

## Australian Greens additional comments

1.1 Domestic violence is a national emergency, and should be treated as one. The Abbott government has made rhetorical statements in support of victims and survivors of domestic violence while simply tinkering around the edges of the problem, and in many areas the government has gone backwards. The Australian Greens believe that the Abbott government's inadequate response to growing calls for action display a fundamental failure of leadership.

1.2 Now is a critical moment, when national attention has focused on domestic violence like never before. This moment is an opportunity for action which must be seized. The appointment of Rosie Batty as the 2015 Australian of the Year, the tireless advocacy of the domestic violence service sector, the community and many influential leaders such as Victorian Police Commissioner Ken Lay, has led to an outpouring of national concern. It has brought domestic violence out of the shadows, including a vital discussion of the gendered nature of this violence.

1.3 Since the Australian Greens initiated this Senate inquiry with the support of the Government and the Opposition, in June 2014, other official inquiries have been established or reported their findings, including the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence<sup>1</sup> and the Queensland Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence led by former Governor General the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce.<sup>2</sup> These inquiries build on the work of many taskforces, committees and reviews over the past decades.<sup>3</sup>

1.4 The weight of evidence gathered during this inquiry, along with work in previous inquiries reminds us that the solutions for this crisis are already on the table. The only thing we lack is leadership from our governments.

1.5 Even though they have made rhetorical statements against domestic violence, the Abbott government has gone backwards by slashing funding to front line services

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<sup>1</sup> The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence was established on 22 February 2015 and is due to report its findings by 29 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence was established on 10 September 2014, and reported its findings on 28 February 2015. Website: <http://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-read-report-recommendation/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Those other reports include the 2010 joint report of the Australian and NSW Law Reform Commissions, the report of the 2012 NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues and even the 2010 *National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*.

and ignoring good advice while cherry picking low-hanging fruit and letting past progress stagnate.

1.6 One of the reasons the Australian Greens initiated this inquiry was the disastrous cuts in the government's 2014 Budget which slashed hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for front line services supporting victims of domestic violence. These funding decisions were, in the main, locked in in the 2015 Budget.

1.7 Where the Abbott government has backed down on its cruel cuts, it has been after sustained public campaigns by service providers, the community, the Greens and the Opposition. Cuts to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, community legal centres, Legal Aid and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services have been defeated, but millions of dollars of cuts are have been implemented or are still proposed, including a \$44 million cut from construction of new emergency accommodation, \$15 million from Legal Aid, \$6 million from community legal centres, \$240 million from the Department of Social Services discretionary grants program, \$21 million in cuts to housing affordability solutions and peak housing and homelessness bodies, and others.

1.8 The Abbott government's response has been cruel and out of touch. The impression is of a government trying to weather a storm. Concessions have been grudging, and new commitments limited. The government's back downs on some funding cuts have been important victories, but they have diverted vital time and energy from advocacy solutions to fundamentally address the problem.

1.9 National attention will not remain at such great levels indefinitely, so it is imperative that we move quickly. Even for governments, achieving significant reforms can be difficult, which is why the current window of opportunity is important.

1.10 The Committee has heard from front line service providers that increased national attention has coincided with a spike in the number of women contacting them for help. Service providers have also stated that this spike has been caused by **both** an increase in reporting and an increase in underlying rates of violence as more women push back against their attackers.<sup>4</sup>

1.11 Given the rare opportunity we have, it is not enough to simply agitate for past cuts to be reversed. It is within our power as federal Parliamentarians to drastically reduce this scourge on our community, and we have a moral obligation to do so. The scale of the current national crisis demands that the federal government lead an emergency response.

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, evidence from DV Connect, *Committee Hansard* 6 November 2014, page 24-25.

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## **The Chair's report and other additional comments**

1.12 The Australian Greens support the recommendations in the Chair's report, which also has the support of Coalition and Labor Senators on the Committee. While the Australian Greens support these recommendations, our view is that they are excessively cautious and do not match the scale of the current crisis. Significant compromise was necessary to find recommendations on which all Senators on the Committee could agree. The Australian Greens believe that on the basis of this tri-partisan position, the government should at minimum immediately implement those recommendations.

1.13 The Australian Greens also support the recommendations made by Labor Senators in their additional comments which largely reiterate the recommendations of the Committee's Interim Report. However, as previously stated, it is crucial that momentum for fundamental reform is not lost, so the Australian Greens believe that much more ambitious recommendations are warranted.

