



# SEARMS Owned Housing

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) & Information Sheet

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### SEARMS Housing - Background

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**SEARMS has full ownership (title) to its own residential and commercial housing portfolio. SEARMS properties are privately owned and receive no government assistance for the housing portfolio unless SEARMS seek grants/funding for specific purposes such as redevelopment/development.**

**Rent revenue received from tenants is used to pay for the rates, insurances, landlord obligations such as smoke alarm testing, general repairs and maintenance and overheads (wages, office rent and utilities).**

**SEARMS Board** determines SEARMS housing policies. These were last reviewed and redrafted at its 31 March 2022 Housing Policy workshop before finalising at its 10 June 2022 Board meeting

SEARMS is committed to improving the quality of housing and this may include selling or redeveloping a property to finance new housing stock. FOR AFFECTED TENANTS, SEARMS will provide assistance with NSW Housing Applications and where possible and able, transfers to other suitable SEARMS housing depending on ongoing household income eligibility and a good tenant history.

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### Eligibility for SEARMS housing

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**Q: Who is eligible to apply for SEARMS housing?**

**A:** You must meet the following criteria:

1. Be an Aboriginal person over 18 years of age who has permanently resided in Batemans Bay or surrounding areas (postcode 2536 excluding Mogo) for a minimum of 12 months.
2. Be on the NSW Housing Pathways system\* (income and asset tested)

**\*NSW Housing Eligibility Policy (current as of July 2022)**

Eligibility for social housing

To be eligible for social housing, clients must:

- establish their identity, and
- be resident in New South Wales (NSW), and
- be a citizen or have permanent residency in Australia, and
- have a household income within the income eligibility limits, and
- not own any assets or property which could reasonably be expected to resolve their housing need, and
- be able to sustain a successful tenancy, without support or with appropriate support in place, and
- if applicable, make repayments of any former debts to a social housing provider, and
- in general, be at least 18 years of age.



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### Application pathway for SEARMS housing

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**Q: How do I apply? Is there a waiting list?**

**A:** SEARMS does not have a waiting list. SEARMS directs all Aboriginal people requiring housing to register on the NSW Housing Pathways system. (SEARMS can assist with this)

Upcoming vacancies will be advertised so that all eligible applicants can either:

- Register on the NSW Housing Pathways system, or
- Confirm/update their NSW Housing Pathways application.

**Q: Why am I required to go on the NSW Housing Pathways System?**

**A:** By going on the system you:

1. Show the demand for housing in the area - evidence for more housing investment
2. Have the opportunity to have your name come up for non-SEARMS owned housing – increased chance of being housed

SEARMS will review the NSW Housing Pathways list to identify potential eligible applicants (**as per the specific requirements for SEARMS eligibility**) for a SEARMS property and will contact them directly to assess if the application can proceed to the next stage for a SEARMS house.

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### Assessment of applications for SEARMS housing

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**Q: How are applications assessed?**

**A:** SEARMS conducts a number of checks from Housing Pathways

1. Meets eligibility criteria for SEARMS housing
2. Checks the household composition (number/ages/gender) to the property size available.  
NOTE: SEARMS applies the NSW Public Housing standards for appropriate housing<sup>1</sup>

All eligible applicants are then put through SEARMS Housing Matrix assessment which determines priority based on predetermined criteria and scoring such as:

- Homelessness
- Supports in area
- Children
- Ability to meet tenant obligations

Where a property was transferred from Budawang Aboriginal Corporation, SEARMS will provide the final short-list and consult with Budawang Aboriginal Corporation and/or Batemans Bay based panel of Walbunja Elders to determine the successful applicant from a shortlist of eligible applicants.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/policies/social-housing-eligibility-allocations-policy-supplement/chapters/entitlements>



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### SEARMS Rent setting policies – **NEW** tenants

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**Q: How is my rent calculated?**

**A:** SEARMS rent setting is a 25% rebate to market rent for NEWLY advertised vacancies only.

Market Rent is sourced from the latest DCJ Rent and Sales data and uses the Median Rent for the size/type dwelling by Postcode.

[Rent and Sales Report - interactive dashboard | Family & Community Services \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

*For example, if the market rent is \$400, SEARMS provides a rebate of \$100 to eligible applicants who will pay \$300 per week.*

**Q: Do I have to pay a Bond?**

**A:** Yes, SEARMS requires a 2 week Bond for all properties. This is in addition to Rent which is paid fortnightly in advance.

**Q: How long is my lease for?**

**A:** Depending on the property, SEARMS may offer a short-term let (crisis), 3 month lease (transitional), 6 month or 12 month leases.

SEARMS Housing Officers will also assist applicants in checking their eligibility for **Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)**. CRA can be up to \$70 per week so it is important to check that applicants are aware of this and claiming as appropriate.

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### SEARMS Rent review policies – **ONGOING** tenants

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**Q: How often is my rent reviewed?**

**A:** SEARMS reviews tenant eligibility and rent annually.

Tenants and all occupants over 18 years, are required to send in their household income information to assess their eligibility according to the NSW Department of Communities & Justice social housing eligibility policy for **ongoing rental rebates**.

Should tenants not send in all of their household information in the required time, their rebate is automatically cancelled and they will pay **MARKET RENT**.

SEARMS will enter the household income information of all occupants over 18 years into the **AHO Community Housing Rent Calculator**.

**As rent payable is assessed on household income, your rebate can be anywhere from 0% to 25% of market rent.**

**Eg Property Market Rent is \$400**

Example 1: AHO Rent Calculation is \$340. Therefore Rent payable is \$340, a rent rebate of \$60

EXAMPLE 2: AHO Rent Calculation is \$280. Therefore the Rent payable is \$300, the maximum rent rebate of \$100 possible



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EXAMPLE 3: AHO Rent Calculation is \$450 Therefore the Rent payable is \$400, a rent rebate of \$0, but rent capped at Market rate.

SEARMS Housing Officers will also assist ongoing tenants in checking their eligibility for **Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)**. CRA can be up to \$70 per week so it is important to check that applicants are aware of this and claiming as appropriate.

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### SEARMS Repairs and Maintenance

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**Q: Who is responsible for repairs and maintenance?**

**SEARMS has obligations as the Owner/Landlord** under the Residential Tenancies Act to provide the residential premises in a reasonable state of cleanliness and fit for habitation by the tenant on the commencement of the lease. Then it is the responsibility of the Tenant to maintain that state.

**The Tenant has obligations to keep the premises in the condition it was received, less fair wear and tear.**

This includes being responsible to pay for any damage you or any guests to the property may cause; changing lightbulbs, and other tenant obligations.

*For details on these obligations, refer to the NSW Residential Tenancy Act*

**For more information see the Repairs and Maintenance – FAQ**

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### Resources/further information

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**Residential Tenancy Act:** <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-2010-042>

**Fair Trading NSW:** <https://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/housing-and-property/renting>

**Commonwealth Rent Assistance:** <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support/programmes-services/commonwealth-rent-assistance>

**Median Rents:** [Rent and Sales Report - interactive dashboard](#) | [Family & Community Services \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

**NSW Dept of Communities and Justice Social Housing Policy:** [Social Housing Eligibility and Allocations Policy Supplement](#) | [Family & Community Services \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)