

201 strickland ave cascades 7004



Senate Economics References Committee Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: economics.sen@aph.gov.au
21 April 2015

Dear Senators,

Re: Co-operatives, mutuals and member owned firms Inquiry

The Cohousing Co-operative is a non-equity housing co-operative in Hobart, Tasmania, providing housing to low-medium income households in a cohousing development.

We have been providing housing for over twenty years. During this time many families have lived in the co-op, improved their lives and gone on to home ownership. A high rate of our members undertake higher education whilst living in the co-op, and this increases their earning capacity.

The co-op provides a beneficial and stable environment for children, providing continuity of their schooling and social networks. Often people in rental accommodation end up moving, not through their own choice, and this is disruptive for children.

Members have developed skills in operating a small business, and the responsibilities that come with that. This has only been possible because the co-op model fosters ownership and autonomy. Households who rent, rather than own, usually do not have the opportunity to develop these skills. Without the co-op, we also would not have had this opportunity.

The member residents of the co-op undertake the management of the housing. The skills developed in doing this transfer into our working lives and have given us the opportunity to develop valuable skills and experience, which again increases our earning capacity.

These skills include developing policies and procedures, interview and selection processes, people management, meeting processes and decision-making, and financial management.

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The collective buying power of the co-operative means members have more opportunities than they would as individuals, for example, we have been able to invest in better quality and more environmentally friendly products and services.

Housing co-operatives are a cost effective way for government to support housing for low-income people. Co-operatives facilitate people participating in housing management, which offsets the cost of providing the housing. Labour of the members has subsidised the maintenance costs, and low vacancy levels has sustained a stable income for the co-op.

To further support co-operatives, we see a need for training for lawyers and accountants about the co-operative model. We have had ongoing difficulty working with both these professions, as there is a lack of knowledge of co-operatives as a legal structure.

We appreciate the opportunity to write this submission to the committee and look forward to further development of the co-operative sector in Australia.

Mona Loofs-Samorzewski
Secretary
Cohousing Co-operative