

REIANEWS

ISSUE 28: OCTOBER 2013

2013
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Estate Institutes'
Auctioneering
Champion



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Mr Peter Bushby
REIA President

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



WELCOME FROM REIA'S PRESIDENT

Welcome to REIA News for October 2013.

Hearty congratulations to the supremely talented Kiwi, Daniel Coulson, Australasian Auctioneering Champion for the second year in a row.

The Aussies fought a strong fight but in the end, 23 year old Daniel's skill and thorough professionalism in his craft shone through.

Thank you to all who helped the competition showcase Australia and New Zealand's very best auctioneers – Chief Judge, Rob Druitt and his hard working committee, the judges and the hosts, REIWA. The Real Estate Institutes' Australasian Auctioneering Championships are such a highlight on the REIA national calendar and I know it's the same for our friends from New Zealand, who'll be hosting the event in Auckland next year so stay tuned.

That leads me to REIA's flagship event – the night of nights on the REIA calendar, in fact. The National Awards for Excellence 2014 will be held on Thursday March 20 at the Museum of Old & New

Art (MONA) in Hobart. See inside for more details and book early as MONA is a world-class destination and seats for the Awards are strictly limited.

On the political front, The Honorable Ian Macfarlane is now the Minister in charge of national licensing. The REIA CEO met with the Senior Adviser to the new Industry Minister who is aware of the profession's issues around national licensing and was briefed on our document ***A Solution Looking for a Problem – the Case for a 'No' Vote.***

REIA has requested a meeting with the Minister in coming weeks in the lead up to the November meeting of the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations and will keep you, our members, fully informed of developments.

If you feel as passionate about this issue as we do, please contact your relevant state or territory REI or Estate Agents' Co-operative in NSW, to assist with their advocacy at a state level. Thank you.

Mr Peter Bushby
REIA PRESIDENT



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2013
Australasian Real
Estate Institutes'
Auctioneering
Champion



Winner Daniel Coulson with Chief Judge and Chair of REIWA Auctioneering Network, Rob Druitt



The coveted Championship trophy

Twenty three year old New Zealander, Daniel Coulson is the 2013 Real Estate Institutes' Australasian Auctioneering Champion, taking the trophy for the second year in a row.

REIA President, Peter Bushby said, "The Aussies were hoping to get some sweet revenge this year after a run of several wins by the Kiwis, but young Daniel's skills and talent shone."

This year, the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA) played host and the five finalists who battled it out with Daniel were Justin Nickerson of QLD, Harry Li from VIC, Rob Mason from WA and the other Kiwi finalist, Andrew North.

Mr Bushby said "The competition is judged by veteran auctioneers after the five finalists were given the address and a tour of a property which they had to mock-sell under the hammer. The clock is ticking and points are deducted for any errors of fact or legislative compliance they may overlook."

"They have to really know their stuff as a crowd of 'bidders' and hecklers tried to put the competitors off and simulate real-life auction situations."

"The choreographed and controlled bidding sequences were hotly contested in front of a crowd of more than 1,000."

» *article continues*

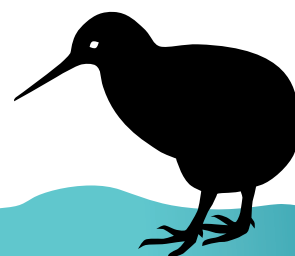


REIA President Peter Bushby at the awards dinner

"We saw the cream of the auctioneering crop in action in Perth. It shows just how important it is to keep standards high in all areas of the real estate profession," added Mr Bushby.

Open to the public, this year's Australasian Auctioneering Championships hosted 23 auctions over two days. The quality was truly exceptional with participants creating momentum in the bidding, while building rapport with the crowd.

The Championships were first held in 1993 and provide a significant opportunity for the Real Estate Institute of Australia and the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand to show off their very best Auctioneers.



AAC 2014

SAVE THE DATE

The 2014 Australasian Real Estate Institutes' Auctioneering Championships will be held at Viaduct Events Centre in Auckland.



22 and 23 October 2014

This article is brought to you by
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NATIONAL LICENSING

REIA attended a meeting of National Occupation Licensing Authority's (NOLA) Property Occupations Interim Advisory Committee (POIAC) recently. Others in attendance were Australian Property Services Association (unions), Australian Institute of Business Brokers, Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council (CPSISC), Property Council Australia, Royal Institute of Chartered Evaluators, Strata Community Australia and six staff from NOLA. The Australian Livestock and Property Agents' Association did not attend.

