



Small Business
Development Corporation

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL TENANCY ACT:

4th edition

*for leases entered into on or after 1 January 2013
(advice for landlords and tenants)*



FOR
LEASE

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL TENANCY ACT

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ISBN 978 0 9803635 8 6

First published 1999
Reprinted 2002 2nd ed.
Reprinted 2011, 3rd ed.
Reprinted 2012, 4th ed

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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act: for leases entered into on or after 1 January 2013 (advice for landlords and tenants)

4th ed.
ISBN 978 0 9803635 8 6.

Western Australia. Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act 1985. 2. Commercial leases – Western Australia. 3. Retail trade – Law and legislation – Western Australia. 4. Small business – Law and legislation – Western Australia. I. Small Business Development Corporation (W.A.) 346.941043462

Published by:

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DISCLAIMER

This publication has been prepared by the Small Business Development Corporation to provide general guidance and direction on the *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act 1985*. The information contained herein is provided voluntarily as a service to our clients and is made available in good faith and is derived from sources believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publishing. However, the information is provided solely on the basis that readers will be responsible for making their own assessment and that they should verify all relevant representations, statements and information. Neither the Corporation nor its officers take any responsibility for statements or representations, nor shall the Corporation or any of its officers be liable in respect of any such statement or representation, whether by reason of negligence, lack of care, or for any other reason whatsoever.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act 1985* (the Act) came into operation on 1 September 1985. The Act regulates commercial tenancy agreements of most retail premises in Western Australia. The primary objectives of the Act are to promote fair leasing arrangements, improve communication and provide access to low cost dispute resolution for the retail industry.

The Act has been amended on several occasions. Amendments are changes to the Act. Some amendments only affect new leases entered into after the date the amendments commenced, while other amendments apply to all leases. It is important to know the date your lease commenced so that you know which amendments apply to your lease. This will also help you to identify the Small Business Development Corporation publication that is relevant to your lease. Please refer to the table below.

On what date did you enter into your retail lease?	The SBDC publication relevant to your retail lease is:
On or after 1 September 1985 but before 1 July 1999.	<i>Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act for leases entered into before 1 July 1999.</i>
On or after 1 July 1999 but before 1 January 2013.	<i>Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act for leases entered into on or after 1 July 1999 but before 1 January 2013.</i>
On or after 1 January 2013.	<i>Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act for leases entered into on or after 1 January 2013.</i>

This publication provides information and general guidance on the Act and amendments to the Act up to and including the *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Amendment Act 2011* (the 2011 Amendment Act) and the *Small Business and Retail Shop Legislation Amendment Act 2011*.

The *Small Business and Retail Shop Legislation Amendment Act 2011*, which became operational on 26 March 2012, establishes a Small Business Commissioner in Western Australia. The Small Business Commissioner, amongst other things, will assist small business operators to resolve complaints and disputes related to retail tenancies.

Whilst the Small Business Commissioner can assist the parties to reach an agreement over a retail tenancy matter, the Small Business Commissioner does not have the power to decide a retail tenancy matter. The State Administrative Tribunal and the courts have the responsibility and power to decide retail tenancy matters.

Retail leasing is a highly complex subject covering many possibilities. Consequently, the Act itself can be difficult to interpret. This publication, in a question and answer format, covers the essential parts of the Act. Its contents are generally in the same order as in the Act.

A NOTE OF CAUTION for tenants and landlords: DO NOT enter into ANY offer to lease, agreement for lease or a lease unless you are familiar, comfortable with and clearly understand the commercial ramifications of the various clauses of the document and the Act.

If you are uncertain, SEEK APPROPRIATE ADVICE.

For legal questions you should consult a solicitor. For commercial matters you may consult a specialist business advisor at the Small Business Development Corporation or any other appropriate adviser. The Small Business Development Corporation can be contacted on 13 12 49.

Tenants and landlords entering into retail shop leases for the first time are especially encouraged to seek professional advice and guidance.

This publication deals with the legislation as at 1 January 2013.

PRELIMINARY

This publication includes the main changes to the Act made by the *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Amendment Act 1998*, the *Retail Shops and Fair Trading Legislation Amendment Act 2006*, the 2011 Amendment Act and the *Small Business and Retail Shop Legislation Amendment Act 2011*.

Q: Does this publication apply to your lease?

A: This publication applies only to leases entered into on or after 1 January 2013.

Q: What if a lease was entered into on or after 1 September 1985 but before 1 January 2013?

A: This publication does not apply and reference should be made to the earlier publications *Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act for leases entered into before 1 July 1999* and *Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act for leases entered into on or after 1 July 1999 but before 1 January 2013*. You should refer to the table above in the introduction section for the publication applicable to your lease.

Q: Which leases does the 2011 Amendment Act apply to?

A: **New retail shop leases** entered into on or after 1 January 2013 and **extensions of existing retail shop leases**. Parts of the 2011 Amendment Act also apply to **existing retail shop leases**.

Q: Which leases does the 2011 Amendment Act not apply to?

A: The 2011 Amendment Act does not generally apply to:

1. **existing leases** entered into before 1 January 2013 that were not covered by the Act as it applied before 1 January 2013; or
2. leases entered into under an option or agreement made before 1 January 2013 that were not covered by the Act as it applied before 1 January 2013.

Q: What is an existing retail shop lease?

A: An **existing retail shop lease** is a retail shop lease that was entered into before 1 January 2013 or a retail shop lease entered into pursuant to an exercise of an option given in a retail shop lease or agreement made before 1 January 2013.

An **existing retail shop lease** also includes a retail shop lease entered into before 1 January 2013 pursuant to an exercise of option under this Act.

Q: What is an extension of an existing retail shop lease?

A: An **extension** of an **existing retail shop lease** is where an **existing retail shop lease** has **expired** and there is **no option available** to renew the term of the lease, and the landlord agrees to grant a further lease.

Q: If a tenant entered into a retail shop lease before 1 January 2013 and exercised an option given in that lease to renew the lease after 1 January 2013, does the 2011 Amendment Act apply to the renewed lease?

A: **Parts** of the 2011 Amendment Act apply (see below for the most important).

Q: Which 2011 Amendment Act amendments also apply to existing retail shop leases?

A: **Parts** of the 2011 Amendment Act apply (see below for the most important).

Q: Which of the 2011 Amendment Act amendments that apply to existing retail shop leases, are the most important?

A:

(a) Market rent valuations

A market valuation of rent is not to take into account the value of:

- (i) the goodwill of the business carried on in the retail shop; or
- (ii) any stock, fixtures or fittings in the retail shop that are not the property of the landlord; or
- (iii) any structural improvement, or alteration, of the retail shop carried out, or paid for, by the current tenant.

(b) Provision of information for a market review of rent

If a landlord is given written notice to do so, the landlord must provide a valuer with certain information.

(c) Confidentiality of information

A person given information by a landlord for the purpose of a market review of rent must not disclose that information except in circumstances specified in the Act.

(d) Operating expenses

The contribution to the landlord's operating expenses is calculated, amongst other things, by the application of the definitions of "group of premises", "lettable area", "total lettable area" and "relevant proportion".

(e) Lease termination

The tenant can terminate a lease that has been extended because the landlord did not reply to a notice from the tenant seeking clarification as to whether a new lease will be offered.

(f) Exercise of options

The landlord must notify the tenant in writing of the date after which the option to renew the lease (if any) is no longer exercisable at least six months and no more than 12 months before that date. If the landlord fails to notify the tenant, as required, then the retail shop lease is taken to provide that the option to renew is exercisable six months after the landlord notifies the tenant.

For leases requiring an exercise of the option to renew the lease before 1 January 2014 or if the landlord cannot give the required notice because of the short lease period then different notice periods apply.

(g) Legal expenses

A landlord cannot claim from the tenant or any other person the landlord's legal or other expenses for:

- the negotiation, preparation or execution of the lease, renewal of the lease or extension of the lease; or
- obtaining the consent of a mortgagee to the lease; or
- the landlord's compliance with the Act.

(h) Prohibition of misleading or deceptive conduct

A party to a retail shop lease must not, in connection with the lease, engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive to another party to the lease or that is likely to mislead or deceive another party to the lease.

Q: Does the 2011 Amendment Act apply if the tenant assigns a lease to another person?

A: If the lease was entered into on or after 1 January 2013, then all of the amendments in the 2011 Amendment Act will apply. If the lease was entered into before 1 January 2013 or under an option granted before 1 January 2013, then only some of the amendments will apply.

The date of the assignment of the lease is irrelevant. What is relevant is the date that the assigned lease was originally entered into.

Q: How have amendments made to the Act by the *Small Business and Retail Shop Legislation Amendment Act 2011* changed retail tenancy dispute resolution?

A: Most retail tenancy disputes covered by the Act must first be referred to the Small Business Commissioner before being able to proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal.

The Small Business Commissioner will assist the landlord and tenant to resolve their dispute. Only after the landlord and tenant have unsuccessfully attempted to resolve their dispute with the assistance of the Small Business Commissioner can a party apply to the State Administrative Tribunal to decide on their dispute. A limited number of types of matters however can proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal.

GENERAL CONDITIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Q: What is a lease?

A: Any lease, licence, or agreement that provides for occupation of premises in Western Australia.

Q: Does a lease have to be in writing?

A: No. A lease may be oral or written, or in some cases a combination of both. Written leases are strongly recommended to ensure that the rights and obligations of the parties to the lease are stated clearly and understood by the parties.

Q: How can a tenant be described?

A: A person, who under the lease is, or would be, entitled to occupy the premises the subject of the lease.

Q: What is a retail shop lease?

A: A retail shop lease is a lease that provides for the occupation of a retail shop unless:

- the tenant is a listed corporation or a subsidiary of a listed corporation; or
- the retail shop has a lettable area exceeding 1000 square metres.

Q: Are there any leases exempted from the Act by the Regulations that would otherwise be included as a retail shop lease?

A: Yes exempt from the Act are:

- a lease held by a listed corporation on the New Zealand Stock Exchange Limited or a subsidiary of such a corporation; and
- a lease of premises for the purpose of operating only a vending machine or automatic teller machine.

You should check the Regulations to ensure this has not changed since 1 January 2013.

Q: Why is it important to determine whether a lease is a retail shop lease?

A: The Act does not apply to leases that are not retail shop leases.

Q: Are there any exceptions?

A: Yes. The *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Regulations 1985* (the Regulations) provide that certain leases, despite not conforming with the definition of retail shop lease, may be prescribed to be retail shop leases.

As at 1 January 2013 there were no exceptions. You should check the Regulations to ensure this has not changed since then.

Q: Are there any exemptions from the Act?

