

For immediate release
29 September 2009

Tenants Union of Victoria Ltd
ACN 081 348 227
55 Johnston Street
Fitzroy 3065
Admin 9411 1444
Fax 9416 0513



Coronial findings a catalyst for action

Today Coroner Peter White found two people died in an October 2006 rooming house fire due to the practices of an unscrupulous operator and a systems failure by regulatory agencies. The findings graphically illustrate the need for the Victorian Government to take action and improve the regulation of the rooming house sector, said the Tenants Union of Victoria today.

"The Coroner has found clear evidence of the failure of the regulatory and enforcement systems. He found the operators constructed a wall of secrecy to isolate themselves from regulatory authorities. They developed a deliberate strategy based on avoiding detection and compliance with their legal duties. Ultimately they have been able to fly under the regulatory radar," said Mark O'Brien, Tenants Union of Victoria CEO.

The Tenants Union of Victoria supports the Coroner's recommendations and looks forward to their implementation.

"Private, for profit rooming house operators now dominate the rooming house sector, charging up to \$300 a week for single rooms. In many cases, rooming house rents are greater than that for a one bedroom flat in the same suburb. We receive complaints on a daily basis about exorbitant rents, illegal evictions and violence and intimidation by rooming house operators."

"The Tenants Union of Victoria hopes this tragedy spurs the Government to implement the Coroner's recommendations to improve the regulatory and compliance system. In particular, we urge the Government to implement the Coroner's recommendation to develop a licensing system for all rooming house operators, including the requirement that operators are fit and proper people."

"We believe that only a licensing system, combined with improved compliance activity, can achieve better practices in an under regulated market where there are no effective prohibitions on a person from exploiting another under the guise of providing a community service. The Government will fail thousands of vulnerable Victorians if this recommendation is not enacted."

The Coroner's findings come just two months after the Premier John Brumby announced a rooming house task force to report to the government on new standards and enforcement processes for rooming houses. The findings of the report have not yet been made public.

For further information please contact:
Mark O'Brien, 0417 133 195.