### **Recommendations of the Interim Report**

1.14 The Australian Greens wish to reiterate the recommendations in the Interim Report of this inquiry. More detail on particular topics is provided below, but the vast majority of the Committee's recommendations have not been implemented. As discussed above, the Abbott government has backed down on some planned funding cuts to legal assistance and homelessness services, but the 2015 Budget has locked in millions of dollars in cuts made in the 2014 Budget.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**1.15 The Australian Greens recommend that all recommendations of the Interim Report of the Domestic Violence inquiry be implemented as soon as possible. In particular:**

- **The \$44 million cut from construction of new emergency accommodation under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, \$15 million cut to Legal Aid, \$6 million cut to community legal centres planned for 2017, \$240 million cut to the Department of Social Services discretionary grants program and the \$21 million in cuts to housing affordability solutions and peak housing and homelessness bodies must be immediately reversed.**
- **Funding uncertainty under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness must be addressed by guaranteeing funding for at least four years.**

- **State and federal governments should implement the Productivity Commission recommendation for an immediate funding boost to legal assistance services of \$200 million to address pressing gaps in services.**
- **Respectful relationships programs should be included in the national curriculum**

## **Gender equality**

1.16 The Committee heard extensive evidence that due to the gendered nature of violence against women, achieving gender equality in all fields of life and respectful attitudes towards women are central to eliminating domestic violence. The Australian Greens support a broad and far-reaching program led by the federal government to achieve gender equality.

### **Recommendation 1**

**1.17 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government lead a broad and far-reaching program of reform to achieve gender equality including action to close the gender pay gap, boost women’s financial independence, address the deficit of women in leadership positions in government and business, share unpaid caring responsibilities more equally and encourage women in to non-traditional industries.**

## **The national framework**

### *Consultation and evaluation*

1.18 There is justifiably universal support for the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 but the Committee has heard concerning evidence from many stakeholders, including the heads of key organisations including the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance and Domestic Violence Victoria that the government is shutting its ears to advice from front line service providers.

1.19 In particular, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance have raised concerns that they do not have adequate resources to adequately coordinate input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>5</sup> Given very serious rates of violence in Indigenous communities, proper consultation is essential.

1.20 The National Plan Implementation Panel (**NPIP**) which was designed to advise Ministers of emerging issues and inform the evaluation of the National Plan

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<sup>5</sup> *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 18.

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has been discontinued despite concerns from the sector, and without any adequate explanation from the government. Expert advisory panels which had been planned to complement the NPIP have failed to materialise.

1.21 The Australian Greens welcome the establishment of the COAG Advisory Panel chaired by Rosie Batty and Ken Lay, but it is mystifying why Abbott government is failing to take advantage of the expertise of the sector by discontinuing the NPIP.

## **Recommendation 2**

**1.22 The Australian Greens recommend that the National Plan Implementation Panel be immediately reconvened, with adequate funding provided to all relevant stakeholders to have meaningful input on the implementation and evaluation of the National Plan.**

### *Data collection and research*

1.23 The Australian Greens also wish to emphasise the critical importance of improvements to the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS). It is imperative that we properly capture the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women, older women, LGBTI Australians, and women with a disability. The first Action Plan under the National Plan, *Building the Evidence Base* should have addressed these issues, and it is important that they are addressed as soon as possible. We support the Committee's Recommendation 4 relating to sample sizes.

## **Recommendation 3**

**1.24 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government expand the Personal Safety Survey to include statistically significant numbers of participants from key vulnerable groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, older women, LGBTI Australians, and women with a disability.**

1.25 The Australian Greens strongly support the Committee's recommendation that ANROWS be given the necessary secure funding until at least the end of the implementation of the National Plan in 2022 to provide for continuation of its research work and enable it to conduct longitudinal research.

## Primary prevention

1.26 The Committee has heard extensive evidence that primary prevention and cultural change activities are critical to reducing the incidence of family violence long term.

1.27 The Australian Greens welcome the government's promise of \$16.5 million for a public advertising campaign focused on primary prevention jointly funded with the States and Territories. We emphasise that primary prevention should not be focused solely on "awareness raising". Many stakeholders have stated both in hearings and privately that awareness raising can only go so far. What is needed is a deep commitment to cultural change via evidence based mechanisms. It is encouraging that ANROWS and Our Watch have articulated such a strong commitment to cultural change, but the government is yet to commit significant resources to primary prevention other than the above advertising campaign.