A: Yes. Certain persons, retail shop leases or retail shops may be exempted by regulation from all or any provisions of the Act.

Q: Are there any exemptions currently?

A: Yes. Exempted is a landlord, in respect of a retail shop lease, who is unable, because of the short lease period, to give the required notice notifying the tenant of the option to renew the lease. However the landlord must comply with alternative notice provisions set out in the exemption (see section in this publication titled “Obligation to Notify Tenant of An Option to Renew”).

You should check the Regulations to ensure this has not changed since 1 January 2013.

Q: What is a retail shop?

A: In the Act ‘retail shop’ refers to two kinds of premises:

1. Those situated in a retail shopping centre that are used wholly or predominantly for the carrying on of a business; or
2. Those not situated in a retail shopping centre that are used wholly or predominantly for the carrying on of a retail business.

Q: Are there any premises excluded from the definition of retail shop?

A: No.

You should check the Regulations to ensure this has not changed since 1 January 2013.

Q: What is a retail shopping centre?

A: A cluster of premises five or more of which are used to carry on a retail business. The premises share the same landlord or comprise lots on a single strata plan.

Q: What is a retail business?

A: A retail business is a business that wholly or predominantly involves the sale of goods by retail or is a specified business.

Q: What is a specified business?

A: A business prescribed by the Regulations to be a specified business for inclusion within the ambit of the Act.

Q: Are there currently any specified businesses?

A: Yes.

- On 16 February 1993 the following businesses became specified businesses:
 - drycleaning • hairdressing • beauty therapy • shoe repair • sale or rental of video tapes.
- On 1 January 2013 the following businesses became specified businesses:
 - beauty treatments • shoe repair (which may include key cutting and engraving) • sale or rental of DVDs
 - electronic games or other similar amusements.

The Regulations should be checked to see whether any other businesses have been added to or removed from the above list.

Q: What if a business operates from a retail shopping centre but does not carry on a retail business?

A: Even if a business is not a retail business it will be regarded as a retail shop, and therefore covered by the Act, if it is located in a retail shopping centre.

Q: What would be examples of a *retail shop* that would seem out of place with its accepted meaning?

A: A travel agency, a real estate agency, a dentist or an accountant are examples of businesses which are non retail and would not be covered by the Act unless situated in a retail shopping centre as defined in the Act. If such non-retail businesses were not located in a retail shopping centre the Act would not apply.

Q: Can a strata title development be classified as a retail shopping centre?

A: Yes, a retail shopping centre, as defined under the Act, can include strata title developments.

Q: Can a multi-level building be a shopping centre?

A: Yes, a retail shopping centre, as defined under the Act, can include a multi-level building.

Q: What if the premises are in a building which has five or more retail businesses but is built over two or more floor levels?

A: All businesses on levels where there is at least one retail business are retail shops.

Q: What does it mean for premises to be used *wholly or predominantly* for the carrying on of a business?

A: Wholly means that the premises are used *entirely* for business purposes. Generally, predominantly means that the premises are used *mainly* for business purposes.

Q: On the other hand, what does it mean for premises to be used wholly or predominantly for the carrying on of a *retail business*?

A: See the discussion of wholly or predominantly above for carrying on of a business. The crucial difference is that in this instance the premises must be used wholly or predominantly for the carrying on of a *retail* business (as defined in the Act) rather than simply a business.

Q: What is the lettable area of a retail shop?

A: The lettable area of a retail shop is as defined in the Regulations and must be calculated in the same, or substantially the same way, as other retail shops in the same group of premises.

The Regulations should be checked to see whether the meaning of lettable area of a retail shop has changed since 1 January 2013.

Q: What is a group of premises?

A: A group of premises means:

- a retail shopping centre; or
- two or more premises (of which at least one must be a retail shop) that have a common lessor and are grouped together for the purposes of ascertaining operating expenses.

To calculate the total lettable area of the group of premises the lettable area of the non-retail shops is as defined in the Regulations and is calculated in the same manner as for the retail shops.

Q: What if the lettable areas of the retail shop are on different levels?

A: All lettable areas are included in ascertaining the lettable area of the retail shop, even if those lettable areas are on different floor levels of the building.

Q: When does a lease commence?

A: When the tenant enters into possession of the premises or when the tenant starts to pay rent or, in the case of a written lease, when all parties have signed - whichever comes first.

Q: Are Government properties covered by the Act?

A: Yes, the Government is obligated both as landlord and tenant.

Q: How can a landlord be described?

A: A person who grants or is to grant to a tenant an entitlement to occupy the premises the subject of the lease OR a person who subsequently buys those premises.

Q: Does this mean that a buyer of retail premises has the same obligations to the tenant as the previous landlord?

A: Yes, particularly in respect of the provisions of the Act that provide for occupation of premises for up to five years.

DISCLOSURE

Q: What is the landlord entitled to know from the tenant before entering into a lease?

A: The Act does not specifically address this point. However, in practice, very few landlords will offer premises to tenants unless they are fully informed of the tenant's financial position, retail experience, and of the type and style of retailing proposed. A landlord should make enquiries and seek further information as is appropriate in the circumstances.

Q: What if the landlord has doubts about the information supplied by the tenant before the lease commences?

A: A landlord can choose the tenant and an owner is not obligated to lease premises to anyone. However, if both tenant and landlord have contracted to lease, it is usually too late to withdraw unless both parties agree. If the information provided by the tenant is misleading or deceptive and the landlord suffers loss or damage, the landlord can take action, including by seeking from the tenant recovery of its loss or compensation.

Q: What is the tenant entitled to know before entering into a lease?

A: Every material matter that relates to the lease of the premises. This includes information relating to a retail shopping centre, zoning matters, proposed works, resumptions etc.

Q: Should tenants make their own inquiries regarding zoning matters, proposed works, resumptions etc?

A: Absolutely, tenants should become as fully informed as possible themselves.

Q: How is the information presented to the tenant?

A: Under the Act the landlord should issue a document called a **Disclosure Statement**.

Q: What information will be on the Disclosure Statement?

A: All that was agreed during the initial negotiations together with all matters that the prescribed Disclosure Statement requires to be fully addressed.

Q: What would be some examples apart from rent, length of lease and rent reviews?

A: The landlord might disclose the pedestrian flow, proposed road changes, the proximity of a newsagency and pharmacy to a proposed shop, and a landlord's financial commitment to promotions.

Q: Can the tenant be required to contribute to the cost of any of the landlord's fixtures and fittings, equipment or services?

A: Yes, provided the Disclosure Statement contains a statement notifying the tenant of the effect of such a provision and this is agreed to in the lease otherwise the provision is void.

Q: Should the Disclosure Statement be in the prescribed form?

A: Yes. The Act says that the Disclosure Statement shall be in the prescribed form and contain a statement notifying the tenant that independent legal advice should be obtained.

Q: Where is the form of the Disclosure Statement available?

A: Visit the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety website at commerce.wa.gov.au, select the link to 'Commercial tenancy forms and publications' at the bottom of the page. If you are unable to access the forms, contact the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or visit us at Level 2, 140 William Street, Perth.

Q: Who should complete the Disclosure Statement?

A: It can be completed by either party, but is nearly always completed by the landlord or the landlord's agent. The completed form must be signed by, or on behalf of, the landlord and the tenant.

Q: If the parties agree on special conditions, eg rent free periods at start up, should such details appear on the Disclosure Statement?

A: Certainly. All relevant agreements should be listed. Note: there may be taxation implications with such special conditions.

Q: When should a Disclosure Statement be issued?

A: At least seven days before entering into the lease.

Q: Should a Disclosure Statement be issued on the renewal of a lease?

A: Yes, because the renewal constitutes a new lease. Note that a Disclosure Statement is **not** required when a lease is renewed pursuant to an option in an existing lease, as opposed to a renewal that is a new agreement.

Q: Should a Disclosure Statement be issued upon an assignment of a lease?

A: No, a Disclosure Statement is not required when a lease is assigned.

Q: If a Disclosure Statement is not provided, or if the Disclosure Statement provided is incomplete or contains false or misleading information, what can the tenant do?

A: The tenant may do either or both of the following:

- terminate the lease in writing within six months after the lease was entered into; and/or
- apply to the State Administrative Tribunal claiming the landlord pay compensation in respect of losses suffered.

It is important to note that BEFORE the tenant can apply to the State Administrative Tribunal for compensation the tenant must first attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: Are there any exceptions to the tenant's right to terminate as a result of deficiencies in the Disclosure Statement?

A: Yes, a tenant cannot terminate a lease even if a landlord has provided a Disclosure Statement that is incomplete or contains false or misleading information if:

- the landlord has acted honestly and reasonably and ought reasonably be excused; and
- the tenant is in substantially as good a position as if the failure had not occurred.

These exceptions do not apply if a Disclosure Statement is not provided.

Q: What precautions need to be taken by the tenant before signing the Disclosure Statement?

A: It is critical the tenant reads and understands the Disclosure Statement. The tenant should also ensure that **all** statements, representations and promises which the tenant is relying on in entering into the lease are recorded on the Disclosure Statement. Legal advice is strongly recommended.

Q: What precautions need to be taken by the landlord before signing the Disclosure Statement?

A: Make sure the information on the Disclosure Statement is complete and is not false or misleading. Legal advice is strongly recommended.

Q: What if the landlord finds false or misleading information has been given by the tenant?

A: The tenant should be careful to give correct information as the Act prohibits the parties to a retail shop lease engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct.

Q: Does the Disclosure Statement refer to legal and financial advice?

A: Yes, the Disclosure Statement contains a statement advising the tenant to seek independent legal and financial advice before entering into a lease.

Q: If a tenant terminates a lease for Disclosure Statement breaches, when does the termination take place?

A: 14 days after the notification of termination is served on the landlord.

Q: Can further information be added to the Disclosure Statement?

A: Yes, additions can be made on the agreement of parties to the lease.

Q: What happens if the parties to a lease enter into an agreement or arrangement that would be void if it was included in the lease?

A: The provision would be considered to be part of the lease and the Act would apply accordingly. That is, the provision would be void.

Q: What would be an example of such an arrangement?

A: A deed or agreement outside the lease to pay key-money for a new lease.

Q: What can a tenant do if the landlord misleads the tenant but the tenant does not find out until after six months?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal has the power to award compensation and/or alter the terms of a lease if it is satisfied that the tenant was misled at the appropriate time and has suffered or is likely to suffer a financial loss.

It is important to note that BEFORE the tenant can apply to the State Administrative Tribunal for compensation the tenant must first attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: What if the tenant was induced to sign a lease based on the representation of the landlord or the landlord's agent that a certain level of pedestrian traffic could reasonably or actually be anticipated?

