

Public housing tenant has VCAT win after getting \$2000 cleaning bill for his 'palace'



By Benjamin Preiss

Maxwell Sanders treated his two-bedroom home in Warragul like a "palace". When he moved out of the public housing unit earlier this year he made sure it was near spotless.

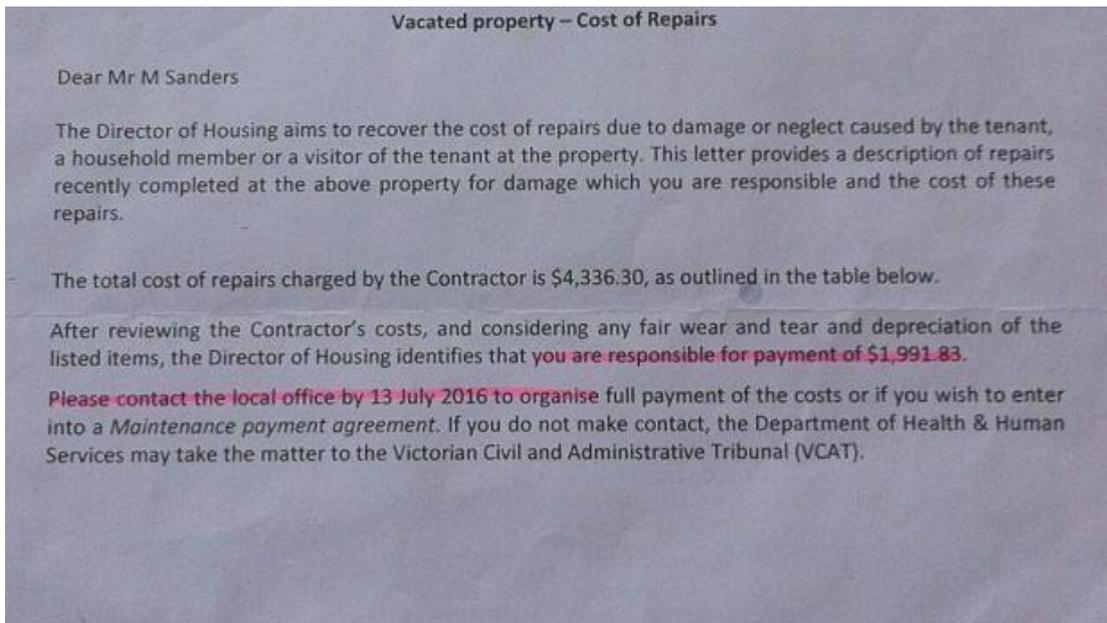
"I was a very good tenant. Very houseproud," he said.



Maxwell Sanders was given a \$2000 bill for cleaning costs when he moved out of his public housing unit in Warragul, he took it to VCAT and then paid only \$50. *Photo: Penny Stephens*

So why, he wondered, had he received a cleaning and damages bill of almost \$2000 from the Victorian Office of Housing several months after his tenancy ended?

"I was bloody shocked."



A letter

Maxwell Sanders received from the Office of Housing *Photo: Supplied*

Fortunately for Mr Sanders, 79, his son-in-law is a keen photographer who documented the tidy state of the unit.

He said the Office of Housing offered to reduce the fee to about \$1100 but he refused on principle.

"I knew I was in the right. I knew I didn't do any damage to the place."

Mr Sanders took the matter to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal this week.



Mr Sanders. *Photo: Penny Stephens*

The result? He was ordered to pay just \$50 for the removal of a small piece of garden furniture he had accidentally left behind.

One letter from the Office of Housing claimed the total cost of repairs at \$4336 but accounting for wear and tear that figure was reduced to \$1991.



Photos of Maxwell Sanders' Warragul unit

The Office of Housing wanted to charge Mr Sanders for rubbish removal, painting the dining room and carpet replacement.

Mr Sanders' situation is not unique. The Victorian Ombudsman is now investigating the Office of Housing over [unreasonable costs for damages and maintenance](#) charged to tenants.

Ombudsman Deborah Glass launched the own motion investigation following complaints from public housing tenants and "wider community concern".

Plenty of these cases are winding up in VCAT. The tribunal's 2014/15 annual report showed the Director of Housing made 12,936 applications in VCAT.

Mr Sanders believes other tenants may be scared into paying unreasonable sums to the department if they receive similar bills.

He hopes by telling his story he can help others avoid a costly exit from public housing. Mr Sanders is now living with his son in Dandenong North.

A department spokesman said it was inappropriate to comment on individual cases but it would work with the Ombudsman to support her investigation.

Mr Sanders' daughter Tanya said she was offended by the bill which came as an "awful fright" after her father had lived in the unit for seven years.

"My dad looked after it like it was his palace," she said. "He wasn't a smoker or a drinker."

Ms Sanders said she is proud of her father for fighting back rather giving in to the Office of Housing.

"There are a lot of people who don't know they've got rights and they'll just sign away anything because they get worried when they get a letter like that."

Submitted by Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council