. Positive relationships
- C. A strong organisation.

In each section of this report, a short response from Queensland Shelter outlines action to date relevant to these findings.

A. Proactive Policy

In the course of consultations, stakeholders raised a wide range of housing policy issues which were important to them, and which they would like Shelter's support to address. The key message for Shelter about its policy priorities was that it needs to advocate on housing issues in a way that makes a difference, in particular focusing on increased supply of affordable and social housing.

Even in this brief consultation process, one of the key issues which emerged was the wide range of housing issues that concern people in the community sector and elsewhere.

These can be roughly classified as follows:

- issues of social housing policy and delivery, including the implementation of the One Social Housing System
- issues of broader housing policy, including the interaction of housing with the planning system, infrastructure development and economic policy, as well as the delivery of "affordable housing"
- issues related to housing but also involving other issues, such as the complex set of issues which leads to homelessness
- specific issues relating to particular population groups, including young people, older people, women, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, and refugees.

It is not likely to be realistic to address all of the issues raised during this consultation, and Shelter will need to set priorities over the next couple of years.

Members' priorities

In the member survey, Shelter members were asked to rate the importance of a range of current housing issues. Increasing the supply of affordable housing was clearly rated as the top priority issue by the majority of respondents. Three other issues also scored highly in terms of perceived priority for Shelter to address. These are:

- improved Commonwealth response to housing issues
- improving housing and support services for homeless people
- development of innovative affordable housing models.

Key Policy Challenges

- *How will Shelter ensure that the voices and issues of special interest groups, including young people, older people, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees are not marginalised within the organisation?*
- *How will Shelter set priorities among the broad range of housing issues of concern to its members?*
- *What balance will Shelter strike between a focus on the details of the social housing system, and broad housing policy issues?*
- *How will Shelter respond to new developments such as the creation of the Urban Land Development Authority and the new programs promised by the incoming Commonwealth Government?*

One Social Housing System

Officers of the Department of Housing and the Housing Minister's office identified the implementation of the One Social Housing System (OSHS) as their top priority. Community stakeholders also raised the OSHS implementation frequently in the course of discussions, focusing on issues surrounding its implementation and its impact on particular social groups.

Housing for Particular Social Groups

One of the issues raised in common by representatives of Indigenous people, young people, people with disabilities, and migrants and refugees is their concern that their voices can be lost in mainstream organisations. This has been the justification for the creation of specialised peaks, both in the housing sector and in the wider community services sector.

Those consulted outlined housing-related issues for each of these social groups that will continue to need to be raised and addressed. The need to adequately take on board the views of these particular groups is one of the key challenges facing Shelter.

Housing and Urban Development

The link between housing and urban development has been recognised by Shelter and others in the sector for quite some time. The creation of the Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA) in 2007, with a mandate to create affordable housing as part of coordinated development plans in "hot-spot" areas, is a serious attempt in Queensland to use the planning system to bring about affordable housing outcomes. There is an opportunity for Queensland Shelter to build a working relationship with the ULDA on these issues, especially working in partnership with other players such as the Urban Research Program at Griffith University, and various housing industry organisations.

Homelessness

One of the questions for Queensland Shelter is the extent to which it gets involved in homelessness issues. Shelter has always been active in this issue to some extent, through its auspicing of the Homelessness Taskforce and through its advocacy for better housing for low income households. However, it has not attempted to take on the range of issues involved in homelessness such as issues around mental and physical health, the use of public space, interactions with the criminal justice system, and issues around the homelessness service system.

Proactive Policy – an update from Q Shelter

Q Shelter is a housing peak that provides coordinated policy advice on behalf of parties with an interest in the housing system as it impacts on low and moderate income households. Within low and moderate income households there are a number of overlapping groups with specific or additional housing issues.

Cutting across the experiences of all those groups are the issues the stakeholder report has highlighted as priorities for our membership, including housing and support solutions for homelessness and innovative affordable housing responses. We understand that there needs to be local, state and federal level involvement in these solutions. While our focus will always be on Queensland, we have strong links with what is happening federally through National Shelter, and we are building stronger linkages with local government.

