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NEWS



QCAT applications skyrocket in the wake of Cyclone Debbie

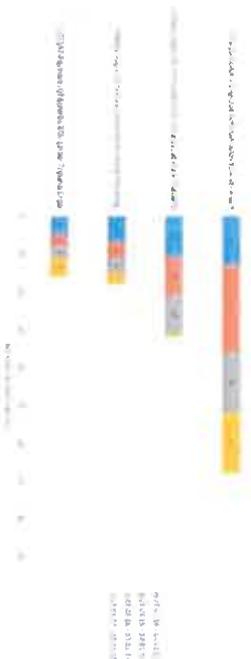
by Peter Carruthers

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APPLICATIONS by lessors to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal for tenants falling to vacate a property before the nominated handover date have jumped 41.6 per cent in the 10 months since Cyclone Debbie hit the Whitsunday last March.

Solicitor at Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Nikki Hancock said it was an indicator that many tenants simply had nowhere to go after rental vacancy rates plummeted to 2.1 per cent in January.

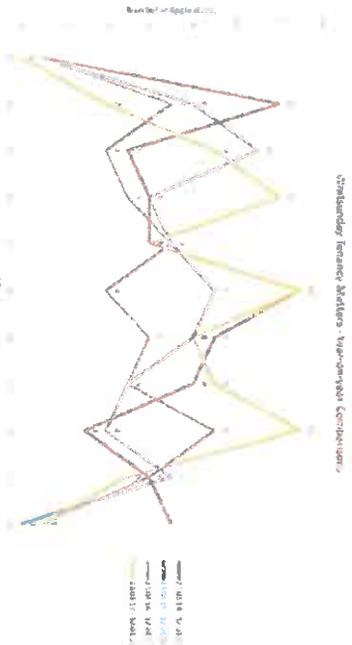


QCAT data showing frequency of tenancy disputes in the Whitsundays.

In regard to real estate agents raising rents, Ms Hancock said she recently had a call from a tenant who was coming to terms with a rental increase from \$700 to \$960 per week.

"It was basically find a new lease at this amount or we will give you your two months notice."

Ms Hancock spoke of a culture of fear among tenants who were too afraid to stand up for their rights and demand landlords comply with the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act. "If they start that process they are afraid they are going to be evicted or their lease won't be renewed," she said.



QCAT graph showing year on year tribunal applications.

rang them to say we have been told to put this mouldy carpet out on the balcony and they responded by saying 'you are not a priority', she claimed.

"They told us to move the bed back into the mouldy room and that they didn't care."

After contacting the Residential Tenants Authority Ms Dobbins was advised to breach the agent.

"They then dropped the rent by \$100 but still didn't do anything while we were there," she said.

In September, six months after the cyclone, Ms Dobbins was forced to vacate the unit so repairs could be made.

She then learnt the agent expected a bond clean and professional carpet clean of floor coverings that were only going to be ripped up.

"The cleaner was disgusted the fact that the real estate was making her clean the carpet and the carpet guys arrived to measure up while there," Ms Dobbins said. "She was horrified by what they were making us do."

Andrea Kriwonosow has moved into a cyclone-damaged property in Cannonvale.

<https://www.whitsundaytimes.com.au/news/qcat-applications-skyrocket-in-the-wake-of-cyclone/3329316/>



Full time carer Noella Dobbins and her husband Andrew at their new home in Proserpine this week.

Picture: Peter Carnuthers

bonds without proper cause and taking advantage of low vacancy rates at the expense of current renters.

Ms Hancock said many people were leaving the Whitsundays off the back of increased rental demand and subsequent rental increases.

"I have heard of a lot of people coming to Mackay and now our vacancy rate is decreasing now as well," she said. "And some people are stuck in a situation where they have nowhere to move or signing up to leases they can't afford and from that they are having other financial problems."

When signing a six-month lease last week Ms Kriwonosow said she had been told the rent would go up by \$75 a week if she chose to renew the lease for another six months.

"We asked for a 12-month lease and they went 'no'. It's so they can keep bumping the rent up every six months," she claimed.

Ms Kriwonosow said she considered herself a "mother" to the Whitsunday community for 25 years.

"I always give people a home, a bed and find people work. I think this is just wrong," she said.

Ms Kriwonosow said she felt so strongly about the rental situation in Cannonvale and Airlie Beach after the cyclone she had written an email to the Federal Member George Christensen asking him to help "sort the rorts".

She has also contacted the Queensland Premier's office.

Mr Christensen's office told the Whitsunday Times he did not wish to comment on the issue.

The Cannonvale local said agents were withholding rental bonds without proper cause and taking advantage of low vacancy rates at the expense of current renters.