1.28 The Committee has heard from many stakeholders including the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and YWCA about the importance of well-designed respectful relationships programs in schools which promote healthy attitudes to gender roles, consent and resolving conflict.<sup>6</sup> The Second Action Plan identified respectful relationships programs as a key priority and proposed that they be included in the national curriculum, alongside *the Line* social marketing campaign but alarmingly no federal funding seems to have been provided. The Abbott government has not been able to provide any evidence that it is funding any school based respectful relationships programs at all. Previous ad hoc programs funded by the previous government have expired and nothing has replaced them.

1.29 The Australian Greens also support the Committee's recommendation that primary prevention efforts must not come at the expense of front line services.

## Recommendation 4

**1.30 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government fund respectful relationships programs for all school students and include them in the national curriculum, but that these efforts must be additional to long-term secure funding for front line services.**

## Crisis lines

1.31 The Committee heard extensive evidence from domestic violence crisis phone services. These are State-based services which offer immediate crisis support

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<sup>6</sup> *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 4.

including safety planning, police liaison, accommodation, court appearances and other support to victims. Often they operate 24 hours per day. These crisis lines receive no funding from the federal government. The Domestic and Family Violence Crisis Lines of Australia Network provided valuable evidence about the overwhelming number of calls that crisis lines receive. Despite their heroic efforts, many calls still go unanswered.

1.32 The 1800RESPECT phone service was designed to fill gaps in the State-based crisis lines, and has been funded by the federal government to deliver non-crisis counselling to victims who need it. In response to statistics which emerged during the course of the inquiry about how many calls 180RESPECT was not able to answer due to growing demand, the federal government provided a small funding boost of \$2 million per year.<sup>7</sup> The Australian Greens welcome this funding, but we note that State-based crisis lines have received no additional support from the federal government.

1.33 No centralised data exists in relation to how many calls are “missed” by State based crisis lines, but the Committee has heard anecdotal evidence that many services are overstretched and calls are going unanswered. The Australian Greens believe that it is appropriate for the federal government to act to make sure that all victims have access to immediate crisis support.

## **Recommendation 5**

**1.34 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government conduct a needs assessment to determine the appropriate level of funding for State-based domestic violence crisis lines and take a leadership role by providing that funding.**

### **Crisis housing**

#### ***Funding for crisis housing***

1.35 The Australian Greens welcome the Committee’s recognition of supportive crisis housing models as key for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of victims. However, the Committee’s recommendations do not respond to the serious shortfall and gaps in services identified by stakeholders, and have not recognised the importance of specialist support services for women and children, who are disproportionately affected by domestic violence.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://scottmorrison.dss.gov.au/media-releases/abbott-government-delivers-funding-boost-for-node8entityentityrespect>

1.36 Refugees are at capacity and turning many of victims away from their doors. The Commonwealth government must take responsibility for this issue and immediately commit to funding services that will give victims escaping violence a safe place to go. Homelessness Australia has called for \$33.8 million per year from the Commonwealth Government to provide services to domestic violence victims for the 2015-2016 financial year, with a further \$33.8 million contribution from State governments. This \$68 million funding gap needs plugging immediately to cover the most basic needs of victims, but it does not include the cost of building new shelters to meet demand.

1.37 Homelessness services nationwide must be adequately funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Homelessness Australia have stated that this means reversing the \$44 million cut from construction of new emergency accommodation in the 2014 Budget and indexing the NPAH funding for inflation, which has not occurred since 2009 resulting in an effective funding cut each year. Funding should be granted on at least four-year cycle to allow for longer term strategic planning. This restoration should be accompanied by extra funding for capital expenditure and shelter construction based on the target of ending turn-aways from refugees.

### **Recommendation 6**

**1.38 The Australian Greens recommend that the \$44 million cut from construction of new emergency accommodation under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in the 2014 Budget be immediately reversed.**

### **Recommendation 7**

**1.39 The Australian Greens recommend that funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness be expanded to cover demand nationwide, and that funding be indexed to avoid real funding cuts. This should be based on a policy of ending turn-aways from refugees.**

### ***Peak bodies***

1.40 One of the Abbott government's most short-sighted cuts was the total axing of funding for Homelessness Australia, National Shelter and the Community Housing Federation of Australia which provide crucial whole-of-sector perspective on housing policy. These cuts were announced three days before Christmas in December 2014 as part of a \$21 million cut to a housing affordability solutions program.



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## **Recommendation 8**

**1.41 The Australian Greens recommend that the three housing and homelessness peak bodies abolished three days before Christmas in December 2014 - Homelessness Australia, National Shelter and the Community Housing Federation of Australia - be re-funded and be given permanent funding certainty, recognising their role as Australia's most eminent bodies in this field, providing expert, evidence-based advice and a vital coordinating role across multiple and complex organisations and services in order to provide policy advice and evaluation of services by the government and non-government sector .**

### *Specialist services*

1.42 Specialist services were identified by many witnesses working in front line services as the most effective means of keeping women safe after leaving a violent partner. Key stakeholders have told the Committee that steps taken by some State governments to remove the gendered focus of women's refuges has been harmful to the safety and wellbeing of victims. The federal Government should work with States and Territories to ensure that any woman who takes the brave step to leave a violent partner has a safe place to go.

## **Recommendation 9**

**1.43 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government ensure specialist services for women and children receive dedicated, secure long term funding.**

### *'Wrap around' services*

1.44 Services overwhelmed by increasing demand and limited resources often cannot assist their clients beyond the initial period of crisis after escaping violence. The Committee's recommendations have failed to acknowledge that during the inquiry, multiple witnesses noted that victims would have experience better outcomes if they were provided with more comprehensive support for a longer period of time. The federal Government should fund 'wrap around' services nationwide to assist victims to recover from trauma and ultimately transition back into employment, health and wellbeing.

1.45 Resourcing emergency housing providers to support women beyond the initial period of crisis would actually deliver major savings to governments in the long run. The committee heard that currently women re-enter the refuge system an average of seven times, costing almost twice as much as it would cost to support them adequately the first time around.

## **Recommendation 10**

**1.46 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government should fund ‘wrap around’ services nationwide to assist victims to recover from trauma and transition back into ordinary life.**

## **Recommendation 11**

**1.47 The Australian Greens recommend a cross party taskforce be established to urgently implement recommendation 27 from the Senate Inquiry into Housing Affordability, tabled in May 2015 which the Coalition supported.**

**Recommendation of that report 27 reads:**

“The committee recommends that the Australian Government together with the states and territories commit to ensuring that adequate funding be made available so that women and children escaping domestic violence are housed in secure and appropriate housing with the necessary support network that would allow them to remain in a safe environment. This approach would mean that women and their children would experience as little social and educational disruption as possible and that the pathway to more permanent housing would be easier. A priority would be to consider the introduction of programs throughout Australia such as New South Wales' Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative, which is designed to protect women who want to live separately from a violent husband or partner, but remain in their home.

The committee also recommends the Australian Government reverse the cuts to the capital program in National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) and apply needs-based supply and services program as part of the national affordable housing platform in recommendation 30...”

## **Legal assistance and law reform**

### ***Funding for legal assistance***

1.48 As the Productivity Commission has found in its December 2014 *Access to Justice Arrangements* report, the level of funding for legal assistance especially for Australia’s most vulnerable across all governments is woefully inadequate. The Committee heard extensive evidence from community legal centres (CLCs), women’s shelters and peak bodies that legal assistance for victims of domestic violence is inadequate, and that court processes in both criminal proceedings and civil orders proceedings are frequently confusing and overwhelming.

1.49 Far from adopting the Productivity Commission’s recommendation, the Abbott government has slashed funding for legal assistance. In the 2014 Budget, \$60

million was slashed from legal assistance services including CLCs, Aboriginal legal services and Legal Aid. After sustained community pressure, including pressure from this Committee, the Abbott government backed away from \$25 million worth of planned cuts for financial years 2015-16 and 2016-17. A \$15 million cut to Legal Aid and cuts to Aboriginal legal services had already been implemented at that time.

1.50 CLCs across Australia are increasingly alarmed at the ‘funding cliff’ which is approaching in 2017-18, which will see \$12 million cut from the sector, including a \$6 million reduction in federal funding.<sup>8</sup> CLCs cannot conduct long term planning on a two-year timeline, so this situation creates pernicious funding uncertainty.

1.51 The new National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services has implemented a new funding model for legal assistance. That funding model has resulted in a reallocation of federal funding from some States towards other States. In particular, some South Australian CLCs face closure if the situation is not resolved.<sup>9</sup> The Australian Greens support increased funding for legal assistance, but we believe that any reduction in funding, anywhere in Australia in the middle of a domestic violence crisis, is unacceptable.

### **Recommendation 12**

**1.52 The Australian Greens recommend that that the federal, State and Territory governments should provide an immediate funding boost to legal assistance services of \$200 million as recommended by the Productivity Commission to address pressing gaps in services.**

### **Recommendation 13**

**1.53 The Australian Greens recommend that the \$12 million ‘funding cliff’ in 2017 for community legal centres be urgently addressed to provide funding certainty to this critical sector.**

### ***Indigenous legal services***

1.54 The Australian Greens also wholeheartedly support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS). Both provide a crucial service, and both need long term, secure funding.

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<sup>8</sup> National Association of Community Legal Centres, *Plan for addressing crisis in legal assistance missing from Federal Budget*, 13 May 2015, [http://www.nacalc.org.au/cb\\_pages/news/PlanforaddressingcrisisinlegalassistancemissingfromFederalBudget.php](http://www.nacalc.org.au/cb_pages/news/PlanforaddressingcrisisinlegalassistancemissingfromFederalBudget.php)

<sup>9</sup> Funding shortfall threatens SA legal centres, *Lawyers Weekly*, 10 June 2015, <http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/news/16642-funding-shortfall-threatens-legal-centres>

The Abbott government's decision to extend funding for some FVPLS for one or two years rather than longer terms means that those services cannot plan for the future.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**1.55 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government extend funding terms for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services to at least four years to allow those services to plan for the future.**

##### *Family report writers*

1.56 Proceedings in the Family Court are often highly significant for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Unfortunately, as the National Association of Community Legal Centres and Women's Legal Services Australia submission pointed out, and as they stated in evidence to the Committee, there are significant issues with the current system of family report writers. The submission stated that:

In WLSA's experience, clients experiencing family violence often feel as though they are not listened to by family report writers and feel further traumatised and humiliated by the family assessment process. In part, people who have experienced, or are experiencing, family violence are hesitant to disclose the effect of the violence on them given concerns about conclusions being drawn by report writers about their capacity to parent.<sup>10</sup>

1.57 Women's Legal Services Australia also stated that some women have had their grant of legal aid terminated as a result of not agreeing with the family report writer's recommendations.

1.58 The Australian Greens respect the work of the Family Court, and of family report writers, but it is appropriate to make sure that all staff are properly trained.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**1.59 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government implement and fund an accreditation process for family report writers according to standards developed in wide consultation with specialists, including a requirement for specialist training and clinical experience working with victims of family violence. The federal government should also implement an effective mechanism for complaints resolution in relation to family report writers, and not cease the provision of legal aid where victims seek to challenge family reports.**

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<sup>10</sup> National Association of Community Legal Centres and Women's Legal Services Australia *submission 26*, p.14.

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### *Training for judicial officers*

1.60 Similar issues were raised throughout the inquiry in relation to judicial officers including magistrates, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court judges. The Committee has had the benefit of submissions and correspondence from the Chief Justice of the Family Court on this issue. The Australian Greens have a deep respect for the work of judicial officers, but based on significant feedback from front line service providers that better training is required, we believe that more must be done.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**1.61 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government provide funding and coordinate training for all judicial officers, including magistrates, involved in proceedings relating to domestic violence, including civil and criminal matters in federal and State jurisdictions.**

#### **Recommendation 17**

**1.62 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government support specialist domestic violence courts at a State level.**

### *National domestic violence order scheme*

1.63 The Australian Greens welcome the government's commitment to a national domestic violence order (DVO) scheme. Such a scheme is a small but vital part of the solution. However, we are disappointed by the government's painfully slow implementation of this scheme via COAG. A national DVO scheme was identified as an "immediate national initiative" under the First Action Plan (2010-2013) which was published in 2011. More recently, the Abbott government appears to have failed to meet its own COAG timetable. Draft model legislation for mutual recognition in all States and Territories was proposed to be considered at the April 2015 meeting of the COAG Law, Crime and Community Safety Council, but the communique from that April 2015 meeting includes no mention of any draft legislation. The Abbott government's overall timetable of having the scheme functioning by the end of 2016 is excessively slow.

1.64 The Australian Greens believe that a national DVO scheme is "low hanging fruit" and ought to be resolved as soon as possible.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**1.65 The Australian Greens recommend that COAG and the federal government expedite the already long-delayed implementation of a national domestic violence order scheme.**

### *Exclusion Orders*

1.66 The Committee heard evidence that exclusion orders (otherwise known as ‘ouster’ or ‘kick out’ orders) that exclude the perpetrator from the family home have been very effective in some jurisdictions, but have been underutilised in others, such as Queensland. The Committee also heard that programs supporting victims who choose to remain at home after their partner was removed to maintain physical safety and financial stability have had some success in States such as NSW, but these programs have not been subject to rigorous evaluations.

### **Recommendation 19**

**1.67 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government ensure that effective exclusion order provisions are enacted in all States and Territories and facilitate greater use of such orders across States and Territories where they already exist.**

### **Recommendation 20**

**1.68 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government undertake a comprehensive review of the success of ‘safe at home’ state programs and subsequently fund an effective model in States and Territories where they do not exist.**

### **Employment law**

1.69 The Australian Greens commend the advocacy of the ACTU and the Finance Sector Union in pushing for domestic violence leave in this inquiry and in a claim before the Fair Work Commission. The Australian Greens support the proposal to give 10 days of paid domestic violence leave to all employees.

### **Recommendation 21**

**1.70 The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government legislate to give every employee to 10 days of non-accumulating paid domestic violence leave to be taken for reasons related to domestic violence, or for attending court appearances, attending appointments and finding accommodation.**

### **Long term affordable housing**

1.71 During the inquiry, the committee repeatedly heard that domestic violence is the dominant driver of homelessness in Australia, and that many victims are forced to choose between homelessness and staying in a violent home because waiting lists for public housing are so long. The shortage of housing is depriving victims in refuges of

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an exit point, causing a massive bottleneck and compounding the lack of space in emergency accommodation.

1.72 Clearly more is needed from our government. However, any attempt to address this crisis is conspicuously missing from the Committee's report.

1.73 The Australian Greens have announced a plan to reform negative gearing and provide homes for 22,000 of the most vulnerable Australians, by launching a massive investment in affordable housing, including victims and survivors of domestic violence.<sup>11</sup> We would launch an emergency package to build 7000 new homes for the homeless by 2020. That would be enough to house every person currently sleeping rough or without adequate shelter. We would also directly fund construction of 7500 new social housing dwellings over the forward estimates, taking more than 15,000 people off the waiting list in just the next four years. That package would include a target of 'prefabricated' housing of high quality, fast build, modular or 'prefabricated' housing which will be significantly faster and more affordable to construct. This would help ensure that in the future, no Australian would be forced to live with violence or sleep in an unsafe place because there was no affordable place to go.

1.74 Our plan is ambitious, but we propose to deliver budget savings from the reform of negative gearing. The Parliamentary Budget Office costed scrapping negative gearing for new investments, raising revenue of almost \$2.9 billion in the first four years, and \$42.5 billion over ten years. The Greens have also announced reforms to capital gains tax which would raise \$74 billion over the next ten years, rising to \$127 billion when negative gearing reforms are taken into account.<sup>12</sup>

1.75 Given that negative gearing has been proven to benefit mostly high-income earners without delivering downward pressure on rent or an increased supply of housing; this proposal would also cool the housing market, contributing to increased housing affordability in Australia as well as funding the much-needed boost for public housing.

1.76 In 2014, the Abbott government abolished the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which was an effective cut of \$235.2m over 3 years and resulted in the loss of an extra 12,000 new affordable housing units.

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<sup>11</sup> *Reforming Negative Gearing* <http://scott-ludlam.greensmps.org.au/campaigns/reforming-negative-gearing>

<sup>12</sup> *Greens release costings for capital gains tax reform*, 5 August 2015 <http://scott-ludlam.greensmps.org.au/content/media-releases/greens-release-costings-capital-gains-tax-reform>

**Recommendation 22**

**1.77** The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government consider reforming negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions in order to provide homes for 22,000 vulnerable Australians, including victims and survivors of domestic violence.

**Recommendation 23**

**1.78** The Australian Greens recommend that the federal government review the abolition of the National Rental Affordability scheme with a view to fixing any issues and replacing this important policy.

1.79 The Australian Greens wish to thank the 165 individuals and organisations and individuals who made submissions to this inquiry, and the dozens of witnesses who gave evidence at public hearings in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin.

*The Australian Greens wish to dedicate these additional comments to Rosie Batty, 2015 Australian of the Year in honour of her courageous and tireless advocacy on behalf of victims and survivors of domestic violence, and also to the countless Australian women, men and children who have been victimised, injured or killed in domestic violence incidents. We hope that this inquiry has contributed to a platform for action eliminate domestic violence in Australia.*

Senator Larissa Waters