A: If the tenant can show that the information was false or misleading there may be a case against the landlord.

TENANT GUIDE

Q: What is the Tenant Guide?

A: The Tenant Guide is a document that must be incorporated into the retail shop lease which explains in plain English the Act's **key** principles. It gives notice of **some** of the rights and obligations under the Act, including notice of **some** void clauses and **some** commercial matters that the tenant should be aware of.

Q: Does the Tenant Guide have to be written in a particular way?

A: Yes, in the prescribed form as set out in the Regulations to the Act.

Q: Where is the Tenant Guide located?

A: The Tenant Guide is to be located at the front of the retail shop lease.

Q: When must the Tenant Guide be given?

A: The Tenant Guide must be given when the retail shop lease is entered into, which is when the tenant enters into possession of the premises, or commences to pay rent, or when all of the parties to the lease have signed the lease – whichever event comes first.

Q: Where can a Tenant Guide be obtained?

A: Visit the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety website at commerce.wa.gov.au, select the link to 'Commercial tenancy forms and publications' at the bottom of the page. If you are unable to access the forms, contact the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or visit us at Level 2, 140 William Street, Perth.

Q: If the Tenant Guide is not incorporated into the lease in accordance with the Act, what can the tenant do?

A: The tenant may within 60 days of entering into the lease (or within a longer period on application to the State Administrative Tribunal) terminate the lease by giving written notice to the landlord, or claim for losses suffered through the State Administrative Tribunal, or both.

Q: Is a Tenant Guide required on the renewal of a lease under an option or on an assignment of a lease?

A: No.

RENT BASED ON TURNOVER

Q: What is meant by rent based on turnover?

A: This is rent calculated as a percentage of the gross sales of the business.

Q: Is this also described as percentage (%) rent?

A: Yes, that is the usual terminology.

Q: At first glance the concept of percentage rent could appear to be onerous on tenants. Do tenants share this view?

A: Not necessarily. Some tenants are quite content with percentage rent. Generally, in a well managed shopping centre, tenants who pay percentage rent have profitable businesses.

Q: Can a landlord charge a tenant percentage rent?

A: Yes, but only with the prior permission in writing from the tenant and based on an agreed formula.

Q: How does a tenant give permission to the landlord to charge percentage rent?

A: By completing the prescribed form *Notice of Election that Rent be Determined by Reference to Turnover* (Form 2).

Q: Where can a Form 2 be obtained?

A: Visit the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety website at commerce.wa.gov.au, select the link to 'Commercial tenancy forms and publications' at the bottom of the page. If you are unable to access the forms, contact the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or visit us at Level 2, 140 William Street, Perth.

Q: Does the percentage rent encompass the whole of the rent?

A: Not necessarily. The percentage rent could be the whole or part of the total rent – usually it is additional rent above base rent.

Q: If the percentage rent is payable over and above the base rent, then how might it work?

A: This is best shown by an example. Base rent is \$50,000 per annum. Percentage rent 8% (agreed to by the relevant parties and based on the type of retailing). Divide \$50,000 by 8% (0.08) to get \$625,000 (threshold). If the gross takings are \$700,000 the percentage rent is 8% of \$75,000 (\$700,000 - \$625,000) which is \$6,000. Hence the total rent is \$56,000 (\$50,000 + \$6,000). There are other ways of applying percentage rent which suits particular landlords and tenants.

Q: Would the 8% used in the example be applicable to most types of retailing?

A: No, the figure could be significantly more or less depending on the gross percentage margin of the business.

Q: Does the lease have to specify the formula by which the percentage rent is to be determined?

A: Yes, otherwise the percentage rent clause is void.

Q: If the tenant has agreed to pay percentage rent, then the landlord will require the tenant's turnover figures - is this correct?

A: Yes, the tenant will have to supply turnover figures within 14 days of the end of each month or by some other agreement. The tenant will also need to supply figures from their accountant showing the annual turnover within 42 days of the end of that relevant financial year.

Q: Should a tenant be concerned about confidentiality when releasing turnover figures to a landlord?

A: Possibly, but the landlord cannot use the figures for any purpose other than calculating percentage rent.

Q: What if the landlord does use the figures other than for calculating percentage rent, for example, breaching confidentiality by publicly revealing the figures?

A: Then the tenant does not have to supply the figures anymore.

Q: What happens if the landlord has reason to believe that the turnover figures supplied are incorrect?

A: The landlord has the right to have an accountant audit the turnover figures.

Q: Who pays for the accountant to do the audit?

A: The landlord. However, the tenant must reimburse the landlord if the turnover figures have been shown to be understated by more than 5%.

Q: Are there exclusions from the turnover figures supplied by the tenant?

A: Yes, the following can be excluded: net amounts of discounts, losses incurred in resale of trade-ins, written-off bad debts, refunds on returns, cancelled lay-bys, goods and services tax (GST) imposed on the purchase price, delivery charges, asset sales such as fittings and fixtures, price of goods returned to wholesalers and receipts from Lotto and agencies other than commission.

Q: Can a tenant release turnover figures to the landlord (other than for percentage rent purposes)?

A: Certainly. Some traders like to know how tenants are performing against certain trends known to the landlord and releasing figures is part of achieving that knowledge.

Q: What if a lease clause states that turnover figures are required, but there is no percentage rent provision and the tenant signs the lease document?

A: The clause on revealing turnover figures is void, so there is no obligation on the tenant.

KEY-MONEY

Q: What is key-money in relation to a retail shop tenancy?

A: It is money or any other benefit, usually **requested by a landlord**, by way of a premium or something similar, for the landlord granting, assigning or renewing a lease, **paid or given by the tenant** or through a third party or a side agreement.

Q: Are there other terms to describe key-money?

A: Sometimes key-money is referred to as goodwill or, in the case of the liquor industry, premium payments.

Q: Is goodwill different from key-money in relation to retail tenancies?

A: Yes, goodwill means an intangible saleable asset arising from the reputation of the business, the relations formed with customers of the business and the nature of the location of the business.

Q: Under the Act can a landlord charge key-money for a new lease?

A: No, key-money cannot be charged.

Q: Under the Act can a landlord charge goodwill for a new lease or assignment of a lease?

A: No, except where the landlord is selling a business that the landlord owns and is granting the purchaser a lease of the premises that the landlord owns.

Q: What would be an example of a landlord receiving goodwill legitimately?

A: A landlord could be running a newsagency from a shop that the landlord owns. If the landlord decides to retire and sell the business, but lease the premises from which the business is conducted, then the landlord can charge goodwill in respect of the sale of the business. However, the landlord would not be entitled to receive key-money for issuing the lease.

Q: Is it possible for the landlord to disguise key-money as prepaid rent?

A: No. If there is any doubt, the onus will be on the landlord to prove that the payment is not key-money. This applies to leases entered into on or after 30 November 1990, but not leases entered into before that date.

Q: Can a landlord recoup expenses for investigating a proposed assignee of a tenant?

A: Yes, these expenses are not classed as key-money.

Q: Can a tenant recover key-money unwittingly paid for in a lease entered into after 1 September 1985?

A: Yes, through the State Administrative Tribunal or a court of competent jurisdiction.

It is important to note that BEFORE the tenant can apply to the State Administrative Tribunal to recover any key-money the tenant must first attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: A tenant sells the business and receives goodwill from the assignee. Is this a problem under the Act?

A: No, a tenant is entitled to sell a business and receive a goodwill payment.

Q: A tenant runs into financial difficulty and closes the shop, clearing out the contents. After the tenant receives a payment, the lease on the vacant shop is assigned. Is the payment classed as key-money under the Act?

A: No, as the tenant is receiving the payment and not the landlord. However, the landlord's consent to the assignment is required and cannot be unreasonably withheld.

ASSIGNMENT AND SUB-LEASING

Q: Does the landlord have to consent to an assignment of a lease?

A: Yes, a lease covered by the Act is taken to provide for assignment of the lease, subject only to a right of the landlord to withhold consent on reasonable grounds.

Q: What happens if a tenant asks the landlord in writing to approve an assignment and the landlord fails to answer the request?

A: Consent is assumed if 28 days have passed and there is no reply from the landlord.

Q: Should a request for assignment/sub-lease be in writing?

A: Yes, the Act specifies that the request be in writing.

Q: Many leases include clauses that make the outgoing tenant (assignor) and any guarantor of the outgoing tenant liable for any money payable under the lease if the incoming tenant (assignee) defaults. Are these types of clauses allowable?

A: Such clauses are void.

Q: Can a lease include a clause that allows the landlord to withhold consent to an assignment unless the outgoing tenant (assignor) or a guarantor of the outgoing tenant agrees to pay any money payable under the lease where the incoming tenant (assignee) defaults?

A: No, this type of clause is void.

Q: Who pays the legal and statutory costs of the assignment?

A: The Act does not cover this point however the parties are free to negotiate these costs. The Act does not prohibit the landlord from claiming reasonable legal or other expenses incurred by the landlord in connection with an assignment of the lease or a sub-lease.

RENT AND RENT REVIEWS

Q: Is there any regulation in the Act over the rent to be paid at the start of a lease?

A: No, this is a matter of negotiation between the parties involved.

Q: If the lease provides for a review of the rent, do the reviews have to occur annually?

A: No, rent reviews can take place every six months, one year, 18 months, two years, or on whatever basis that the parties have agreed.

Q: When the rent review time arrives, can the landlord increase the rent to any amount at the landlord's discretion?

A: No. The rent cannot be increased unless the lease specifies **a single basis** on which the review is to be made.

Q: What are examples of a "single basis for rent review"?

A: Some common examples are:

- (1) market rent;
- (2) directly relating to the consumer price index (CPI);
- (3) a fixed percentage increase; or
- (4) a fixed monetary increase.

Note that these are examples and other methods may be used.

Q: Some rent review clauses set out a number of methods for reviewing the rent and state that the rent will be reviewed using the method that produces the highest rent. For example, it may be the greatest of market rent, the change in the consumer price index or a specified percentage. Is this method of reviewing the rent permitted?

A: No. The rent can only be reviewed on a single basis per rent review.

Q: Must the rent review basis be the same for each rent review if the lease provides for a number of reviews during the term of the lease?

A: No. The lease may provide a different basis for each rent review, provided the rent review is on a single basis each time.

Q: What happens if a lease does not provide a method of rental increase at review time?

A: The landlord cannot increase the rent unless the tenant agrees.

Q: What is market rent?

A: Market rent is defined in the Act as “the rent obtainable at the time of that review in a free and open market as if, all the relevant factors, matters or variables used in proper land valuation practice having been taken into account, that retail shop were vacant and to let on similar terms as are contained in the current retail shop lease”.

