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ANNUAL REPORT

**Residential Tenancies Authority**

2019–20

Letter of compliance

28 August 2020

**The Honourable Mick de Brenni MP**

**Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology, Minister for Sport**

GPO Box 2457

Brisbane Qld 4001

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the Annual Report 2019–20 and financial statements for the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA).

I certify this Annual Report complies with:

* the prescribed requirements of the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* (Qld) and the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2009* (Qld), and
* the detailed requirements set out in the *Annual Report requirements for Queensland Government agencies.*

A checklist outlining compliance with the annual reporting requirements can be found on 87 of this report.

Yours sincerely

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**Paul Melville**

Board Chair, Residential Tenancies Authority

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Chair’s message

It gives me great pleasure to present the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) Annual Report for 2019-20 outlining the RTA’s efforts and achievements to further its vision of renting that works for all Queenslanders.

The highlights of the 2019-20 financial year for the RTA were:

* approving a four-year Strategic Plan which ensured the customer remains at the centre of our work;
* continuing work to implement the changes arising from the COVID-19 Regulations;
* expanding stakeholder forums with organisations that touch our industry (including visits to Townsville and Roma), and most importantly,
* assisting Queenslanders whose tenancies were impacted by COVID-19.

The new Strategic Plan outlines the RTA’s direction and objectives for the next four years. It retains a strong focus on customer service and continues our ongoing endeavours to provide digital solutions as an option so customers can more easily access RTA services.

A strong focus in 2019-20 was to extend our regional connections. The RTA Board met in Townsville in October 2019 and met with the local rental sector, most of whom had been impacted by the floods in February 2019. To support the launch of the RTA Regional Roadshow, the Board met in Roma in February 2020 and engaged with the rental community there that was suffering from the impacts of drought at the time. These regional visits enabled the RTA to more deeply understand the needs of regional Queensland and facilitated direct engagement with over 800 stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of all Queenslanders in 2020. The RTA played a crucial role in assisting those landlords and tenants directly affected. The team at the RTA were able to respond rapidly to the changing times and the RTA team performed in an extraordinary manner which included:

* developing the COVID-19 Dispute Resolution Web Service within two weeks
* producing a wide range of digital and paper resources to explain the temporary COVID-19 amendments to tenancy laws and how to work together
* transitioned to a remote workforce while conducted continuous training for relevant staff, representing over 550 hours of staff investment.

Like most other government agencies, our investment portfolio was impacted by the pandemic. With the guidance of Queensland Investment Corporation (QIC), we expect to see these impacts being reversed in due course. We are already seeing some evidence of this.

I’d like to thank the Honourable Mick de Brenni MP, Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology, Minister for Sport, his office and all of the staff from the Department of Housing and Public Works who interact with the RTA to achieve positive outcomes for the Queensland community. Their support has been significant and is greatly appreciated.

Finally, I’d like to thank the wonderful staff at the RTA who have gone above and beyond, particularly since the impact of the pandemic. There has been a need for extended hours, transitioning to work from home arrangements, new technology and supporting customers who were significantly impacted by the pandemic. The staff responded wonderfully and have been ably led by our CEO Jennifer Smith and the Executive Leadership Team.

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**Paul Melville** Board Chair

CEO’s message

As Queensland’s independent rental authority, we strive to place our customers at the centre of all that we do. In 2019–20, we laid the groundwork and conducted research to map our customers’ journeys and identify areas where we could deliver an improved customer experience. This work will continue as we deliver on our Strategic Plan 2019–23, which highlights our aim to deliver smart digital services, build a customer-focused workforce, improve business efficiency and ensure customers value our services.

Following the successful launch of the RTA Bond Lodgement Web Service in June 2019, we released a suite of end-of-tenancy Web Services in December 2019 to make requesting bond refunds simpler and quicker for our customers. We conducted customer consultation through focus groups and used the feedback gathered to inform the Web Services and streamline essential customer transactions around ending a tenancy. The launch of the Bond Refund, Bond Disputes and Update Your Details Web Services also marked the important milestone of 30 years of service for the RTA in Queensland.