It was made clear at the meeting that POIAC is an advisory body only and not a decision making one. Matters discussed, at what was considered an introductory meeting of POIAC, were its role, a progress update on national licensing, implementation and CPD.

It was indicated that any requirements for CPD would be activated only after a risk analysis and cost benefit analysis had been undertaken. REIA argued that this was an unnecessary and time consuming approach and that the Decision Regulation Impact Statement (DRIS) did not indicate that the treatment of consumer benefit would be adequately considered.

It is expected by NOLA that the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations meeting in November will go ahead but that national licensing could be dealt with out of session.

REIA's *Vote 'No'* response to the DRIS was distributed to state and Commonwealth Government members together with a media release following input from the REIs and can be found at http://www.reia.com.au/userfiles/REIA_DRISsubmission2013WEB.pdf



*REIA CEO and Chair of the Council of Small Business of Australia (COSBOA), Amanda Lynch, Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson and COSBOA CEO, Peter Strong look over REIA's *Vote 'No'* campaign document at a recent meeting.*



The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP

MINISTER FOR INDUSTRY



MINISTER IN CHARGE OF NATIONAL LICENSING

The Honorable Ian Macfarlane is the newly elected Government's spokesperson on national licensing and REIA is already forging relationships with the Minister and his office.

Mr Macfarlane was elected as a member of the Australian House of Representatives in October 1998, representing the Division of Groom, Queensland for the Liberal National Party and has been the Minister for Industry in the Abbott Government since 18 September 2013.

He was born in Kingaroy, Queensland, and was a farmer and president of the Queensland Graingrowers Association before entering politics. He acquired the nickname "Chainsaw" due to his

raspy voice, from ABC rural reporter Judy Kennedy. He now attributes the moniker to his ability to "cut through red tape" and it was alluded to in his 1998 election campaign through the slogan "The Right Voice for Groom".

As a minister in the Coalition Government under John Howard, he held the portfolio of Minister for Small Business from January 2001, before being promoted to the Cabinet role of Industry, Tourism and Resources in November 2001. Following the defeat of the Coalition in the 2007 federal election, he served in the shadow portfolios of Trade as well as Infrastructure and Water, and was the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources.

REIWA PRESIDENT RE-ELECTED

David Airey has been re-elected for a second term as president of the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia. Hayden Groves has been elected Deputy President.

REIWA's elected Council of nine members made the decision at its first meeting since its recent election of councillors for 2013-14. Mr Airey said he was honoured to serve another term as President. "REIWA is a vibrant and dynamic organisation with a high community profile that helps our members grow their businesses and most importantly, provides advice to consumers, government and property professionals. I look forward to continuing my service to the Institute and its members in November following a brief holiday break and also to working with the new council team."

David Airey is a former REIA President.



REIWA President David Airey and Deputy President Hayden Groves



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This article is brought to you by REIA Research Officer, **Evgeniya Hawthorne**. Evgeniya can be contacted at evgeniya.hawthorne@reia.com.au

GENDER PAY GAP IN AUSTRALIA



If a woman does the same job as a man she should be paid equally. However, that is not the case for many women in Australia with the gender pay gap standing at 17.5%. Although the gap varies depending on many factors such as sector, industry, occupation, type of employment, age, experience, etc., the message remains. On average, women are being underpaid.

The gender pay gap is the difference between the average of all female

and all male earnings expressed as a percentage of male earnings. In May 2013, the average weekly ordinary time earnings of women working full-time were \$1,250.50 per week (or \$265.90 per week less than men), who earned an average weekly wage of \$1,516.40 per week. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) figures show a disappointing trend of the gap widening by 1.3 percentage points over a period of 19 years.

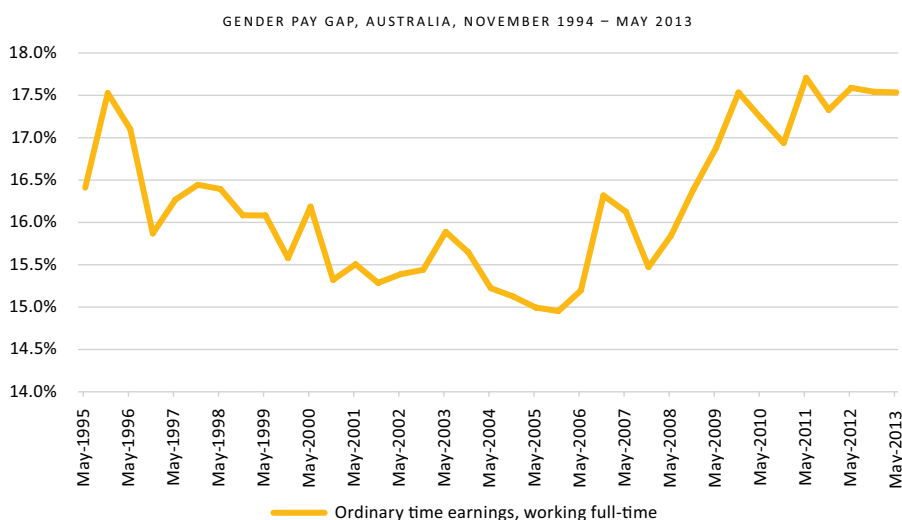
The gap is present in both public and private sectors although it is wider in the latter. Given the important role played by small business in creating employment, it is essential for small business to understand its obligation not to discriminate on the basis of gender and pay equally for work of equal value.

Small business is a vital part of the Australian economy. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Counts of Australian Businesses publication estimates that there were 2,141,280 actively trading businesses in Australia in June 2012. Of them, 61% did not employ and 34.9% employed fewer than 20 employees. Only 4.1% of businesses employed 20 people or more.

Not only do small businesses employ women, many are also run by women. For the last twenty years, women have comprised around one-third of all small business operators in Australia. In 2006, 32% of small businesses in Australia were run by women.

The majority of real estate services businesses are classified as small, with only 4.2% of them employing 20 people or more.

Figure 1



Source: ABS, 6302.0 - Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, May 2013, Table 3

Of the 64,700 self-identified real estate agents in August 2011, 52% were men and 48% were women. Despite the apparent equality, the work of female agents differs from the males. The vast majority of agencies' employees are actually property managers. As many as 95% of agencies' property management staff can be women and 80% of sales staff can be men.¹ Figure 2 below shows that men represent the majority of real estate services' business owners while their female counterparts are most likely to be employed.

In May 2013, at 23.5%, the Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services sector had the fourth highest gender pay gap – the figure was six percentage points above the national level.

Apart from the ABS' publications on average weekly earnings, there are limited, if any, legitimate sources of data to estimate the issue of gender pay equality in small business in general and in the real estate industry in particular.

The *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* replaced the *Equal Opportunity*

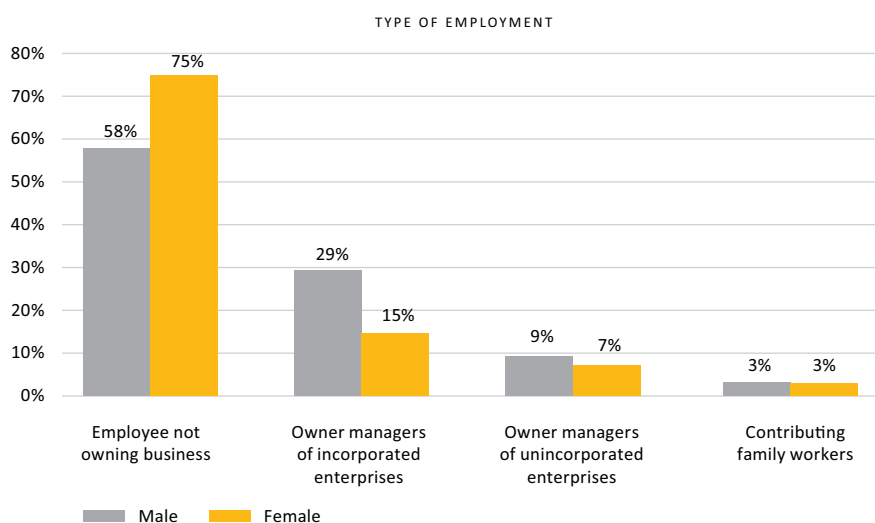
for Women in the Workplace Act 1999. The new legislation aims to improve and promote equality for both women and men in the workplace. All private sector employers with 100 or more employees are required to report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency on an annual basis. Employers with fewer than 100 employees are not required to report. Due to the exemption, little is known about pay equity in small to medium sized businesses. There are limited tools available that focus specifically on small firms and acknowledge their resource constraints and information preferences.

