



Greater Wellington Regional Council submission on the Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill (No.2)

Before: Government Administration Committee

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Greater Wellington Regional Council submission on:

Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill (No.2)

Opening statement

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) supports the purpose of the Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill (No.2) to ensure every residential tenancy in New Zealand is provided with minimum standards of heating and insulation.

GWRC manages the Warm Wellington programme which enables home-owners to insulate their homes and have the associated costs paid back through rates instalments.

We support the comprehensive nature of the Bill with the new section 132A requiring standards for heating, insulation, indoor temperatures, ventilation, draught stopping and drainage. All of these factors contribute to a dry and healthy home – not just insulation.

We note that there are concerns about potential rent increases and the affordability for some tenants in being able to run heaters or heat-pumps, and consider that these are issues that need to be addressed as part of a wider response to New Zealand's housing crisis. This shouldn't preclude taking actions on the current concerns. The Bill before you addresses the need for residential tenancies to meet minimum standards for healthy habitation and we consider it to be a positive step.

GWRC makes the specific comments below in relation to the Bill.

Don't let the standards be set too low

New section 132A states that the Department (being the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) has the function of preparing and publishing minimum standards of heating, insulation, indoor temperature, ventilation, draught stopping and drainage. These standards must include methods of measuring each of these factors, exemptions, and be published within 6 months of the commencement of the Act.

These clauses are an improvement on the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act in that there is certainty that they will be propagated within a certain timeframe, as opposed to the unspecified timing of the regulations that *may* come as a result of the Amendment Act.

With all the debate surrounding timing and standards in both of these Bills, we urge the Committee to not lose sight of the ultimate goal of ensuring warm and dry rental properties. We ask the Committee to take every step necessary to ensure that these standards are set at an appropriate level to avoid reluctant landlords continuing to tenant unhealthy homes.

Ensure the standards apply to all landlords

The Principal Act which this Bill amends contains reference to a number of different types of tenancies including income-related tenancies, boarding-house tenancies, and service tenancies.

We ask the Committee to ensure that the standards apply to all tenancies and to all landlords including Housing New Zealand and other social housing providers.

Monitor and enforce the standards

New section 13A(1C) states that failure by the landlord to comply, or a breach of the guarantee is declared to be an unlawful act. Unlawful acts can result in financial penalties. This clause raises the question of monitoring and enforcement of the new standards in the Bill, and the other obligations placed upon landlords by the Principal Act and subsequent regulations.

Ensuring the warmth, safety, health and security of a home will need more than just legislation. Legislation needs to be monitored and enforced in order to make a difference to New Zealanders lives. We ask the Select Committee to develop provisions that include periodic, independent inspection of rental properties to ensure they are habitable, healthy and safe.

Support landlords and tenants

In addition to requiring standards for the matters set out in section 132A, we ask the Committee to consider other avenues to support both landlords and tenants to improve the health and warmth of tenanted properties.

- Educational material aimed separately at landlords and tenants is needed, not only to understand and meet their requirements under the Residential Tenancies Act, but also to maintain the value of the property and the resident's health. MBIE need to develop this material and deliver it using a variety of communication channels in order to reach all tenants and landlords. Councils may be able to assist with the distribution of education materials through rates notices.
- Consider making the cost of heat-pumps and insulation tax-deductable, and reinstate levels of EECA funding for insulation which were significantly cut in Budget 2016.
- Consider ways of supporting low income tenants, particularly those with children, to pay for the cost of heating their homes to a minimum temperature.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill (No.2).

GWRC wishes to appear before the Committee to speak to this submission.

Chris Laidlaw
Chair, Greater Wellington Regional Council

Date: