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BUILDING SUPPORT FOR HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES – ACTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Introduction/Background

In August 2007, the Co-operatives Representative Council organised a tour of several Housing Co-operatives with the Hon Jay Weatherill, Minister for Housing. A mini-bus was hired and together with several members of the Co-operatives Representative Council, the Minister and one of his advisers visited properties owned by four different Housing Co-operatives.

The opportunity was taken to explain to the Minister the many advantages of Housing Co-operatives, to showcase their achievements and benefits and to discuss recent difficulties. The tour concluded with a lunch at the offices of the Community Housing Council of SA.

Participating Housing Co-operative members believe that the tour was successful in giving the Minister new insights into the work and achievements of Housing Co-operatives.

Discussion among members of the Co-operatives Representative Council following the tour focused on the idea of Housing Co-operatives taking action of a similar nature at the local level.

This document proposes several ways in which Housing Co-operatives can initiate and undertake such action.

Aims of Local Action

Local action has several aims:

- Help the participating Housing Co-operatives achieve their own goals
- Build awareness of and support for Housing Co-operatives among Members of Parliament, local Councils and other key stakeholders
- Familiarise local stakeholders with the Housing Co-operatives in their area and the work they do
- Promote the achievements of Housing Co-operatives in meeting the housing needs of low-to-moderate income earners
- Help set the scene for further growth in the Housing Co-operatives program.

Suggestions for Local Action

The centrepiece of local action could be a bus tour for selected stakeholders. To avoid overloading stakeholders, a number of Housing Co-operatives in the same area could consider banding together and conducting a joint event.

The following is a suggested list of stakeholders but this could easily be added to:

- Your local State Member of Parliament (could be more than one depending on your area of operation)
- Your local federal Member of Parliament (could be more than one depending on your area of operation)

- The CEO of your local Council or his/her delegate eg Community Services Manager
- Senior staff of any significant and relevant community organisations operating in your area
- The Manager of your local Housing SA office.

It is suggested that you aim to show the tour party about four or five properties, depending on your geographical spread and the diversity of members and properties. Aim to show properties illustrating the range of work you do eg older versus newer properties; larger versus smaller properties; or clusters versus stand-alone properties.

The mood of the tour should be positive, ie;

- Concentrate on your achievements
- Tell the stories of how members have been helped by the Housing Co-operative
- Emphasise the benefits of Housing Co-operatives.

This does not mean you cannot discuss any problems or issues you are having, just place them in context. Try and showcase any special achievements of your Housing Co-operative eg in providing sustainable housing; in helping people with disabilities; in connecting members up to other services; in building design; or any awards you have won.

It is suggested the tour finish with a morning or afternoon tea or lunch. Make sure you have some written information available about your Housing Co-operative.

Other local action that you could undertake includes:

- Invitations to key local stakeholders to attend your AGM
- Circulate Annual Reports to key local stakeholders
- Distribution of your newsletter (if you have one) to local stakeholders
- Hold an occasional get-together eg a BBQ and invite key local stakeholders
- One-on-one approaches to key local stakeholders about important issues
- Send a delegation to your local MP or Council
- Maintain a photo album with photos of your properties and major events, for display to stakeholders.

Resources

The Community Housing Council of SA is always willing to provide advice to Housing Co-operatives about this or any other matter.

To find out your State Electorate:

- Visit the State Electoral office website at <http://www.seo.sa.gov.au> and follow the links to Electoral Districts and Maps.

To find out your Federal Electorate:

- Visit the Australian Electoral Commission website at <http://www.aec.gov.au> and follow the links to electoral maps or electorates by State.

To find out your local Council – consult your latest rate accounts.

To find out the names of any local community groups – try your local Council office or community information service or visit Community Information Strategies SA at <http://www.infosearchweb.com> and conduct a search for your Council area(s).

Mini-buses can be easily hired from a number of companies. You may be able to obtain a discount if you explain you are from a community organisation. To drive a twelve-seater, you should only require a standard car driver's license. Half-day hire should cost around \$200-\$250 (2007 prices).