It is crucial to promote fairness and respect in the workplace to assist small businesses to attract and retain the best workers.

We are well aware that women generally spend a more substantial amount of time taking care of their families' needs. This can result in the difference in earnings. However, the current level of the gender pay gap can not be justified.

The Gender Pay Gap paper can be found at <http://www.reia.com.au/userfiles/GenderPayGap.pdf>

Figure 2



Source: 2011 Census

¹ <http://www.rebonline.com.au/breaking-news/6576-female-agents-still-face-challenges-ceo>

FIABCI AUSTRALIA REPORT

In December, Fiabci meets in Dublin for the winter business meetings from the 4th to the 7th. Already a few delegates have registered from Australia. If you wish to attend or find out more, check out www.FIABCI-Ireland.ie



Chris McGregor

Just as a reminder as 2013 comes to an end, our 2014 membership renewals will become due. We would be delighted to see our membership grow even more to support Robyn Waters as she becomes the World President for 2014-2015.

Chris McGregor

PRESIDENT • FIABCI
AUSTRALIAN CHAPTER

► LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARDED

Chris McGregor has been awarded the honour of Life Membership of the REIT. He joined real estate in 1986. Chris has been the Managing Director of First National Real Estate McGregor since 1994 and is currently the Chairman of First National Tasmania and a past Director of First National, serving four years.

Chris has served on the Real Estate Institute of Tasmania (REIT) Board since 1989 and was elected State President from 1998-2000. He also served as the Deputy

President of the REIA in 2009-2010 and is a trainer and auctioneer.

Chris is currently the National Australian President for FIABCI which is the French acronym for the International Real Estate Federation which is based in Paris.

Chris is a Fellow of the Real Estate of Institute of Australia, Fellow of the Australian Marketing Institute and CPM, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



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INDUSTRY UPDATE

Industry news from around Australia



RBA Financial Stability Review

The Reserve Bank of Australia released the Financial Stability Review warning “those purchasing property” to “do so with realistic expectations of future dwelling price growth.”

The Bank associated an increase in property market activity over the past year, particularly in NSW and from investors, with the reduction in interest rates and recent increases in housing prices. The RBA attributed the steady performance of banks’ domestic housing loans to low interest rates and tightening mortgage lending standards after 2008.

However, lending practices in the residential mortgage market will be an important area for the Banks to watch due to the risk of increases in speculative activity on the housing market.

Presentation, presentation, presentation

They say you can’t sell a secret, but some scenes are best kept hidden, especially when selling real estate.

A goat tied to the clothes line, dirty dishes throughout the kitchen and grotty bathrooms - these all sound like scenes from a reality TV show about hoarders, but in fact all these “special” features have popped up in “unreal estate” listings online.

Real estate commentator and host of *Selling Houses Australia*, Andrew Winter, said great photos in an advertisement are “vital” and even give your home a “brand”.

“Is the image you’re looking at really going to help sell your home or are there things in the picture that you’d like to change, such as unmade beds, bench tops full of stuff, clothes on the line and fridge magnets,” he asks.

Australian vendors, and even more surprisingly their real estate agents,

don’t always heed Mr Winter’s advice. It’s not rocket science, but a picture of a bed that doesn’t come with the house is useless, as is a close-up of the toilet seat, yet agents across Australia have been busy pointing and shooting at walls, floor tiles and piled up sinks.

news.com.au

Streamlining Qld

Nine high-growth councils across Queensland have joined with South East Queensland Councils to commit to improving development assessment process, commencing the Concept to Construction Development Assessment Innovation project.

The project, a partnership between the Council of Mayors (SEQ), the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Government, will offer improved certainty for the development industry and help to stimulate jobs and economic growth.

Council of Mayors (SEQ) Chairman Councillor Graham Quirk says the project will leverage off best practice solutions and ideas to create efficient assessment and approval processes, at the same time ensuring good-quality and long term outcomes for communities.

“The project focuses on stimulating economic development, building confidence in DA process, cutting red tape and bringing a renewed focus on risk management.