Q Shelter is mindful of the need to ensure that our positions reflect the experiences of a range of stakeholders including special interest groups. Our strategies for this include:

- our specialist branch structures which currently include a Women's Branch, Seniors' Branch, Indigenous Branch and ASHRAM (incorporating the perspectives of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds)
- our work plan and policy platform which are developed and reviewed in consultation with our branches and delegates
- a responsive team environment where staff members belong to multiple teams including a 'health and housing' grouping and an 'access to appropriate housing' grouping
- a commitment to ensure that all groups' perspectives are incorporated in our policy positions through consultation with individuals and organisations, including where a group is particularly affected by an issue
- specialised forums or events to feed into broader policy processes, where appropriate. An example is a youth specific forum to be part of our planned One Social Housing System project, which is to be held over the next year.

B. Positive relationships

Interviews revealed some priorities for Shelter in developing working relationships.

Specialist peak bodies

Peak organisations from the community, disability, youth, seniors, women's, multi-cultural and local government sectors reported housing as an important issue for their constituents. These peaks saw Shelter as playing a lead role on housing issues, and were prepared to support this with information from their constituents.

Key Relationship Challenges

- *What are the most important new and existing relationships to be developed beyond the community housing sector?*
- *How can Shelter provide more support to branches and "grass-roots" members?*
- *How can Shelter build constructive working relationships with the recently defunded housing peaks?*
- *How can Shelter balance its financial relationship with Government with the need to be an independent, and sometimes critical, voice?*

Branches, members and regional relationships

It has proven difficult to maintain viable Shelter branches outside Brisbane given lack of resources and competing demands. Branches expressed a need for increased support and an increased Shelter presence regionally as part of the increased resourcing.

Queensland Shelter has three specialist branches – the ASHRAM branch, the Indigenous branch and the Women's Housing Network. Those consulted reported a need for additional support. Shelter has also acted as auspice for the Homelessness Taskforce, raising the question of the extent to which it intends to take on the issue of homelessness.

Housing peak bodies

With the possible exception of the Queensland Public Tenants Association (who had yet to make a final decision at the time of the consultations) all the existing housing peaks intend to continue operating despite reduced resources.

While the defunded organisations expressed a willingness to work with Shelter in future, they suggested introducing relationship mechanisms including "fee-for-service" arrangements, partnerships and MOUs or contracts.

Consultation participants advised Shelter to:

- build and maintain respectful relationships with the other peaks and give weight to their views on issues related to the people and organisations they represent
- build its own expertise in the areas covered by these peaks with their help and support, in order to be able to present issues to the Government in a knowledgeable, constructive way

- work at both regional and State-wide level to break down barriers between different parts of the sector.

Some suggested that rebuilding trust with some defunded peaks will take time and a demonstration of goodwill.

Government

The Queensland Department of Housing is Shelter's main funding body, and much of Shelter's policy advice and advocacy is directed to them.

Consultation with department representatives suggested that the department expected Shelter to deliver:

- well-researched advice which reflects the diversity of views in the sector
- active leadership
- respectful and challenging interaction with the Minister and staff.

Likewise the Minister's Office advised that the Minister wants Shelter to be a strong voice for the sector, providing professional, strategic input.

The key challenge for Shelter is to strike the balance between respectful interaction and critical input. One of the key concerns expressed by many in the sector was that the outcome of the peaks review could be a compliant peak organisation. Over the next 12 months people in the sector will be watching closely to see how independent Shelter is. On the other hand, Shelter will want to make the most of the goodwill that currently exists towards it to build positive, robust relations with the Department and Minister.

There are opportunities for Queensland Shelter to work with other Queensland Government agencies on housing-related projects. Relevant agencies include:

- human service departments such as Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland
- planning, infrastructure and economic development departments such as Urban Land Development Authority
- central agencies such as Premiers and Treasury.

Academic Institutions

The AHURI UQ Centre and the Urban Research Program at Griffith University expressed an interest in closer partnerships with Queensland Shelter to engage on issues and undertake joint research.

Positive Relationships – an update from Q Shelter

Specialist peak bodies

Shelter recognises the interplay between housing and a range of other human needs and issues. We work closely with a number of other specialist peak bodies including QCOSS. A major joint project going forward with QCOSS is the SAAP network project funded by the Department of Communities.

Q Shelter are part of the Queensland Futures Forum made up of peak bodies and state wide organisations who are working together on issues of concern to the whole of the community sector. We will continue to look for opportunities to work in partnership with other peak bodies where we have a joint area of concern.

