

Supporting the sector

Disaster recovery

North Queensland was hit with severe flooding in January 2019, impacting the lives of many tenants, property managers and property owners in and around Townsville.

The RTA provided targeted support and services to the flood-affected Townsville renting community and contributed to the whole-of-government response to the natural disaster. The RTA website promoted fact sheets and information on common tenancy issues in a natural disaster, as well as links to local government and non-government support services. RTA fact sheets were distributed to evacuation and flood recovery centres in Townsville in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

We participated in the daily whole-of-government disaster response teleconferences to identify and respond to emerging tenancy issues. RTA staff also supported two flood forums in Townsville hosted by the Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ) and participated in Q&A sessions for tenants and property owners/managers. The RTA prioritised dispute resolution requests and flood-related phone enquiries to support disaster recovery efforts for all parties involved.

Responsive government

The RTA's Digital Strategic Plan aligns with the Queensland Government's Our Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities – Be a responsive government principle.

We started developing web services to enable customers to transact with us via a 24/7 digital channel. The RTA consulted with customers on the new online Bond Lodgement service, ensuring stakeholders and customers had an opportunity to review the prototype and provide feedback via focus groups and webinars. This feedback informed the look and feel of the final product.

Proactive automated bond refund notifications were implemented to keep customers informed about the status of their bond refund application. The automated updates reduced the number of people calling the Contact Centre about their bond refund applications by 50 callers a day on average.

“**The RTA partnered with the Department of Housing and Public Works, REIQ and Tenants Queensland to offer coordinated, multi-agency support to the local community through the Rental Recovery Hub in Townsville.**”

Located in the Rising Sun Shopping Centre at Mundingburra, the Rental Recovery Hub operated 7 days a week in February and March 2019 and weekdays from 28 March 2019. Trained RTA conciliators attended the Hub daily between February and April 2019 to assist people with flood-related housing or tenancy concerns. Impacted parties were identified and referred to the RTA for dispute resolution and further support.

Partnering for initiatives

Renting in Queensland (RiQ) | Open Doors to Renting Reform

In September 2018, the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW), in partnership with the RTA, launched the statewide Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation program to improve renting in Queensland.

Tenants, property owners, property managers and other key stakeholders shared their experiences of living in, owning or managing rental properties. Ideas on how to improve renting in Queensland were gathered through surveys, online snap polls, discussion forums, social media, written submissions and face-to-face consultation events held throughout Queensland.

The RTA amplified the response to and involvement in the Open Doors to Renting Reform consultation. We provided support at 20 community information events, produced a promotional video and played a key role in promoting the consultation at community education events. Campaign messaging was also disseminated through our business operating platforms such as interactive voice recording on the Contact Centre phone system, outgoing customer correspondence, post-call surveys and targeted email campaigns.



RTA website

7,974 people clicked on the Open Doors to Renting Reform tiles on the RTA website



RTA IVR messaging

43,824 customers heard the RiQ messaging through the RTA Contact Centre



Email campaign

617,500 promotional emails for Open Doors to Renting Reform distributed

26.8% of customers opened the email

11.3% of those clicked on a link within the email

Over 135,000 responses were received during the nine-week consultation phase. The RTA will continue to implement and deliver service offerings, associated business processes, education and compliance activities resulting from reform of the RTRA Act.

Skillsets for Successful Tenancies – Dollars & Sense

The RTA collaborated with the DHPW to promote awareness of the Dollars and Sense program, a free tenancy skills training program delivered by the Tenancy Skills Institute and funded by the Queensland Government. The Dollars and Sense program was developed in consultation with property managers across Queensland and is helping to equip tenants with important tenancy and life skills for renting a property. The RTA embedded targeted messages into our community education presentations and digital communications including the RTA Newsroom and LinkedIn channel.

‘Not Now, Not Ever’ campaign contribution

We extended our support for the Queensland Government’s domestic and family violence (DFV) initiative ‘Not Now, Not Ever’ by promoting resources and information on our website. A DFV toolkit developed by Q Shelter and the REIQ outlining useful tips to help property managers respond appropriately when a DFV situation is suspected. This toolkit was circulated to property managers and accommodation providers, and is available on the RTA website.

We raised our customers’ awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a DFV situation under Queensland tenancy law through news articles, fact sheets and information statements. These information statements must be provided to tenants at the start of every tenancy under the RTRA Act.

Engaging with stakeholders

In 2018–19, the RTA participated in 59 face-to-face stakeholder engagement activities to provide education, information, support and raise awareness of rights and responsibilities under the RTRA Act.