“The Concept to Construction project will discover the best ways of assessing and approving new developments and apply these across the state to help ensure new housing and commercial development is completed and ready for sale as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

The first phase of the project is underway with councils benchmarking their DA services against the Council of Mayors (SEQ) Development Assessment

Framework of Leading Practice, a document that aims to bring a world leading standard to DA in Queensland.

Real Estate Advertising Outlook

Research and Markets released its 2013 Real Estate Advertising Outlook: Advertising (Finally) Rebounds. The 36-page report takes a close look at how the real estate marketing landscape has changed, and forecasts one big near-future change: The days of double-digit growth for online media are rapidly coming to an end, and the first-ever decline might be two years away.

The report is available [here](#).

NT growth

NT Treasurer David Tollner said that the trend number of residential building approvals in the Territory in August 2013 increased by 1.4 per cent compared to July 2013 and is further evidence of growing confidence in the Territory economic direction.

“This is the highest monthly number of building approvals since December 1999 and comes on the back of yesterday’s news that Territory retail trade turnover has continued to strengthen,” Mr Tollner said.

“Nationally, the trend number of residential building approvals in August increased by just 0.1 per cent so we are leading the way for the rest of Australia.”

“In the year to August 2013, the number of residential building approvals in the Territory increased by a whopping 29.9 per cent, the second highest growth rate of the jurisdictions, behind Western Australia, which is up by 31.2 per cent.”

“The increase reflects strong demand for new residential properties supported by strengthening population growth, relatively high rental yields and low interest rates.”

MAKING NEWS

General national news



Platinum living

A Platinum rating from Liveable Housing Australia (LHA) now provides automatic Green Star points under the Green Building Council of Australia's (GBCA's) rating system for buildings.

Multi-unit residential projects in which at least 10 per cent of the dwellings meet the Platinum Level of the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines will be automatically deemed compliant with the Green Star Mat-15 'Universal Design' credit.

Project teams that can demonstrate LHA Platinum Level certification will now be automatically awarded one Green Star point within the Green Star – Multi Unit Residential rating tool.

"We congratulate the GBCA for allowing projects to use the up-to-date Liveable Housing Guidelines, which are being embraced by industry, instead of the standard that was previously referenced, and which is more than 15 years old," Mr Aitken says.

"This new ruling offers a more cost effective compliance pathway to ensure apartment dwellings are liveable. Very few projects previously claimed the Mat-15 credit because it was costly and difficult to achieve," Mr Aitken explains.

Booming Victoria

Victoria has recorded its largest quarterly interstate migration gain since March 2002, says Treasurer Michael O'Brien.

"We've welcomed an extra 1,530 people this quarter," Mr O'Brien said.

"While we are seeing a temporary increase in people from Western Australia coming to our state in Grand Final week, Victoria has also experienced a significant permanent increase in population."

According to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures, in the year to March quarter 2013 Victoria's population from all sources grew by 1.82 per cent or 31,616 persons.

Mr O'Brien said that more people have arrived in Victoria in the year to March than the seating capacity at Melbourne's iconic home of football, the MCG.

"Overall, Victoria's population has grown by over 100,000 over the year to March, which is almost 2,000 people every week.

"People both within Australia and internationally want to live and work here, which is continuing to boost our economy. Victoria is clearly the premier state for new arrivals."

The strong growth figures were also driven by 76,612 births over the year.

Queensland young guns

The Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ) has called upon the expertise of young real estate professionals to help guide its future direction.

The REIQ has selected a group of young guns to be part of its Young Industry Professionals (YIP) advisory group. The group, who have more than 80 years of industry experience collectively, has been tasked with helping to shape the future direction of the Institute.

The REIQ has been the state's peak professional association for real estate since 1918 but recognised it must seek the input of its youngest members to remain a viable, modern organisation.

REIQ CEO Anton Kardash said the REIQ must keep looking at ways to remain relevant, accessible and meaningful for all its key stakeholders.

Garage Sale Trail

Retro bargains, de-clutter, or just get to know the neighbours – four years after starting locally in Bondi Beach, Garage Sale Trail is now a national event. It organises communities around Australia to hold Garage Sales on the same day, this year Saturday October 26th.

Sustainability is the key, by redistributing great stuff and saving it from landfill and it's a terrific opportunity for you to connect with people in your neighbourhood.

You could make some money from stuff you would otherwise have thrown away, for you or your favourite charity.