Note that a calculation of market rent cannot take into account the value of:

- the goodwill of the business; or
- any stock, fixtures or fittings in the retail shop that are not the property of the landlord; or
- any structural improvements, or alteration, of the retail shop carried out, or paid for, by the current tenant.

Q: Is it mandatory to use the Act’s definition of market rent?

A: Yes.

Q: When are market rent reviews initiated?

A: Unless otherwise provided in the retail shop lease, market rent reviews must be initiated no earlier than three months before, nor later than six months after, the date that the review is due.

Q: Who can initiate the market rent review procedure?

A: A party to a retail shop lease may initiate the review by sending a notice in writing to the other party to the retail shop lease.

Q: Is a lease clause that prevents the rent from going down on a market rent review allowable? An example of such a clause is: “notwithstanding anything else provided for in this lease, the rent payable following a market rent review may never be less than the rent payable prior to that rent review”.

A: No, such clauses are void. On a market rent review, rents must be able to go up **or** down.

Q: Can the lease contain a clause that prevents the tenant from disclosing the rent?

A: No, such a clause is void. The tenant is free to voluntarily disclose to third parties the rent that the tenant is paying.

Q: If the lease provides for a review of rent (which could involve extensive negotiations) and at the conclusion of the rent review the parties do not agree with the new rent, what avenues are open to challenge the new figure?

A: The issue can be resolved by:

- a licensed valuer who is agreed to by both parties; or
- a licensed valuer nominated, at the request of both parties, by the Small Business Commissioner; or
- two licensed valuers, one appointed by the tenant and one by the landlord.

Q: Is the landlord obliged to provide any information to the valuer/s to assist in determining the rent payable?

A: Yes.

Q: What information must the landlord provide to a valuer/s to assist in determining the rent payable?

A: The relevant information about leases for retail shops in the same building or centre on request including:

- current rental for each lease;
- rent free periods or any other form of incentive;
- recent or proposed variations of any lease;
- outgoings for each lease; and
- any other information set out in the Regulations.

Q: What if the landlord fails to supply the information?

A: If the landlord does not have a reasonable excuse, the valuer must notify the tenant in writing of the failure within seven days. The tenant may apply to the State Administrative Tribunal for an order that the landlord comply with the request to supply the information.

Q. Does the information have to remain confidential?

A: Yes, unless the information was provided in specified circumstances set out in the Act or was already publicly available.

Q. Is a valuer obliged to provide confidential information to the Small Business Commissioner?

A: Yes, a licensed valuer with confidential information obtained in relation to a rent review may disclose the information to the Small Business Commissioner, if required in relation to a request for assistance or alternative dispute resolution.

Q: What are the consequences of unauthorised disclosure of information?

A: If unauthorised disclosure causes loss or damage compensation may be payable. The parties may reach agreement themselves as to the amount of compensation, or if agreement cannot be reached, may apply to the State Administrative Tribunal.

It is important to note that BEFORE the tenant or landlord can apply to the State Administrative Tribunal for compensation an attempt must first be made to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: On a market rent review, if the landlord and tenant do not agree on what the rent is to be, what rent is payable?

A: The existing rent is maintained and continues to be payable until the market rent dispute is determined. Once it is determined, the reviewed rent becomes due and payable as from the date that the rent review was due.

Q: Are the valuers in question required to give written reports on how they arrived at their decision?

A: Yes, on request of either of the parties to the lease and after payment of their fees.

Q: Who pays the valuer's fees?

A: The Act is silent on this point. Normally the fees are shared between the parties or as the lease otherwise provides.

Q: What happens if the two valuers cannot agree on a new market rent?

A: The question can be determined by the State Administrative Tribunal but BEFORE making an application to the State Administrative Tribunal the parties must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: What can the State Administrative Tribunal do when determining the rent in a market rent review dispute?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal is not bound by the rules of evidence, but is required to act according to equity, good conscience and the substantial merits of the case without regard to technicalities or legal forms. The State Administrative Tribunal may inform itself on any matter in such manner as it sees fit.

Q: In determining the rent payable on a market rent review what can the State Administrative Tribunal make the parties do?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal can require the parties to provide valuations (by licensed valuers) and any other documents and information that the State Administrative Tribunal considers appropriate.

Q: If there is a delay before a market rent is finally determined, money may become owing by one party to the other. How is the rent adjusted?

A: If the market rent review dispute was referred to the State Administrative Tribunal for determination then the State Administrative Tribunal can also determine any increase or reduction in the rent payable and over such period as the State Administrative Tribunal sees fit, taking into account all the circumstances.

Q: Can a landlord charge interest on overdue rent?

A: Yes, the Act does not prohibit such a charge, but it must be clearly disclosed and specifically provided for in the lease.

OPERATING EXPENSES - CONTRIBUTION TO LANDLORD'S EXPENSES

Q: What are operating expenses?

A: Sometimes called variable outgoings, they are the expenses of the landlord in operating, repairing, or maintaining:

- a building of which the retail shop forms the whole or part; or
- a retail shopping centre, the building or buildings of which the retail shop forms a whole or a part, and the common area.

Q: What would be generally included under operating expenses?

A: Statutory payments (for example, council rates, water and sewerage rates), insurance premiums for the building, air conditioning, cleaning expenses, fire protection, pest control, repairs and maintenance, security costs, rubbish removal and sewerage disposal, music systems, signs, gardening and landscaping, parking, and like expenses.

Q: Does the lease need to specify each item of the operating expenses?

A: Yes, otherwise they cannot be charged to the tenant. They are usually listed in the main body of the lease.

Q: Would a general clause similar to “all other expenses incurred in operating the centre” be satisfactory?

A: No, all operating expenses must be clearly specified in the lease, ie they must be individually listed under each relevant category of outgoing.

Q: Is the tenant entitled to know how each item of operating expense is determined?

A: Yes, this is required to be set out in the lease. The tenant should be able to determine contributions to each operating expenses item.

Q: Are tenants entitled to know how the operating expenses are apportioned?

A: Yes.

Q: Should tenants be told how and when the operating expenses are to be paid?

A: Yes, this should be set out in the lease. Payments are typically paid monthly.

Q: How is the tenant's contribution to operating expenses calculated?

A: By calculating, at the commencement of the accounting year, the proportion the lettable area of the tenant's retail shop bears to the total lettable area of the group of premises it is a part of. This proportion is called the '**relevant proportion**'.

Q: How is the lettable area of a retail shop calculated?

A: The Regulations set out how the lettable area of a retail shop is calculated. The lettable area must be calculated in the same way as other retail shops in the same group of premises.

Q: What is a group of premises?

A: A group of premises is two or more premises **one of which is a retail shop** which have a common lessor and are grouped together for the purposes of allocating operating expenses.

Q: What if the lettable areas of the retail shop are on different levels?

A: All lettable areas are included even if they are on different levels.

Q: What is total lettable area?

A: The total of the lettable area of retail shops and lettable area of non retail shops in the group of premises.

Q: How is the lettable area for non-retail shops calculated?

A: The lettable area of non-retail shops is calculated in such manner as is prescribed by the Regulations.

Q: Why are the terms lettable area, *relevant proportion* and total lettable area important?

A: They are used together to calculate the upper limit of the landlord's operating expenses that are payable by the tenant.

Q: In a group of premises how is the proportion of the landlord's operating expenses that are payable by the tenant limited?

A: Except if the expense is a referable expense (explained below), the proportion of the landlord's operating expenses payable by the tenant cannot be greater than the ***relevant proportion*** without the approval of the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: Can the proportion payable by the tenant be less than the *relevant proportion*?

A: Yes, if the landlord and tenant agree.

Q: What if there is a dispute as to what the *relevant proportion* is?

A: In the event of a dispute the parties must first attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner and, if the dispute cannot be resolved, it may be referred to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What are standard trading hours?

A: These are trading hours that are prescribed by the Regulations under the Act.

Q: If a tenant trades only within standard trading hours, can that tenant be charged the landlord's operating expenses that arise because other tenants trade outside of standard trading hours?

A: No, a tenant who does not trade outside standard trading hours cannot be charged the landlord's operating expenses that are incurred in relation to non-standard trading hours.

Q: Should tenants be provided with an itemised budget at the start of the financial year?

A: Yes, the landlord's agent should have this document ready one month before commencement of the operating expenses' financial year.

Q: What if tenants are not given an itemised budget?

A: They do not have to pay any operating expenses until one month after they are given the budget. If no budget is ever given, then there is no liability to pay operating expenses.

Q: What if there is a dispute between tenant and landlord regarding operating expenses?

A: In the event of a dispute the parties must first attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner and, if the dispute cannot be resolved, it may be referred to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: How are tenants made aware that the operating expenses have been correctly spent?

A: The tenants are entitled to an operating expenses statement.

Q: What is an operating expenses statement?

A: It is a written statement that details all expenditure incurred by the landlord in relation to operating expenses that the tenant is required to contribute to.

Q: Does the operating expenses statement have to be prepared to any standard?

A: Yes, it must be prepared in accordance with standards made by the Australian Accounting Standards Board.

Q: When is the operating expenses statement required to be given by the landlord to the tenant?

A: Within three months after the end of the accounting period to which the operating expenses statement relates.

Q: For retail shopping centres, is any additional information required to be included in the operating expenses statement?

A: Yes, the operating expenses statement must include details of the current total lettable area of the retail shopping centre and details of any material change in that total lettable area during the period to which the statement relates.

Q: Does the operating expenses statement have to be audited?

A: Yes, it must be accompanied by an audit report from a registered company auditor.

Q: What must be included in the auditor's report?

A: The auditor's report must include a statement by the auditor as to:

- whether or not the operating expenses statement correctly states expenditure incurred by the landlord; and
- whether or not the total amount of estimated operating expenses for the period concerned exceeded the total actual expenditure.

Q: Who pays for the audit costs?

A: The landlord must pay half of the cost of the audit of the operating expenses statement. The tenants, in accordance with their **relevant proportion**, pay their proportion of the other half.

Q: Are there any instances when an auditor's report is not required?

A: Yes, where the operating expenses relate only to land tax (subject to limited exceptions), water, sewerage and drainage charges, local government rates and charges or insurance premiums, and the operating expenses statement is accompanied by copies of the relevant assessments or invoices or other proof of payment.

Q: What happens if the landlord fails to give the tenant an audited operating expenses statement?

A: The tenant is not obliged to pay any operating expenses until the landlord complies.

Q: What are referable expenses?

A: Referable expenses are operating expenses of the landlord directly attributable to the retail shops that share the benefit of that operating expense.

Q: How do referable expenses differ from operating expenses?

A: Operating expenses are expenses incurred by the landlord for services which are necessary for **all** businesses within the landlord's premises. Referable expenses are operating expenses incurred by the landlord for services that benefit only **some** businesses and not all businesses.

Q: Can a tenant be required to pay operating expenses that are of no benefit to them?

A: No. Some services benefit some tenants but not others. A landlord may only recover an expense where the tenant enjoys or shares a benefit resulting from the operating expense (a referable expense).

Q: Are referable expenses limited?

A: Yes, the tenant is liable only for the proportion of referable expenses the lettable area of the shop bears to the total lettable area of all the premises which incur the referable expense.

Q: Can the tenant be required to contribute an amount greater than the proportion the lettable area of the shop bears to the total lettable area of all the premises in the group of premises to which the operating expense is referable?

A: No, unless approved by the State Administrative Tribunal.

SPECIFIC OPERATING EXPENSES

Q: Can a strata title levy be charged to the tenant as an operating expense?

A: The landlord may charge the tenant that part of the levy imposed on the landlord by the strata company that relates to expenses of the landlord in operating, repairing, or maintaining the building or buildings of which the retail shop forms part and the common area, provided the lease allows for this charge.

Q: What are management fees?

A: Management fees are fees charged by a manager for the cost of the collection of rent and other money and for the management of the leased premises in general. The Act provides that fees can be prescribed by regulation as management fees.

Q: Does the tenant have to pay management fees?

A: No, payment of management fees by tenants is prohibited.

Q: Is there a limit on the tenant's contribution to land tax and metropolitan region improvement tax?

A: Yes, if the lease provides for such a contribution, the amount payable is to be calculated on the basis that the land on which the tax is assessed is the only land which the landlord is the owner (on a single ownership basis) and is subject to the **relevant proportion** (if there is more than one retail shop involved).

Q: What happens if a retail shop lease requires the tenant to make a payment or payments for the purpose of paying off all or part of the cost of constructing, extending or purchasing plant or equipment for the retail shopping centre?

A: That term of the lease is void.

Q: What if a retail shop lease contains a provision that a tenant is obliged to contribute towards the cost of any of the landlord's fixtures, fittings, equipment or services?

A: Such a provision will be void unless the Disclosure Statement provided to the tenant contains a statement notifying the tenant as to the effect of such a provision.

Q: Must the tenant pay the landlord's operating expenses as a separate cost?

A: No, if the parties agree, the lease can provide for:

- a gross rent to be paid which includes the rent and all other costs of the landlord in leasing to the tenant the building or shopping centre as a fixed amount;
- a semi gross rent which provides for a payment of rent together with a limited number of operating expenses such as local government rates and taxes, water authority rates and taxes and charges, and land tax; or
- some other variation.

SINKING, MARKETING AND PROMOTIONAL FUNDS

Q: What is a sinking fund?

A: Generally a fund set aside to pay for replacement capital items at some future date.

Q: Could you have sinking funds for other purposes?

A: Sinking funds can be for any specific purpose that requires a future cash sum. They usually apply to items of capital expense, although they can apply to items of revenue expense.

Q: Are any specific types of sinking fund clauses prohibited under the Act?

A: Yes, generally sinking fund clauses that allow the landlord to recover from the tenant contributions towards the cost of:

- construction of the shopping centre;
 - extension or structural improvement of the shopping centre; or
 - any plant or equipment that is or becomes the landlord's property;
- are prohibited.

Q: Does this clause apply to all retailers?

A: No, only to retailers in retail shopping centres (a collection of five or more retail shops with the same landlord or on the same strata plan).

Q: Does the Act regulate sinking, marketing and promotion funds?

A: Yes, if the lease is for premises in a retail shopping centre and provides for payments to be made by the tenant into:

- a sinking fund for repairs or maintenance, or any similar purpose; and
- a fund or reserve for marketing or promotion, or any similar purpose.

Q: Does the lease need to specify the purpose of the fund or the reserve?

A: Yes.

Q: Are contributions by tenants to sinking funds and marketing or promotion funds or reserves required to be held in any special manner?

A: Yes, money is to be paid by the landlord into one or more appropriately designated interest bearing accounts.

Q: Are there any restrictions placed on the landlord as to money held in sinking funds and marketing or promotion funds or reserves?

A: Yes, this money (including interest) may only be used for:

- the purpose stated in the lease;
- taxes payable on the fund or reserve;
- the costs of auditing the fund or the reserve accounts; and
- accounting, legal and other professional costs incurred for a **scheme of repayment** (see below).

Q: What are the landlord's obligations in relation to sinking, marketing or promotion funds or reserve accounts?

A: The landlord is required to keep full and accurate accounts of all money received or held in respect of each fund and reserve account, keep the accounts in such a way that they can be audited, have the accounts audited at the end of each accounting year and give the tenant a copy of the auditor's report within three months after the end of each accounting year.

Q: What if the landlord fails to give the tenant a copy of the auditor's report?

A: The tenant is not required to make payments into the relevant fund or reserve from the date of non-compliance until the landlord complies.

Q: What happens if there is a deficiency in a fund or reserve?

A: The landlord has to pay into the fund or reserve any deficiency that is due to the failure by the landlord, or any previous landlord.

Q: Is there a time limit in respect of which a tenant must make a claim in relation to a deficiency in a fund or reserve?

A: Yes, the tenant must notify the landlord of the claim within three years of receiving the auditor's report.

Q: What happens to the reserve or fund if the retail shopping centre is destroyed, demolished, or ceases to operate?

A: The landlord is required to prepare a **scheme of repayment** that must be approved by the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What must be contained in a scheme of repayment for a sinking fund?

A: The following must be detailed:

- the amount in the sinking fund (including interest earned);
- the **relevant proportion** to which each former tenant is entitled; and
- the way in which the amount is to be distributed, based on the **relevant proportion**.

Q: What must be contained in a scheme of repayment for a marketing or promotional fund or reserve?

A: The following must be detailed:

- the amount in the marketing or promotional fund or reserve (including interest earned);
- the proportion of that amount to which each former tenant is entitled; and
- the way in which the amount will be distributed.

Q: Can the scheme of repayment that is submitted to the State Administrative Tribunal by the landlord for approval be varied?

A: Yes, the State Administrative Tribunal may approve the **scheme of repayment** or require it to be amended. The landlord must repay to each former tenant the amount set out in the scheme as approved by the State Administrative Tribunal.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Q: Can a tenant be required by the landlord to open the retail shop at specific times?

A: No, a tenant has the right to trade during whatever time the tenant wishes (subject to the *Retail Trading Hours Act 1987*). Any provision in a retail shop lease that requires the tenant to open at specific times is invalid.

Q: What if the landlord refuses to renew a retail shop lease and the tenant believes this is because the tenant failed to open the shop at the times required by the landlord?

A: The tenant must first attempt to resolve the dispute through the Small Business Commissioner and, if the matter cannot be resolved, it may be referred to the State Administrative Tribunal and the tenant can there apply for compensation.

TENANTS' ASSOCIATIONS

Q: Can tenants join and form tenants' associations?

A: Yes, the Act specifically gives these rights to tenants.

Q: What if a retail shop lease has the effect of preventing or restricting tenants from forming, joining or taking part in any activities of a tenants' association or similar bodies?

A: The provision in the retail shop lease is void.

Q: Can a landlord treat or propose to treat any less favourably a tenant who forms or joins, or who proposes to form or join, a tenants' association or similar body than a tenant in similar circumstances who does not do or propose to do any of those things?

A: No.

Q: What can a tenant do who believes they have been treated unfavourably by the landlord because they formed or joined, or proposed to form or join, a tenants' association or similar body?

A: The tenant must first attempt to resolve the dispute through the Small Business Commissioner and, if the matter cannot be resolved the tenant can seek an order from the State Administrative Tribunal that the landlord pay compensation to the tenant, and/or an order that the landlord do, or refrain from doing, anything set out in the application.

RIGHT TO A FIVE YEAR TENANCY

Q: Does the Act entitle a tenant, entering into a new lease in a retail shop, to a minimum lease term?

A: Yes. The Act entitles a tenant with a lease of more than six months to a lease for a term of **up to** five years.

Q: What if a tenant enters into a new retail shop lease of less than six months?

A: The tenant is not entitled to a five year lease under the Act.

Q: Does the tenant have to agree to a five year lease?

A: No, the tenant can negotiate a shorter period but, under the Act, the tenant has the option to increase that shorter period up to five years if the tenant requires.

Q: Is there any exception to the less than six month exclusion?

A: Yes. A tenant will be entitled to a lease of up to five years if, as a result of the lease being renewed and/or continued, the tenant has continuously occupied the retail shop for more than six months.

Q: Can the five years or more be made up with option periods?

A: Yes, the lease could be three years with a three year option or four years with a one year option or four years with a four year option or whatever is agreed between the parties.

Q: Does an assignee have a right to a five year tenancy?

A: No, the assignee may only be granted the balance of the lease to which the assignor was entitled under the lease, plus any unused option contained in the lease, or the balance of any statutory option available.

Q: If a tenant has been given an initial term, including options of less than five years, what procedure is available to extend the period?

A: The tenant should give notice to the landlord on the prescribed form (Regulation 6 Form 3) within the required time to exercise the statutory option (ie the balance of the five year period).

Q: Is there a time limit for invoking the statutory option?

A: Yes, notice should be given to and served on the landlord not less than 30 days before the expiry of the current term.

Q: Can the 30 day notice period be reduced?

A: Yes, but only at the discretion of the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What if there is an unremedied default by the tenant (eg rent arrears) under the lease?

A: The default must be remedied before the statutory option can be exercised.

Q: How are disputes about the statutory option resolved?

A: The question can be determined by the State Administrative Tribunal but BEFORE making an application to the State Administrative Tribunal the parties must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: Do the terms of the Act apply to subleases?

A: Yes, but only to the extent that they are consistent with what applies to the head lease; eg a statutory option could not extend past the expiry date of the head lease, even if it is less than five years in duration.

Q: Can a landlord and tenant agree to a lease that is shorter than five years, and the tenant waive the right to the balance of the statutory five year period?

A: Yes, but the tenant must first obtain the State Administrative Tribunal's approval with a written application.

Q: What effect does this have if the landlord and tenant agree to say three years and the State Administrative Tribunal's approval is obtained?

A: The tenant will not be allowed to exercise the statutory option if there is a change of mind later in the lease; eg after two and a half years the tenant cannot then expect the five year term after previously agreeing to a three year term approved by the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: Can an assignee exercise a statutory option if such a course was available to the assignor?

A: Yes, but the statutory option period available to the assignee is limited to the period that was available to the assignor immediately prior to the assignment.

