



Tenant Advisory Group – Batemans Bay Area Terms of Reference

1. Background

SEARMS is one of the leading Aboriginal Community Housing organisations in NSW. We have been NRSCH (National Regulatory System for Community Housing Providers) registered since 2019 and undergo regular compliance assessments. This is in addition to the usual annual financial audits undertaken.

The **Tenant Advisory Group** (referred to as '**TAG**') is a forum for Tenants and Registered Occupants (hereon referred to as **Tenants**) of SEARMS Housing to provide feedback on the way it delivers its services. **Members are volunteers.**

The TAG operates for the properties owned by SEARMS and other SEARMS managed properties in the Batemans Bay and surrounding Areas.

SEARMS Staff provides administrative and coordination support to the quarterly TAG meetings and TAG newsletter.

SEARMS manages around 480 properties – mostly on behalf of other Aboriginal housing Owners such as the AHO (government), Local Area Land Councils and Aboriginal housing organisations. We also own and manage our own housing stock.

Each Owner organisation has its own set of housing policies – from eligibility, assessment and allocation; rent setting and arrears management; and repairs and maintenance policies (approvals, funding, use of trades, etc).

Changing Government policy has severely impacted on Owner's capacity to carry out Repairs and Maintenance works with the cessation of dedicated funding to Operational funds ceasing in 2013 and Repairs and Maintenance funding since that time being limited to only a few Owners portfolios.

Over the past 3 years, SEARMS has provided the costs of running a housing portfolio to the Owners to assist them in updating their own policies – in particular rent setting and arrears management.

In 2022, SEARMS undertook its own review which resulted in the current SEARMS housing policy being updated and implemented.

A SEARMS Tenant Advisory Group Terms of Reference was first raised in discussion with existing SEARMS tenants, with an inaugural group who volunteered to assist with addressing issues raised by some of these tenants.

To ensure that all Tenants in the Batemans Bay and surrounding areas have the opportunity to participate and that discussions at the TAG meet the Australian Privacy Principles, the following documents were finalised for issue.

- SEARMS Tenancy Advisory Group – Batemans Bay Terms of Reference
- SEARMS Tenancy Advisory Group – Expression of Interest form



Tenant Advisory Group – Batemans Bay Area Terms of Reference

2. Role

The role of the TAG is to:

- Provide a platform for Tenants of SEARMS Housing to provide advice in relation to Housing policy, procedures and service delivery.
- Ensure decisions do not impact on financial sustainability of the housing programs.
- Develop a Rental Assessment and Arrears Management Circle to guide management on action.
- Develop an Annual Action Plan that is specific for the TAG. The Action plan will identify clear goals and outcomes for the Action Plan and these will be prioritised by members of the TAG.
- Assist in the development and implementation of community engagement activities including community events and workshops;
- Report on the business of the TAG in quarterly tenant newsletters and through other approved SEARMS communication channels.
- On behalf of the tenants and families ensure that the needs of tenants are considered and communicated to SEARMS.

3. Membership Eligibility

Membership is open to any Aboriginal tenant or Aboriginal registered household occupant that is 18 years of age or over nominated by 2 other head tenants (not residing at the same property)

Membership shall not exceed 9 people who are Tenants (or Registered Occupants) of the SEARMS managed properties

- With no more than 2 of the 9 being immediately related*

Members of the TAG must not have been issued with A Notice to Remedy from SEARMS in the previous 12 months for debts in excess of \$5000 or a Notice of Termination

A Member will automatically cease being a TAG member when:

- they exit a tenancy and the SEARMS Housing service, or,
- are issued a Notice to remedy for debt in excess of \$5000
- are issued with a Notice of Termination from SEARMS

All TAG members are expected to demonstrate:

- A commitment to progressing outcomes that improve the lives of tenants that occupy houses and units that are managed or owned by SEARMS Community Housing Aboriginal Corporation, in the Batemans Bay area.
- A willingness to attend meetings, working groups, workshops and training;
- A willingness to make a positive contribution in meetings and to actively participate in the activities of the TAG;
- A commitment to equal opportunity, equity and access, fairness and social justice;
- Efficiency - Members will endeavour to contribute as much as possible, as required and as time allows.

SEARMS CEO – will confirm applications for eligibility and submit to the SEARMS Board for final approval.

A **SEARMS Coordinator** will attend meetings as a non- voting member.



4. Office Holders

The SEARMS Co-Ordinator will Chair this meeting until the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are elected.

Chairperson

The Chairperson will:

- Be elected for a one year term;
- Be nominated at the TAG meeting that will be held in March of each year;
- Develop the meeting agenda in consultation with the SEARMS Coordinator;
- Chair the meetings;
- Set and Follow the agenda;
- Enable all members to have their say;
- Know how to bring conversation back to business;
- Have a sense of justice and fair play;
- Ensure decisions are made and recorded in the minutes;
- Have knowledge of the TAG Terms of Reference.

Deputy Chairperson

The Deputy Chairperson will:

- Be appointed on the same terms and conditions as the Chair
 - Will stand in when the Chairperson is absent

Secretary (SEARMS responsibility)

This role will be undertaken by the **SEARMS Coordinator** who will:

- Provide secretarial support duties for TAG meetings and forums as required.

5. Meetings

The TAG will meet quarterly (every 3 months) in each location at a time and day to be set by the members of the TAG. Meetings will not run longer than 2 hours

The locations, dates and times of all meetings for the following 12 months will be determined by members of the TAG at the first meeting.

The Chairperson, with the endorsement of the SEARMS Coordinator, is able to invite guest speakers from SEARMS Housing, AHO or other Community Housing related agencies.

Efficiency - Members will endeavour to contribute as much as possible, as required and as time allows.

Decision making

- A quorum of 50% of the total membership of the TAG plus one member is required. Meetings that do not have a quorum will be abandoned and a subsequent meeting date and time will be scheduled.
- The TAG will operate by consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached, then this is reported back to SEARMS as undecided.



6. Code of Conduct, Confidentiality & Conflict of Interest

All TAG members will treat one another with respect, dignity and honesty in the spirit of co-responsibility. This will be achieved by:

Respect

- Members will listen to one another's opinions in an unbiased and non-judgmental manner;
- Members will allow others to speak without interruption;
- When speaking, members will be mindful of time constraints.

Confidentiality

- Some sensitive matters must remain strictly confidential and will be identified as strictly confidential by the Chairperson or SEARMS staff;
- It is recognised that on occasions, Members may discuss TAG events in general terms with a member of the community that is not a committee member. All discussions concerning the TAG should be professional and constructive.
- TAG members understand and consent that their name will be advertised as members of the TAG group on SEARMS communication channels.

Conflict of Interest

- Members are to disclose any conflict of interest Immediately relation definition of Family members/role Members will be asked to agree to and sign SEARMS:

- Code of Conduct Policy
- Privacy & Confidentiality Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy

Breach of the Above

Breaches of any of the above will be investigated and managed as appropriate by SEARMS Coordinator; Any Members who become aware of breaches of the Code of Conduct, must notify the Chair, or SEARMS Coordinator.

Definitions:

Immediate Family is:

- Mother/Father, Sister/brother, Son/Daughter, Spouse/de-facto

Member Eligibility: Head tenant or Registered Occupant

Batemans Bay and Surrounding Areas: post code areas 2536 and 2537 ONLY

Additional Resources:

SEARMS Code of Conduct

SEARMS Privacy & Confidentiality Policy

SEARMS Conflict of Interest Policy

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-legislation/the-privacy-act>

Australian Privacy Principles

<https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/australian-privacy-principles>

Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW)

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2010-042>