So far Garage Sale has redistributed one million items from potential landfill, helped raise \$3 million in local fundraising, and helped 800,000 people to meet their neighbours in Australia.

Schools, community groups, local businesses and cultural institutions can all get involved too. More information at www.garagesaletrail.com.au

Characteristics of Australian business

The Selected Characteristics of Australian Business, 2011-12 publication is out. All businesses were asked to identify barriers which significantly hampered the development or introduction of new or significantly improved goods, services, operational or organisational/managerial processes or marketing methods and barriers that significantly hampered general business activities or performance.

Consistent with previous results, 45% of business reported at least one barrier to innovation. One in five businesses reported lack of access to additional funds, making this the most frequently reported barrier, followed by lack of skilled persons in any location (18%).

Household energy consumption

ABS released results of its first Household Energy Consumption Survey showing that in 2012, the average Australian household spent \$39 per week on electricity and gas for their homes and \$60 per week on fuel for vehicles.

Energy costs represented around five per cent of the average gross weekly household income and range from almost 10% for low income households to 3% for high income households.

Households paying a mortgage had the highest overall energy costs (\$123 per week), while those renting from a state or territory housing authority spent less than half this amount (\$56 per week).

POLITICAL WATCH

Information and news from government



Sydney urban housing

The changes to the NSW planning reforms must not stop the need for a diverse range of housing types to complement the low density suburban model for Sydney, says the Urban Taskforce.

"There are a growing number of people who now want to live in more urban areas often in apartments and it is essential that these models are encouraged in the right locations," says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson.

"What is needed to contribute to community discussions on future growth are a number of models for varying levels of density. The Urban Taskforce has developed a new system of grading density based on building heights. Seven residential types representing the number of storeys have been selected from R2 to R4, R6, R8, R12, R25 and R35+."

WA first home owners

First home buyers of newly constructed homes are eligible to receive an increased grant of \$10,000 from the WA State Government.

The boost to the First Home Owner Grant (FHOG) – from \$7,000 to \$10,000 means first home buyers signing a contract to build or purchase a new home and owner-builders who commence laying foundations for the home will be eligible for the increased grant of \$10,000.

First home buyers signing a contract to purchase an established home will be eligible for a \$3,000 grant.

REIWA President David Airey said this was not good news for the 70 per cent of first home buyers who preferred to purchase existing, older homes rather than building new.

"Till now, first home buyers have been

eligible for a grant of \$7,000 whether they buy an established home or build a new one. Now the grant will drop to \$3,000 for established homes."

Bare minimum in Tasmania

Tasmania will be the first state or territory to have legislated minimum standards for residential tenancies, following the successful passage of the Residential Tenancy Amendment Bill (Tasmania) through the Upper House.

The proposed minimum standards listed below went through unscathed but not without much discussion and some dissent. The standards require all tenanted properties to be:

- Weatherproof and structurally sound
- Clean and in good repair
- Equipped with bathroom and toilet
- Serviced with a kitchen sink, hotplates and an oven (which can be a microwave)
- Supplied with electricity and one fixed form of heating
- Provided with curtains (except properties owned by Housing Tasmania)
- Adequately ventilated

ACT disclosure

Attorney-General, Simon Corbell, is reminding real estate agents of their obligations under the Australian Consumer Law (ACL), the *Civil Law (Sale of Residential Property) Act 2003* and the *Agents Act 2003*, in relation to disclosure and making false or misleading representations.

"Recent months have shown a general lack of awareness by some people in the real estate industry about their obligations to disclose information to potential buyers when selling property or land in the ACT. This lack of awareness relates particularly

to the status of a Development Approval (DA) for a property," said Mr Corbell.

"The status of a DA is likely to impact on whether a potential buyer remains interested in purchasing a property or not, and failing to disclose the status on a DA may cost the potential buyer time and money."

New in NSW

"A total of 41,309 houses have been approved in NSW in the twelve months to August 2013, the highest level since 2003/04," NSW Planning and Infrastructure Minister Brad Hazzard said.

"In NSW approvals have increased by 8% against the five year average in the period from April 2011 to August 2013, despite a fall of 2% in approvals nationally in the same period.

"This substantial hike in housing approvals shows NSW is the happening place when it comes to new properties.

"The message to those who want to build houses is come to NSW, where we are open for business."