Branches, members and regional relationships

Shelter's branch structure is at the centre of our role as a state-wide organisation. We appreciate that our branches are volunteer structures and are pleased to have increased capacity to support them. Some of the strategies Shelter will use to further support our branches include:

- a full time Branches Officer (role increased from 0.6)
- a 'patron policy officer' approach where each branch is linked to a policy staffer (including the Executive Officer and Operations Manager) to ensure that branches can build strong relationships with a broader range of Shelter staff
- an enhanced branch grant program to support branch projects such as the current Women's Branch project looking at the connections between domestic violence and access to appropriate housing, and the Logan/LANARTA Branch's initiative to work with local real estate agents to encourage supportive attitudes to struggling renters
- base level funding available to all branches to assist with meeting costs such as room hire and catering
- enhanced efforts to engage greater numbers and a broader range of stakeholders in branch and organisational activities
- development of a branches' communication strategy and advice from the Communications Officer (to be rolled out over coming months).

Housing peak bodies

Q Shelter has made efforts to convene further regular round table meetings of peaks. These meetings have always been difficult to pull together because of the competing demands on peaks' time. Q Shelter has also proposed a joint protocol for working with other housing peaks and continues to work with the peaks involved to finalise this agreement.

We have also established regular management level meetings with the Queensland Disability Housing Coalition, at their request.

Government

Q Shelter has a constructive working relationship with the Department of Housing. We also have direct links with the Department of Communities and the Residential Tenancy Authority and have recently started to build links with the Urban Land Development Authority. Housing relates to a number of government agencies and over the past two years we have also met with Police, Health and Local Government and Planning.

Academic institutions

Queensland Shelter has developed relationships with a range of academic institutions. We do regular guest lectures at U.Q., Griffith University and the Queensland University of Technology. We have offered student placements to a number of social science faculties and also provide input to the AHURI research unit at the University of Queensland and receive policy inputs from U.Q., QUT and Griffith University staff.

C. A strong organisation

In the member survey, members were asked to rate a number of skill and activity areas which they saw as important for Shelter to develop. Their top five priorities were:

- improved leadership in the housing sector
- more lobbying/campaigning on housing issues
- stronger cross-sectoral relationships
- increased media coverage of housing issues
- more support for branches.

These priorities are strongly compatible with each other, with members seeing the need for a stronger sector and a greater public and political presence.

Comments from members focused on a number of related issues including:

- stronger lobbying and campaigning with all three levels of government
- working towards a socially inclusive approach to the development and implementation of policy with the Department of Housing
- more contact with and support for members and branches, including a number commenting on the desirability of regionally-based staff
- a number of strong messages that special interest groups should not be marginalised within Shelter.

Key Organisational Challenges

- *What staffing mix is needed to achieve the organisation's priorities?*
- *How can Shelter resource better support for branches?*

Staffing Mix

In terms of the skills and strengths it needs to undertake its broader role, the key priority was seen to be developing a diverse and highly skilled staff team. Some of the following have been requested or suggested by various stakeholders:

- staff with specialised skills in working with young people and people with disabilities
- a designated Indigenous position
- knowledge of areas related to housing, including homelessness, planning, economics and business
- skills in lobbying and campaign development
- skills in branch and network development
- high level skills in written communication and marketing in the broad sense of the term
- policy development.

Ultimately the staff mix will need to be determined by the work priorities set by the organisation.

Strong Organisation – an update from Queensland Shelter

Stronger lobbying and campaigning with all three levels of government

Q Shelter understands that housing is an issue that is relevant to all three levels of government. We are already working strongly at the State and Federal levels and see the importance of facilitating strong understandings of how Queensland can take advantage of Federal initiatives such as the National Affordable Rental Scheme and the Homelessness Green Paper process. The Queensland perspective on the new National Affordable Housing Agreement will be a major area of work for us in the coming months.

Working towards a socially inclusive approach to the development and implementation of policy with the Department of Housing

As a membership organisation Q Shelter is committed to forming policy positions grounded in our members' experiences. As a funded peak it is also our clear role to take the messages of our members and stakeholders to decision makers in Government.

More contact with and support for members and branches, including a number commenting on the desirability of regionally-based staff

One of the most immediate advantages of Q Shelter's improved resource base is our ability to better support our branches, as outlined in the Relationships section of this document.

Staff with a strong skills base and a number of strong messages that special interest groups should not be marginalised within Shelter

Queensland Shelter has recruited a strong staff team with a range of skills to work across the range of housing issues experienced by low and moderate income Queenslanders, including special interest groups.

Some of the skills and approaches we have kept in mind while recruiting include:

- a balanced staff team who bring a range of personal and professional perspectives
- policy staff skilled in participatory research methods
- an identified Indigenous position with the staff member appropriately skilled to work across all areas of housing policy
- a communication specialist to work across the organisation.