



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

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Residential Tenancies Tribunal

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (14:45): My question is to the Minister for Business Services and Consumers. Can the minister inform the house about the strategies that have been implemented to make the Residential Tenancies Tribunal run more efficiently?

The Hon. J.R. RAU (Enfield—Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Business Services and Consumers) (14:45): I thank the honourable member for his question. As members are aware, the government has responded directly to the issue of unsatisfactory waiting times to have matters heard before the Residential Tenancies Tribunal. I can advise the house that waiting times have improved dramatically in 2012.

In April 2012, the Commissioner for Consumer Affairs undertook an internal review of the operations of the tribunal. To ensure the tribunal ran more efficiently, a number of strategies were utilised, including: ensuring that the staffing levels in the tribunal were sufficient to deal with the demand by utilising temporary staff; introducing a new conciliation model for

matters before the tribunal; updating computer systems within the tribunal; commencing hearings earlier in the day; operating an additional hearing room; establishing procedures to deal with frivolous applications; reviewing and updating tribunal proforma; increasing delegations; and group listing vacant possession applications.

An important development in the tribunal was the creation of a pilot program for conciliation in June, similar to that used in the Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal of New South Wales. This new conciliation model brings parties together at the tribunal to resolve a dispute through mutual agreement without the need for a full hearing, without a formal determination being imposed upon them.

Mrs REDMOND: Point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that the Attorney-General's matter may refer to a matter that is before the house, that is already listed on our *Notice Paper*.

The SPEAKER: I am sure the Attorney-General is very aware of that standing order.

The Hon. J.R. RAU: I'm talking about—

Mrs Redmond interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Attorney?

The Hon. J.R. RAU: I am not answering a question about the Residential Tenancies Act, if that's what the Leader of the Opposition is concerned about. There's a difference between the act and the administration of the office. I am talking about the administration of the office.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Deputy Premier.

The Hon. J.R. RAU: Madam Speaker, the member for Kavel at least is interested in this. Anyway, this new conciliation model brings together parties in the tribunal to resolve a dispute through mutual agreement without the need for a full

hearing, without a formal determination being imposed upon them.

The pilot program has seen the current time frame for listing a bond or compensation application, lodged by a party seeking moneys owed after a tenancy agreement has ended, reduced to 15 days, down from over 90 days at the beginning of the year. That's a great effort by everybody in the office. They're doing a fantastic job.

Overall, the model has seen significant success, with over 80 per cent of matters listed being resolved by conciliation. I am pleased to advise that it has now been progressively implemented as business as usual. Although members would be aware that listing times for matters will always fluctuate according to the complexity and urgency, I am pleased to advise the house that the current average listing times for the more urgent types of matters are as follows.

Vacant possession matters are currently being listed for hearing in 11 days, which is a reduction from 34 days at the beginning of the year. Matters to vary or set aside a previous tribunal order are being listed for hearing within one week. For termination based on tenant conduct, matters are being listed for hearing within one week. Immediate termination of the tenancy agreement due to serious damage or personal injury matters are being listed for hearing within three days.

It should also be noted that investments by the government into the tribunal's information technology systems have provided additional efficiencies. Stage 1 of the initiative, Bonds Online, went live on 8 November 2012. This means that agents, landlords and tenants can now access information relating to the status of a bond through a new online service. Other government agencies who are authorised to access certain bond information will also be able to do so via a secure online portal, rather than through a time-consuming, paper-based request process.

The next major phase of this project, which is expected to be rolled out in 2013, is to develop the system to also handle bond lodgements and refunds online. This will take away—

Mr GARDNER: Point of order: sessional order 2—we are up to about 4½ minutes now.

The Hon. J.R. RAU: I was interrupted.

Mr Gardner interjecting:

The Hon. J.R. RAU: Very nice of you; very generous of you. Are you the Speaker now?

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! I will give the minister a few more seconds but, minister, your time, according to this clock, has expired.

The Hon. J.R. RAU: I am just coming to the climax, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Thank you.

Members interjecting:

The Hon. J.R. RAU: Do I need to start again?

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister.

The Hon. J.R. RAU: This will take away the paperwork and allow a much smoother processes for tenants and landlords. I look forward to the government continuing to make further improvements to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal because this side of the house is committed to delivering better outcomes for all South Australians. This is because the government has a positive and forward-looking vision for this state. It is a can-do government.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bragg.