Q: Will the tenant's rights to the statutory option be affected by a change of landlord?

A: No, they are protected by the Act. The definition of landlord includes anyone who acquires the landlord's interest in the premises.

Q: Clearly the intention of the Act is for a tenant to receive at least five years occupancy, but what if the tenant defaults on a lease clause before the five years has elapsed?

A: In this case the landlord is entitled to terminate the lease at the time of default which will effectively reduce the five year period.

Q: In the case of a sub-lease, can the sub-tenant expect five years if such a term is inconsistent with that of the head lease?

A: No, the sub-tenant can only receive a term that is consistent with the term of the head lease.

Q: Is there any other way in which a landlord can terminate a lease in less than five years?

A: Yes, if:

- the State Administrative Tribunal has approved in writing a clause in the lease authorising such early termination that the tenant agreed to; or
- the lease contains a standard provision prescribed by the Regulations that permits such early termination.

Q: What are examples of provisions the State Administrative Tribunal can approve in writing?

A: Total or partial destruction of a shopping centre by fire or earthquake or the landlord wishing to demolish the centre totally or partially. This list is not exhaustive.

Q: Is there a name for these types of occurrences?

A: Under the Act they are called *special circumstances*.

Q: Who decides what is a special circumstance?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: Are there types of provisions prescribed in the Regulations that do not require approval?

A: Yes. Provisions allowing for the termination on the liquidation or bankruptcy of a tenant and specific types of guarantors of the tenant do not require approval.

The Regulations should be checked to see whether, since 1 January 2013, any other provisions have been prescribed that do not require approval.

Q: If a lease has a termination clause that allows the landlord to give the tenant six months notice of termination and has the State Administrative Tribunal's approval, does that have the potential to reduce the term of the lease?

A: Yes, the lease term could be determined with say a six months notice and be reduced to less than the term provided for in the lease. This could also cut out any option contained in the lease or any statutory option to renew the lease.

Q: Surely that could have a significant effect on the value of a retail business in its first five years of operation?

A: In some cases yes, the tenant could lose his or her business and be left with substantial debts with no compensation from the landlord. In other cases, especially with older buildings, the tenant might welcome an agreement from a landlord to terminate the lease.

Q: What can a prospective tenant do to protect its business interests?

A: The tenant needs to determine whether the clause is acceptable and if not conditions negotiated so that the tenant's interests are protected.

Q: When is the best time to conduct such negotiations?

A: At the disclosure stage, before entering into a binding commitment to lease the premises.

NOTICE AS TO RENEWAL OF LEASES

Q: Does a landlord have to renew a lease after its expiration if five years have elapsed?

A: No. There is no obligation for a landlord to grant a new lease to the existing tenant, unless the lease itself contains such an obligation.

Q: But what if the tenant has a valuable business and wants a new lease in order to continue business at the premises?

A: The landlord is under no obligation to renew any lease that has expired. However, if there is an unused option contained in the lease it may be exercised.

Q: Can the landlord ask for a monetary consideration for the granting of a new lease?

A: No, such payments are prohibited under the Act, as they would be classed as key-money.

Q: The issue of lease renewal would be of major concern to many retailers. Does the Act recognise the potential problems relating to renewals?

A: Yes.

Q: How does the Act address the issue?

A: At any time during the 12 months before the end of the lease the tenant can write to the landlord seeking clarification as to whether a new lease will be offered. If there are provisions in the lease granting further lease options, then the procedures set out in the lease must be followed.

Q: How long has the landlord to reply in writing to the request?

A: The landlord must respond in writing within 30 days.

Q: What if the landlord says no?

A: The tenant will have up to one year to assign the lease, re-locate to alternative premises or find some other solution to the problem.

Q: What if the landlord says yes?

A: The landlord must notify the tenant in writing and will be bound by that decision.

Q: What if the landlord does not reply?

A: If the landlord does not reply within 30 days, the lease's expiry date is extended by the period of non-compliance. For example, if a tenant made a written request to a landlord and the landlord did not provide a response for 90 days, the term of the lease would be extended by 60 days (ie. the time it took the landlord to respond less the 30 day period).

Q: Does this extension mean the tenant is 'locked in' to the lease extension?

A: No, the tenant can terminate the lease if he or she wants to do so.

Q: When does the landlord have to specify the rent to be charged at the time of the commencement of the new lease?

A: Not less than three months before the expiry of the current lease term.

Q: What if the tenant does not write to the landlord requesting clarification of whether a new lease will be available?

A: The landlord is under no obligation to grant a new lease.

Q: If my lease is renewed after the original term of the lease expires, from when will my new lease commence?

A: If a lease is renewed after the original term of the lease ends, the lease for the new term commences on the expiry of the term of the original lease.

OBLIGATION TO NOTIFY TENANT OF AN OPTION TO RENEW

Q: If a lease contains an option to renew, does a landlord have to remind a tenant of the option expiry date?

A: Yes, the landlord must notify a tenant in writing at least six months and no more than 12 months prior to the option expiry date.

Q: What happens if the landlord does not notify the tenant?

A: The option expiry date is taken to be six months after the landlord notifies the tenant as required.

Q: If the lease is extended because of the landlord's failure to notify the tenant of the option expiry date, can the tenant terminate the lease?

A: Yes.

Q: Some landlords will be unable to give the tenant the required notice as there is not enough time before the option must be exercised under the lease. What happens in these situations?

A: The Regulations set out different notice periods for these situations.

Q: To which leases do different notice periods apply to?

A: Different notice periods apply in two situations:

1. to leases requiring an exercise of the option to renew the lease before 1 January 2014; and
2. if the landlord cannot give the required notice because of the short lease period.

Advice should be sought for these leases.

Q: In the second situation mentioned above, if the landlord cannot give the required notice to the tenant in writing prior to the option expiry date because of the short lease period what is the landlord required to do?

A: The landlord is required to notify the tenant in writing of the option expiry date on or before the commencement of the current term of the lease.

Q: What is an example of a lease that the Act allows the landlord to give a shorter notice period prior to the option expiry date because of the short lease period?

A: An example is a five month lease with a two year option to renew the lease and the tenant must exercise the option three months before the end of the five month lease. In that case the landlord is required to notify the tenant in writing of the option expiry date on or before the commencement of the five month term of the lease.

COMPENSATION BY THE LANDLORD

Q: Is it possible for a tenant to get compensation from a landlord apart from matters not necessarily relating to the Disclosure Statement?

A: Yes, compensation may be available to a tenant where the landlord's actions, or failure to act, cause loss or damage to the tenant.

Q: In what circumstances could the tenant seek compensation?

A: If the landlord:

- substantially inhibits the tenant's access to the retail shop;
- takes action that substantially alters or inhibits the flow of customers to the retail shop;
- causes, or fails to prevent or remove, any disruption to trading within the centre;
- fails to rectify any breakdown of plant or equipment; or
- fails to adequately clean, maintain or repaint the building or any common area connected with the centre.

Q: Is such compensation available to all tenants?

A: No, only for tenants in retail shopping centres.

Q: What is the procedure if a tenant has a grievance that could lead to compensation?

A: The tenant must give written notice to the landlord to rectify the matter within such time as is reasonably practicable.

Q: If the matter is not rectified, how is liability and the amount of compensation determined?

A: If the landlord does not rectify the matter within a reasonable time, the landlord is liable to compensate the tenant. The amount of compensation may be agreed, in writing, by the landlord and tenant or as determined by the State Administrative Tribunal but BEFORE making an application to the State Administrative Tribunal for compensation the tenant must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: What should the tenant do in preparation for a claim for compensation?

A: Clearly quantify the compensation claim and support it by revealing detailed sales changes, reduced gross profits, increased expenses and the overall effect on net profits, and show that the cause of the damage suffered is attributable to the landlord's action or inaction.

RELOCATION

Q: Can the lease contain a provision requiring the tenant to relocate?

A: Yes, a lease may contain a relocation clause.

Q: Can the landlord compel the tenant to relocate?

A: Yes, so long as the lease contains a relocation clause the tenant has agreed to and the terms of the clause comply with the Act.

Q: If a lease contains a relocation clause how does the tenant know if the clause complies with the Act?

A: The tenant should check if five years has expired since the lease was entered into:

- if not, and the lease commenced less than five years ago, the relocation clause must be in the prescribed form or in a form approved by the State Administrative Tribunal; or
- if five years or more of the lease has expired, the relocation clause must contain certain provisions listed in the Act.

Q: What are the consequences of failure to comply?

A: The relocation clause will be void.

Q: What is the prescribed form?

A: The prescribed form is the form of the standard relocation clause that is set out in the Regulations in Schedule 1 Item 2.

Q: What is the purpose of the prescribed form?

A: If the parties agree to the landlord being able to end the lease and relocate the tenant earlier than five years from the commencement of the lease they can incorporate the prescribed form into the lease.

By using the prescribed form the State Administrative Tribunal's approval is not required.

Q: What form of relocation clause may be approved by the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal may approve another form of relocation provision if the Tribunal is satisfied that, in the circumstances, such approval should be given.

Q: Who makes the application to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: The application may be made by the landlord. Notice of the application must be given to the tenant.

Q: If a landlord plans to redevelop, several tenants may require relocation. Does the landlord have to make a separate application for each tenant?

A: No, if the same special circumstances affect several leases the landlord may make a single application in relation to these leases.

Q: 5 years has expired since I entered into my lease. What provisions must the relocation clause contain?

A: The relocation clause will comply with the Act if it contains provisions to the following effect:

- the tenant's business cannot be relocated unless the landlord has given the tenant at least six months written notice of a relocation;
- the relocation notice must give details of an alternative retail shop (if the retail shop is in a shopping centre, the alternative shop must be in the same centre);
- the tenant is to be offered a new lease of the alternative shop at the same or better terms than the existing lease;
- the new lease will not be shorter than the term remaining in the existing lease;
- the rent for the alternative shop will not exceed the rent for the existing shop although in some cases there could be an adjustment;
- the landlord must pay the tenant's reasonable costs of the relocation; and
- if the landlord does not offer the tenant a new lease of an alternative retail shop then the landlord is liable to pay to the tenant such reasonable compensation as is agreed in writing between the parties or as determined by the State Administrative Tribunal.

It is important to note that BEFORE an application can be made to the State Administrative Tribunal to determine any compensation the parties must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner.

LIABILITY FOR LEGAL OR OTHER RELATED EXPENSES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LEASE

Q: Can the landlord claim legal or other related expenses from the tenant or any other person related to entering into the lease?

