



# June 2024 edition

Walawaani njindiwan!

## Community Engagement Information Sessions

You may have noticed we've been holding a series of information sessions in our Batemans Bay office. These are specially designed for our tenants to provide input and feedback. They are also an opportunity to connect, share, and learn together.

The topics we've covered so far are:

- *All about rent reviews*
- *How we manage vacancies*

In these sessions we also explained why it's important for us to manage rent arrears carefully.

Are there any other topics you would like us to cover? Please email your suggestions to [media@searms.com.au](mailto:media@searms.com.au)

Keep an eye out for our next session on **25th July** – ***How we manage repairs and maintenance.***

## SEARMS rent reviews are now underway

Our last community engagement session was about the rent review process.

A large number of people who came along told us they were unsure about the differences across the various property owners and their policies. It helps if you look at SEARMS as being similar to a commercial real estate agent, such as LJ Hooker, who manage properties on behalf of owners. With SEARMS, these owners could be AHO, Local Aboriginal Lands Councils and even ourselves for our own properties. Just like each tenant has a set of rules internally, property owners have different rules that apply. If you are unsure who owns the property you currently live in, feel free to contact us and we can provide this information.

Prices continue to rise on everything – electricity, wages, food, rates, insurances to name a few. This is one of the reasons why most rent setting policies requires all occupants over 18 years to provide income statements to that we can make sure we set rents correctly. We rely on your honesty to ensure we calculate the rents correctly for each family type. You should also note that Centrelink Provides CRA (Commonwealth rent assistance) which offsets your out-of-pocket rental expense. If you require more details or want to discuss further contact us.

## **SEARMS Vacancies**

It is not often we have properties becoming vacant! We list our vacancies on RealEstate.com send an SMS to all our tenants to alert them of the listing. We also share the information on our social media.

## **Tenants Advisory Group**

We are pleased to congratulate the members of the newly formed Tenant Advisory Group – TAG for short. These members self-nominated for the positions after we put out a call earlier this year. We will shortly announce the names of these new members.

Our new TAG members will now receive training and support to prepare for their position. Their main role is to advocate for tenants needs to our Board and executive. This will include providing advice on our housing policies, procedures, and general service delivery. We are looking forward to working with them to help us improve our service to tenants.

## **You may be eligible for an energy rebate**

If you receive the Family Tax Benefit you may be eligible for the 2023-24 Family Energy Rebate of up to \$180 to help pay your electricity bills. You could also receive a one-off National Energy Bill Relief Household Payment as a lump sum of up to \$500. Applications close 11pm on Sunday 16 June 2024. To apply, go to this website [energy.nsw.gov.au/rebates](https://energy.nsw.gov.au/rebates)

## **SEARMS secondary dwellings update**

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond our control, a range of events has caused a delay in the completion of the secondary dwellings currently under construction in Batemans Bay. While we are doing our best to get the development completed, most of these matters are out of our hands. Among other things, COVID shutdowns are still impacting contractor availability and, in some instances, unviable cost escalations due to supply and trade shortages.

We understand your frustration regarding these delays. We also understand that our engagement has not been as strong as we all would like. This was mostly due to internal staff shortages and our focus diverted to other issues. Our aim is to keep you up to date with developments from now on so you know what is happening, and when. Moving forward, we:

- will post regular updates on the completion schedule of the dwellings on our website see [News and Events – SEARMS Community Housing Aboriginal Corporation](#)
- have designated our Asset Manager, George Carpenter, as the tenant and contractor liaison on this project from now until completion for those directly impacted by the delays – you can contact George on 1800 138 425.

Until Council and Certifier inspections and approvals take place, only authorised trade staff can enter the sites. We ask that until then, you do not enter any of these sites. While the dwellings may look liveable, they aren't. These sites are still under the Builders Warranty and Insurance which does not cover any periods of occupation by residents. Any unauthorised access could delay projects even further and lead to possible site shutdowns by the regulator. Power, water, and sewerage connections are not finalised yet so any occupation could lead to serious health outcomes to occupiers and the public.

Most of our Primary Tenants have already put forward their preferred applicants for the 2nd dwelling. We will be working with them to assess eligibility and set up new leases with these tenants before occupation.

We appreciate your patience and complying with the correct processes in releasing these new developments for occupation.

### **Community Connections**

We will shortly be launching our new Community Connections quarterly e-newsletter, with the first issue in June/July. Apart from tenants and residents, we will also send this newsletter to our community partners. The aim of the newsletter is to help create a positive community for our tenants and to raise our profile with the broader community. In short, telling our story. So if you or your tenant community has done something different, interesting or positive that you'd like to share, let us know. Contact us or talk with your Housing Officer.

### **Our staff in the news!**

Congrats to our staff members who recently graduated from their Certificate IV in Housing Cadetship. The program provides an opportunity for cadets to commence studying while they undertake paid employment for 12-months in application, allocation, tenancy, and asset development. The news caught the eye of national and local media with ABC national interviewing former cadet Iesha Simon, and local paper Bay Post interviewing former cadet Baeden Davis. To hear Iesha's interview [Listen here](#)

### **NAIDOC Week**

Join the local community in celebrating 2024 NAIDOC Week on Saturday 13 July with the theme *Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud*. This year's theme celebrates the unyielding spirit of our communities and invites all to stand in solidarity, amplifying the voices that have long been silenced. For more information visit [Mogo Big Day Out NAIDOC 2024 | Facebook](#)

### **Reconciliation Week**

Last week, our offices were closed in recognition of National Reconciliation Day on 27<sup>th</sup> May. The dates for this important week remain the same each year, 27 May to 3 June. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey – the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court Mabo decision. Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We all have a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures

### **Contact us**

If you have any questions about anything in this newsletter please contact us. You will find our contact details on our [web page](#)

Don't forget to connect with us on [Facebook](#)



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