

TENANTS ADVICE SERVICE

892. Hon KATE DOUST to the Minister for Commerce:

I refer the minister to the Tenants Advice Service, Western Australia.

- (1) How much funding has been provided to TAS WA by the state government to deliver its service for the 2011–12 financial year?
- (2) How many residential tenants were assisted by TAS WA during the 2011–12 financial year?
- (3) Given that the TAS WA phone line was closed from 29 October 2012 to 1 November 2012 —
 - (a) on how many other occasions has this hotline been closed; and
 - (b) will the minister provide the dates?
- (4) What assistance is the government offering to ensure that it delivers this vital advice service to tenants without interruption?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

I thank the honourable member for notice of the question, which was given yesterday. This is an important issue, and I have actually updated my answer. I am glad the member asked the question today, and I thank her for her interest.

- (1) Funding of \$736 049, including goods and services tax, was provided to the Tenants Advice Service from the rental accommodation account, under a contract for the provision of tenancy education and advice services during the 2011–12 financial year.
- (2) TAS reported 4 379 client contacts, 169 503 website hits, and 21 education or training programs during 2011–12.
- (3) The Department of Commerce received quarterly reports that indicate that TAS telephone advice services were provided on a regular basis during 2011–12.
- (4) The department received a formal report about factors impacting TAS service capacity on 29 October 2012. This was followed by a meeting between the department's contract management staff and the executive officer and principal solicitor of TAS on 30 October 2012. Advice was received that the Tenants Advice Service would be unable to provide telephone advice services from 31 October 2012. Since this time TAS has been answering calls and redirecting callers to the Consumer Protection helpline, which is available for all tenancy-related inquiries on 1300 30 40 54, and to the 15 other local tenancy advice centres around WA that are available to take inquiries. Although the Tenants Advice Service has operated as a general point of contact, often people either make initial inquiries direct to the local service unit or, alternatively, are referred to those local services.

The director general met with TAS representatives on 6 November 2012 and accepted from them advice that TAS was withdrawing from its contractual arrangements to provide tenancy advice and education services. The department has commenced a process to put alternative arrangements in place as soon as possible.