A: Generally, no. A landlord is not able to claim from any person, including the tenant, the landlord's legal or other expenses relating to:

- the negotiation, preparation or execution of the lease, or the renewal of the lease or an extension of the lease; or
- obtaining the consent of the mortgagee to the lease; or
- the landlord's compliance with the Act.

Q: Can any legal or other expenses be claimed by the landlord for an assignment of the lease or a sub-lease?

A: Yes, reasonable expenses in relation to an assignment of a lease or a sub-lease.

REFURBISHMENT AND REFITTING

Q: Can a landlord require a tenant to refurbish or refit a retail shop?

A: Yes, if the retail lease contains a clause requiring the tenant to do so and the clause provides details of the required refurbishment or refitting.

Q: How specific must these details be?

A: The details must indicate the nature, extent and timing of the required refurbishment or refitting in general terms.

Q: What if the clause does not provide these details?

A: The clause will be void.

ACT PREVAILS

Q: Can parties to leases contract out of the Act?

A: No, any clause in a lease that is contrary to any provision of the Act is void.

Q: But what if the landlord and the tenant are happy with a void clause?

A: This might be all right in practice but there are many factors that can upset an arrangement like this and lead to difficulties. For example, the landlord can change, the lease is assigned or one or the other of the parties changes their mind.

Q: What would be an example to illustrate this point?

A: A landlord or their agent might orally request that a tenant pay key-money for a lease in a new shopping centre and the tenant agrees to pay. However, some time later the parties fallout over some issue and the tenant decides to ask for his key-money to be returned.

Q: Can the tenant expect the key-money to be returned?

A: Yes, the tenant can expect a full refund - if key-money has been paid.

Q: How is this possible with no written agreement?

A: The Act provides that a written or oral agreement or arrangement that contains a provision which, if contained in the retail shop lease would be void, then that provision is deemed to be contained in the lease and the Act will apply accordingly.

Q: What if such an oral agreement took place after the lease was entered into?

A: Under the Act it is immaterial whether the agreement took place before or after the entering into the lease.

UNCONSCIONABLE CONDUCT AND MISLEADING OR DECEPTIVE CONDUCT

Q: Why does the Act contain prohibitions on unconscionable conduct and misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: A retail lease is a commercial transaction between a landlord and a tenant. As a general rule, there is no expectation that parties to a commercial transaction have to be 'nice' to each other; business is business. However, the law recognises that one party should not be subjected to harsh, oppressive or deceitful conduct by the other party. Therefore, the Act prohibits unconscionable conduct and misleading or deceptive conduct.

Q: Is there a difference between unconscionable conduct and misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: Yes, although the terms bear some similarity they are quite distinct.

UNCONSCIONABLE CONDUCT

Q: What is unconscionable conduct?

A: Unconscionable conduct deals with harsh and oppressive conduct in business transactions. Generally defined, it is conduct which is so unreasonable that it goes against good conscience.

Q: Does the Act define unconscionable conduct?

A: No, the Act does not define unconscionable conduct. Unconscionable conduct is a developing area and the State Administrative Tribunal has the power to take into account all matters that it considers relevant in deciding whether unconscionable conduct has occurred.

Q: Does the Act prohibit unconscionable conduct?

A: The Act prohibits unconscionable conduct by both landlords and tenants and provides for a non-exhaustive list of matters to be considered by the State Administrative Tribunal in determining whether unconscionable conduct has occurred.

The matters the State Administrative Tribunal may consider when determining whether a landlord has acted unconscionably include the following:

- the relative bargaining strengths of the landlord and tenant;
- whether the landlord forced the tenant to engage in conduct that was not necessary for the protection of the landlord's interest;
- if the tenant was able to understand any documents relating to the lease;
- whether the landlord exerted undue influence or pressure or any unfair tactics were used against the tenant;
- the extent to which the landlord was willing to negotiate terms and conditions of the lease;
- the extent to which the landlord was reasonably willing to negotiate the rent;
- the extent to which the landlord acted in good faith;
- the extent to which the landlord unreasonably used information about the turnover of the tenant's or a previous tenant's business to negotiate the rent; and
- the extent to which the landlord required the tenant to incur unreasonable refurbishment or fit out costs.

Q: Who must prove that there has been unconscionable conduct?

A: The obligation is on the party who claims the conduct is unconscionable.

Q: What matters may the State Administrative Tribunal have regard to when determining whether a tenant has acted unconscionably towards the landlord?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal may consider similar matters that it considers for a landlord.

Q: If one or more matters exist that the State Administrative Tribunal can consider in determining whether unconscionable conduct has occurred does this mean there has been unconscionable conduct?

A: The occurrence of one or more of the listed matters does not mean that the conduct is unconscionable - the listed matters only present an increased *risk* of unconscionable conduct having occurred. The State Administrative Tribunal will consider all of the circumstances in considering an allegation of unconscionable conduct. Therefore, single instances of conduct may not be unconscionable but when several instances of such conduct are considered together, it may be concluded that in all the circumstances, the conduct was unconscionable.

Q: Does the Act contain any examples of circumstances which will *not* amount to unconscionable conduct?

A: Yes. The Act states that a person is not to be taken to engage in unconscionable conduct only because that person:

- commences legal proceedings in relation to the lease or refers a dispute or claim in relation to the lease to arbitration; or
- fails to renew the lease or enter into a new lease; or
- does not agree to having an independent valuation of current market rent carried out.

Q: What if conduct is unfair or creates a hard bargain?

A: Conduct which is merely unfair or creates a hard bargain is unlikely to be considered to be unconscionable conduct by the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: To what leases do the unconscionable conduct provisions of the Act apply?

A: The unconscionable conduct provisions of the Act apply to all retail shop leases including those leases commenced or renewed before the commencement of the Act provided the Act would have applied to those leases had the Act been in operation at the time.

Q: Is all unconscionable conduct covered by the Act?

A: The Act only covers unconscionable conduct that occurred on or after the commencement date of the unconscionable conduct provisions. The unconscionable conduct provisions commenced on 11 May 2007.

Q: Are there any matters the State Administrative Tribunal is not to consider in determining whether unconscionable conduct has occurred?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal cannot consider any circumstances that were not reasonably foreseeable at the time of the alleged unconscionable conduct.

Q: Can the State Administrative Tribunal consider circumstances existing before the 11 May 2007?

A: Yes but not to conduct engaged in before 11 May 2007.

Q: How can a landlord or tenant who has suffered loss or damage as a result of unconscionable conduct recover that loss or damage?

A: Initially a landlord or tenant must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner. If the matter is not resolved through the Small Business Commissioner the matter can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal. The State Administrative Tribunal can then determine whether unconscionable conduct has occurred.

Q: What orders can the State Administrative Tribunal make?

A: The Tribunal can order that a party pay compensation in respect of any loss or damage suffered as a result of the unconscionable conduct, or for other appropriate remedies.

Q: When should a matter involving an allegation of unconscionable conduct be commenced?

A: The application must be lodged within six years after the alleged conduct occurred.

MISLEADING OR DECEPTIVE CONDUCT

Q: Does the Act prohibit misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: Yes. A party to a retail shop lease must not engage in misleading or deceptive conduct.

Q: What is misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: Misleading or deceptive conduct under the Act is conduct that is misleading or deceptive to another party to the lease or that is likely to mislead or deceive another party to the lease.

Q: Does the Act define misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: No, neither term is defined in the Act. However, the terms have been the subject of a great deal of interpretation by the courts. In summary, conduct will be misleading or deceptive if it causes or is capable of causing error.

Q: To whom does the prohibition apply?

A: The prohibition applies to the existing landlord and tenant and to former parties to the lease.

Q: Must the conduct have *actually* misled or deceived a party to the retail lease?

A: No, the Act also prohibits conduct which is *likely* to mislead or deceive.

Q: What does 'likely' to mislead or deceive mean?

A: It means that there is a real chance of a person being misled or deceived.

Q: Who must prove the allegation of misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: The obligation to prove the allegation is on the party who claims the conduct is misleading or deceptive.

Q: Must the person engaging in the misleading or deceptive conduct intend to mislead or deceive?

A: No, intention is irrelevant for the purposes of considering the conduct.

Q: Does the conduct of a party to the lease have to be the only cause of the other party being misled or deceived?

A: No. The conduct does not have to be the only cause of a party being misled or deceived so long as it is a substantial cause.

Q: Is 'engaging in conduct' defined in the Act?

A: No. Examples of a person engaging in conduct in a retail leasing context may include a person:

- making representations, promises or predictions;
- stating an opinion;
- providing information in a disclosure statement; and
- conducting negotiations before and during the term of the retail lease.

Q: Can silence, that is the failure to disclose an important matter, be conduct that is misleading or deceptive?

A: Yes, conduct can mean the failure to do any act. Therefore, if important information is not disclosed, or only 'half the story' is told, the conduct may be misleading or deceptive.

Q: What are some examples of 'engaging in conduct which is misleading or deceptive' in a retail leasing context?

A: Whether conduct is misleading or deceptive is a question of fact which must be decided by considering all of the circumstances. In retail leasing **possible** examples include:

- where a landlord makes representations about the proposed features of a centre such as the identity of an anchor tenant which are untrue; or
- where only some, but not all, pertinent information is disclosed so that a party only receives 'part of the story'. For example, a landlord may tell a prospective tenant the centre has a 95% occupancy but does not reveal that several larger tenants will be vacating the centre on expiry of their leases.

Q: What about representations made in relation to matters which could occur in the future?

A: Representations as to future matters may be misleading or deceptive. A possible example is where a landlord makes promises or forecasts, for example about anticipated turnover or customer flow, and these promises or forecasts are inaccurate.

Q: Can a landlord and tenant contract out of the prohibition on misleading or deceptive conduct?

A: No.

Q: Can the parties effectively 'get around' the prohibition another way? For example, a landlord and tenant may agree that neither party relied on representations by the other when entering into the retail lease.

A: Such a term will not necessarily prevent a conclusion that misleading or deceptive conduct caused the party to enter the contract. The conclusion will depend on the circumstances of the case.

Q: To what leases do the misleading or deceptive conduct provisions of the Act apply?

A: The misleading or deceptive conduct provisions of the Act apply to all retail shop leases including those leases commenced or renewed before the commencement of the Act, provided the Act would have applied to those leases had the Act been in operation at the time.

Q: Is all misleading or deceptive conduct covered by the Act?

A: The Act only covers misleading or deceptive conduct that occurred on or after the 1 January 2013.

Q: How does State Administrative Tribunal determine whether the conduct is misleading or deceptive?

A: The test as to whether conduct is misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive is an objective one determined in all the circumstances of the case and by what is reasonable. The State Administrative Tribunal may take into account all matters that it considers relevant in deciding whether misleading or deceptive conduct has occurred.