NSW recorded 3,740 dwelling approvals in August 2013.

"Our average monthly approvals are 17% higher than in the previous five years under Labor, showing that the NSW Government's targeted policy is working and business and consumer confidence is returning to NSW," Mr Hazzard said.

NSW approvals for August 2013:

- Up 31% on the five year monthly average from September 2008 (2,857 dwellings).
- Up 21% on the monthly average (3,099 dwellings) since we came to office.
- Up 11% on the July 2013 result.

THE WORLD

Property news from around the world



US shutdown

The US real estate industry is bracing for the impact of the first government shutdown in 17 years, which went into effect on 1 October.

In the short term, there should be minimal disruptions in the federal loan processing apparatus, government officials say.

The Federal Housing Authority FHA will continue to endorse single family loans, and underwrite and approve new loans during the shutdown, contrary to some media reports.

"If the shutdown lasts and our commitment authority runs out, we do expect that potential homeowners will be impacted, as well as home sellers and the entire housing market," HUD says. "We could also see a decline in home sales during an extended shutdown period, reversing the trend toward a strengthening market that we've been experiencing."

But the impact on buyer confidence and sales will be more difficult to forecast. On a practical level, more than 700,000 government employees are going without pay, a significant part of the buying public.

Crowdfunding for property

Recently, an alternative to the institutional lender has presented itself which could work for property investors – "crowdfunding".

The theory is that instead of raising funds from a bank or wealthy investors, you raise the equity from hundreds of your contacts and perfect strangers, each investing a very small amount in the business or property. Does crowdfunding work for property investment?

Crowdfunding for real estate has attracted major players in the USA, such as FundRise and Realty Mogul. The basis for FundRise's crowdfunding platform is that local people can invest in a company that buys empty or rented commercial property.

There are already a handful of crowdfunding websites up and running in the UK. In particular, crowdfunding for UK residential buy-to-let property seems to be making its debut. Investors are pulled together to purchase property assets allowing them to control, rent or sell with full day to day control of the investment.

Until the UK Government deals with crowdfunding through legislation or regulation, the crowds may remain dubious about this form of investment. However, the US market has proven that crowdfunding is here to stay. According to Forbes Magazine, US equity crowdfunding was set to top US\$3 billion in 2012.

Spain

The long anticipated legislation granting non-EU nationals automatic Spanish residency via property investments has now officially been made law after being published in the state Gazette (BOE), opening the door to thousands of potential investors spending a minimum of €500,000.

Whereas traditional buyers have been the British, Dutch and Germans, this could change with estate agents reporting a rise in interest from buyers from the Middle East, Russia and China. They nationalities have already been snapping up properties in anticipation of the new law which is retrospective allowing those who have already bought to benefit from the residency rights which allow them to stay in Spain for 12 months compared with the current 90 days and a further residency permit that is renewable every two years.

A new company called Residency in Spain has been established to deal with the demand from real estate investors and has registered as many as 30 enquiries a day from non-EU potential buyers, particularly from China and India.

In terms of location, by far the most sought after area is the Costa del Sol. Known globally as

a European hotspot for glitz and glamour, it's still the place to be seen for many and has become a real magnet for savvy Middle Eastern investors.

Facebook Town

Facebook's sprawling campus in Menlo Park, California is so full of cushy perks that some employees may never want to go home. Soon, they'll have that option.

The social network says it is working with a local developer to build a \$120 million, 394-unit housing community within walking distance of its offices. Called Anton Menlo, the 630,000 square-foot rental property will include everything from a sports bar to a doggy day care.

A Facebook spokeswoman said employee retention wasn't a major factor in the real estate push. "We're certainly excited to have more housing options closer to campus, but we believe that people work at Facebook because what they do is rewarding and they believe in our mission," she said.

Some employees had inquired about places to live near the corporate campus, she said, amid a housing shortage in Menlo Park.

Spending more time in the clutches of the company sphere isn't necessarily positive. One reason the old company towns eventually disappeared was that they could be overbearing to workers. In the 2013 version, the downside could be unspoken expectations that employees always be working.

Facebook's plans are still a far cry from those steelworker and mining company towns from a century ago. Facebook employees aren't expected to work there for their entire lives. And the new development can only house a maximum of about 10% of its Menlo Park employees.

But the move speaks to how competition is reshaping the role of corporate culture in the tech industry.

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