In February 2020, the RTA released a series of Web Service upgrades and enhancements, shaped and informed by customer feedback. This included adding a Bond increase option to our Bond Lodgement Web Service. I am pleased these services are improving the experience for many of our customers and we continue to be mindful of those customers who may need additional support to access our services.

A conscious effort has been made to move towards paperless services to reduce our environmental footprint. In addition to developing RTA Web Services which offer customers an alternative to paper forms for essential tenancy transactions, we ceased bulk printing for all forms and publications in January 2020.

In the second half of the financial year, the RTA focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Queensland renting community was significantly impacted by the pandemic and the accompanying social and economic consequences. The RTA moved quickly to support the community alongside the new temporary legislative changes introduced by the Queensland Government. The RTA also worked quickly to transition to a remote workforce while continuing to provide high quality customer services. During this period, the RTA engaged a second contact centre to support our customers as they responded to the National Cabinet and Queensland Government announcements, legislative changes and accessing available assistance and support mechanisms. Extensive training for new and current staff enabled the business to rapidly respond to the needs of the sector. The RTA’s comprehensive COVID-19 response and the associated details regarding our transition to a remote workforce are shown on pages 17–19 of this report.

As we adjust to our new normal, not only at the RTA but across the world, I am grateful for the hard work, flexibility and dedication of our RTA staff. They have continued to make renting work for everyone in our community while also adapting to new ways of working. I thank the Executive Leadership Team for their trust, advice and resilience through the changes and uncertainties that this year has presented. I would also like to thank the RTA Board, the Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology and Minister for Sport, the Honourable Mick de Brenni MP, and the Department of Housing and Public Works for their ongoing commitment to our sector.

In the next 12 months, the RTA will continue to support the Queensland renting community and strengthen relationships with our stakeholders on the road to recovery. I also look forward to making further progress on our strategic objectives and delivering positive outcomes for our customers.

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**Jennifer Smith** Chief Executive Officer

About us

Our vision and purpose

The RTA is an independent statutory authority established by the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* (RTRA Act) and offers a range of services to empower positive relationships, administer fairness and uphold integrity and balance in the residential rental sector.

As a self-funded organisation, the income earned from the investment of rental bonds pays for our operating costs and allows us to provide state-wide tenancy information, education and support services and bond management. We also offer a free dispute resolution service to help parties resolve tenancy issues without the need for legal action, and investigate alleged offences under the RTRA Act, with the aim to educate and prosecute offenders.

To remain relevant in this rapidly changing sector, the RTA researches and monitors residential rental data and trends. We also facilitate conversations with key stakeholders and industry sector bodies, which enables us to proactively identify and respond to our customers’ varying and evolving needs and expectations.

The RTA is governed by a Board of Directors, appointed by the Queensland Parliament’s Governor in Council, and is responsible to the Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology and Minister for Sport, the Honourable Mick de Brenni MP.

Our objectives and strategies

This year, the RTA launched a new Strategic Plan 2019–23 to guide our journey for the next four years. This Strategic Plan brings a fresh perspective to our purpose and paves our way to becoming a customer-centric organisation. It also demonstrates our commitment to respect, protect and promote human rights in our decision-making and actions.

Our Strategic Plan 2019–23 outlines four main objectives. We aim to provide smart digital services, improve business efficiency, build a customer-focused workforce and ensure customers value our services.

The RTA also contributes to the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027, which is a 10-year framework led by the Queensland Government to create better housing pathways and help every Queenslander access a safe, secure and affordable home.

Our contribution to community objectives

The RTA contributes to the Queensland Government’s Our Future State – Advancing Queensland’s Priorities to ‘Be a responsive Government’, supporting the residential rental sector by providing simple, easy-to-access services that meet customer expectations.