Our engagement activities included presentations, interactive workshops, focus groups and information stalls at key events. Our efforts on digital initiatives such as webinars and videos extended our reach and engagement to regional Queensland and remote communities who might otherwise have limited access to tenancy information and support. We also contributed regularly to a variety of stakeholder publications and newsletters for industry bodies including REIQ, ARAMA and CPAQ to educate and inform the sector.

The RTA stepped into the social networking world by launching a company page on LinkedIn. Participation in LinkedIn allows customers and stakeholders to receive RTA updates and information in their own time and learn about RTA's participation in rental sector activities.

Online forms

To ensure the development of our online Bond Lodgement delivers real benefits to the RTA and our customers, we consulted externally with the rental community via focus groups and webinars.

Invitations to participate in consultation were extended to members of industry stakeholder groups, organisations and RTA news subscribers to capture feedback and input from differing voices and representation in the sector. A total of 346 participants from the rental community provided their suggestions and feedback on how to make this digital transition seamless. Qualitative data was captured and used to inform the final product.

Results were extremely positive with most participants finding the service easy to use and over 90 per cent indicating confidence in being able to complete a bond lodgement online.

RTA Stakeholder Forums

The RTA Stakeholder Forums (previously known as Industry Development Forums) were rebadged in 2019 as a quarterly event with an expanded membership group to:

- provide an avenue for members to raise and discuss issues and trends affecting the residential rental sector
- improve the RTA's knowledge and understanding of stakeholders' interests and concerns
- improve stakeholder knowledge and understanding of the RTA, its strategic directions and operations
- provide stakeholders with opportunities to collaborate and have input to RTA initiatives.

Stakeholder Forum members include:

- Asia-Pacific Student Accommodation Association (APSAA)
- Australian Resident Accommodation Managers Association (ARAMA)
- Caravan Parks Association of Queensland (CPAQ)
- LawRight
- Property Owners' Association of Queensland (POAQ)
- Queensland Shelter (Q Shelter)
- Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS)
- Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ)
- Student Accommodation Association (SAA)
- Support Accommodation Providers Association (SAPA)
- Tenants Queensland (TQ)

Information guides and publications

The RTA's comprehensive suite of information guides and publications helps our customers to navigate the rental market and understand their legal rights and responsibilities.

To provide tailored customer experiences, we removed the witness signature requirement for tenancy agreements. Content and format of the pocket guides for tenants were refreshed into a more user-friendly format with concise and up-to-date information.

Aligned with the Queensland Cultural Diversity Policy, our information statements are also translated into multiple languages to support culturally and linguistically diverse customers, continuing our commitment to tailored, customer-focused services.

Our compliance activities

The Investigations Unit helps to ensure renting that works for everyone through providing education and enforcement of the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* (RTRA Act).

The Investigations Unit actively engages with parties involved in an investigation to provide education and reduce the likelihood of repeated breaches and offences.

The RTA may consider issuing a Penalty Infringement Notice (PIN) or proceeding to prosecution when:

- significant detriment has been caused
- there is ongoing and systemic non-compliance
- conduct involves deceit, dishonesty or was unconscionable
- it is in the public interest.

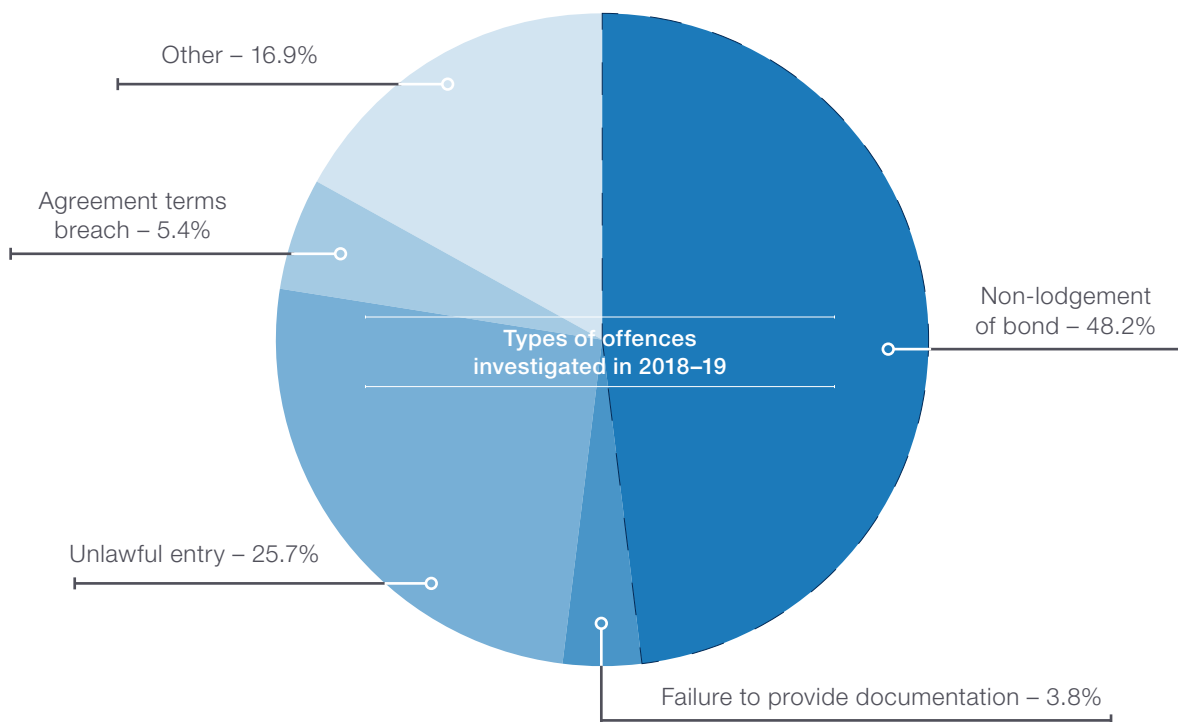
The investigative process is separate and independent to the dispute resolution process and any matter related to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT). Investigated matters are criminal offences that are prosecuted through the Magistrates Court to either a plea of guilty or a summary trial in which the rules of evidence apply.

The Investigations Unit regularly collaborates with the DHPW, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to undertake compliance action throughout the sector.

In 2018–19, the Investigations Unit:

- finalised 1,159 investigations into non-compliance with the RTRA Act
- issued 51 Penalty Infringement Notices
- finalised 6 prosecutions with all of them resulting in a guilty plea
- educated 436 individual respondents regarding their rights and obligations under the RTRA Act.

“The Investigations Unit actively engages with parties involved in an investigation to provide education and reduce the likelihood of repeated breaches and offences.”



Our prosecutions: case studies

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Southport real estate agent Marilyn Martin and her son Brendon Martin were convicted and jailed for fraudulently obtaining \$107,000 from Ms Martin's trust account. Ms Martin was also prosecuted for another 16 counts of failing to lodge rental bonds and failing to issue receipts for bonds received.

Both defendants were sentenced to four years' imprisonment, suspended after serving six months in prison.

This prosecution was the result of a collaborative partnership between the RTA, OFT and QPS. While Ms Martin was under investigation for offences under the RTRA Act, fraudulent activity was detected and referred to the OFT and QPS.



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Gympie landlord Jack Green pleaded guilty to breaching sections 183 and 202 of the RTRA Act for unlawfully entering his tenants' acreage rental property at Victory Heights and interfering with the tenants' quiet enjoyment of their home. The court imposed a \$3,000 fine and ordered that half the fine go to the tenants.

The tenants arrived home one day to discover a bulldozer onsite, with part of the acreage cleared of all vegetation. No entry notice was issued prior and the property had been significantly altered without the tenants' knowledge or consent.

Magistrate Callaghan said Mr Green should have waited until the tenancy finished to develop the property, noting: "The works very significantly interfered with the peaceful enjoyment they were paying for."



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In July 2018, director of Cairns crisis accommodation Three Sista's Stuart Wright was prosecuted for 17 offences under the RTRA Act in a joint investigation with the OFT. Offences included using the wrong tenancy agreements, unlawful eviction and falsifying documents. Mr Wright entered a guilty plea. Convictions were recorded with a \$16,000 fine and costs of \$2,350 handed down.

Magistrate Luxton said: "The victims of these offences were vulnerable tenants with somewhat limited financial means. This type of offending behaviour must be denounced and discouraged ...the intent of the legislation is to put in place a system where the rights of both tenants and property owners are protected."

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Peter McManus of Peter McManus Prestige Properties Proprietary Limited pleaded guilty at Southport Magistrates Court to knowingly submitting a false and misleading document to the RTA. A \$2,000 fine was handed down and no conviction recorded.

Upon mutual instruction from the landlord and tenant, Mr McManus amended a bond amount on an already signed and finalised bond refund form from \$1,200 to \$1,000 and forwarded it to the RTA without highlighting the issue.

Magistrate Shephard noted the need to send a message to the industry regarding the importance of reliability in forms submitted to the RTA, saying: "The whole system is based on the RTA receiving forms and being able to rely on those forms, so it's important that the integrity of the system is maintained."

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