Q: How can a landlord or tenant (or former landlord or tenant) who has suffered or is likely to suffer loss or damage as a result of misleading or deceptive conduct recover that loss or damage?

A: Initially a landlord or tenant must attempt to resolve the matter through the Small Business Commissioner. If the matter is not resolved through the Small Business Commissioner the matter can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal. The State Administrative Tribunal can then determine whether misleading or deceptive conduct has occurred.

Q: What orders can the State Administrative Tribunal make?

A: The Tribunal can order that a party, or former party, pay compensation in respect of the loss or damage or for other appropriate remedies.

Q: When should a matter involving an allegation of misleading or deceptive conduct be commenced?

A: The application must be lodged within six years after the alleged conduct occurred.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Q: How can a retail shop lease dispute be resolved?

A: Ideally, a landlord and tenant and/or their representatives should discuss any areas of disagreement and find a workable solution that is satisfactory to both parties. If an agreement cannot be reached, the Act contains a dispute resolution procedure.

Q: If the parties cannot reach a solution themselves, what is the next step?

A: Commence the dispute resolution procedure set down in the Act.

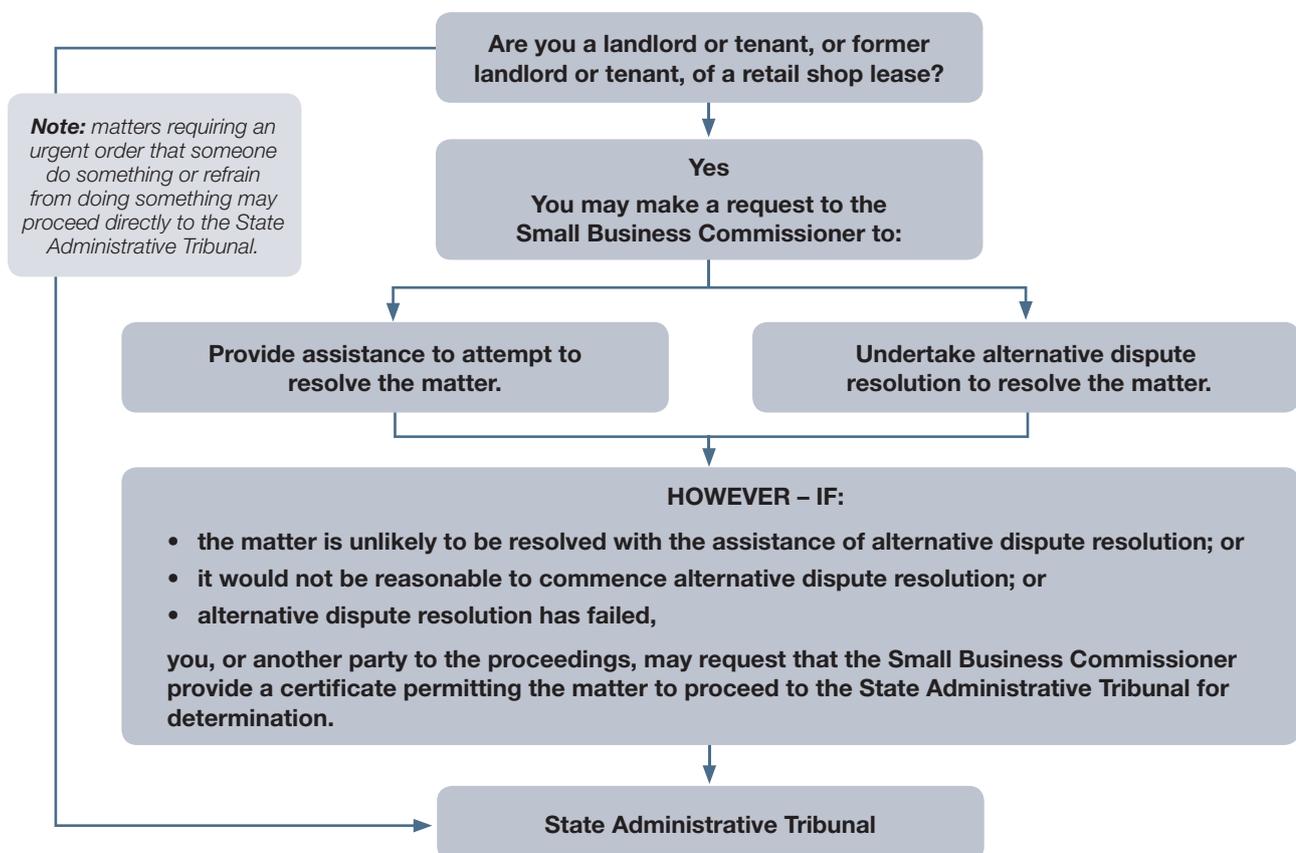
Q: Who can commence the dispute resolution procedure?

A: A party to a retail shop lease or, in some cases, a former party to a retail shop lease.

Q: In a nutshell, what is the dispute resolution procedure?

A: In most cases, a retail tenancy dispute will be considered first by the Small Business Commissioner. If the matter cannot be resolved through the Small Business Commissioner, the matter may be referred to the State Administrative Tribunal for determination. A small number of types of matters (discussed below), may proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal. The procedure is summarised in the diagram below:

Q: I have a dispute with my landlord/tenant. What should I do?



Note: some State Administrative Tribunal interim order applications and a very small number of mainly non-dispute type matters may also proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION BY THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER

Q: What are the functions of the Small Business Commissioner under the Act?

A: The Small Business Commissioner has a significant role in the resolution of retail shop lease disputes in Western Australia. The Small Business Commissioner's duties involve assisting tenants and landlords to resolve complaints and disputes related to retail tenancies. The Small Business Commissioner can:

- provide assistance to attempt to resolve the matter; or
- undertake alternative dispute resolution in respect of the matter.

Q: How can the Small Business Commissioner help parties in a retail tenancy dispute?

A: The Small Business Commissioner provides a range of services in helping the parties resolve their dispute. This includes providing information, advice and guidance together with bringing the parties together for the purpose of resolving the dispute informally, and more formal impartial alternative dispute resolution.

Q: Who can make a request for assistance to the Small Business Commissioner in relation to a dispute involving a retail shop lease?

A: Only parties to the retail shop lease (including an assignee and a subsequent purchaser of the leased premises), or in some cases a former party to a retail shop lease, can make a request for assistance.

Q: How do parties to a lease make a request to the Small Business Commissioner?

A: By contacting the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49.

Q: Where can I obtain further information about making a request to the Small Business Commissioner to assist in resolving a retail tenancy dispute?

A: Further information can be obtained by contacting the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or by visiting the Small Business Development Corporation website at smallbusiness.wa.gov.au

Q: Can the Small Business Commissioner make determinations?

A: No, only the State Administrative Tribunal and the courts can make a determination in relation to retail tenancy disputes.

Q: Can I go directly to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: Although there are some exceptions, generally parties to a retail tenancy dispute must first seek to resolve their dispute through the Small Business Commissioner before the dispute can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What matters can go directly to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: Only a very small number of types of matters may proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal. These are outlined below under the heading 'State Administrative Tribunal'.

Q: What is alternative dispute resolution?

A: Alternative dispute resolution is a low cost, convenient and fast way that parties can seek to resolve a dispute without undergoing formal legal proceedings in a court or tribunal.

Q: What is the intention of alternative dispute resolution?

A: To achieve a solution that is practical, acceptable and binding for the parties involved in the dispute.

Q: What happens when a party requests that the Small Business Commissioner commence alternative dispute resolution to resolve a retail tenancy dispute?

A: When the Small Business Commissioner receives such a request, the Small Business Commissioner decides whether:

- the parties should first seek further advice or assistance (such as legal advice or an independent valuation); or
- to commence, or refuse to commence, the alternative dispute resolution proceeding for the dispute.

Q: Is any assistance given to the parties to resolve their dispute before formal alternative dispute resolution is undertaken?

A: Yes, through the Small Business Commissioner, informal assistance and guidance to resolve the dispute is provided before any formal alternative dispute resolution is undertaken.

Q: If the parties are unable to resolve their dispute through informal assistance and guidance and the Small Business Commissioner decides to commence the more formal alternative dispute resolution for a retail tenancy dispute, what is the next step?

A: The Small Business Commissioner may appoint a person with appropriate skills and experience to undertake the alternative dispute resolution. This person is called a facilitator in the *Small Business Development Corporation Act 1983*, however this person is commonly called a mediator.

Q: How does alternative dispute resolution work?

A: Both parties meet with the facilitator (mediator) and are given every opportunity to state their case. The facilitator (mediator) helps the parties to attempt to achieve a mutually acceptable, practical solution to the problem.

Q: If other parties are involved, can those other parties be joined?

A: Yes, parties can be joined for the purpose of an alternative dispute resolution proceeding if the Small Business Commissioner considers that the person has an interest in the matter, and that person consents to being joined.

Q: Who must pay the costs of the alternative dispute resolution proceeding?

A: The costs of an alternative dispute resolution proceeding, including the fees and expenses of the facilitator (mediator), are determined by the Small Business Commissioner. These costs are borne by the parties to the dispute. Further information can be obtained by contacting the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or by visiting the Small Business Development Corporation website at smallbusiness.wa.gov.au

Q: How are the costs of an alternative dispute resolution proceeding determined?

A: The costs are to be paid by the parties in equal shares or, with the approval of the Small Business Commissioner, as otherwise agreed by the parties.

Q: Do parties need legal representation in the alternative dispute resolution proceedings?

A: A party may be represented by a lawyer during the proceedings but, if appropriate, the facilitator (mediator) may meet with any of the parties without the party's legal representative being present.

Q: Is an alternative dispute resolution proceeding confidential?

A: Anything lawfully said or done during the alternative dispute resolution proceeding cannot be used in a court or tribunal or body unless the parties consent to the use of that information.

Q: What happens if alternative dispute resolution is not successful?

A: The Small Business Commissioner may, upon the request of one of the parties, issue a certificate (discussed below) and the matter can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal for determination.

Q: Why would the Small Business Commissioner refuse to undertake alternative dispute resolution?

A: The Small Business Commissioner may refuse to proceed with alternative dispute resolution in cases where the matter is unlikely to be resolved by alternative dispute resolution, or if it would not be reasonable to commence alternative dispute resolution in the circumstances.

Q: What happens if the Small Business Commissioner refuses to commence alternative dispute resolution?

A: The Small Business Commissioner, on the request of a party to the dispute, will issue a certificate and the matter can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What is the certificate and why is it important?

A: The certificate issued by the Small Business Commissioner is a certificate that allows the matter to proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal. Without this certificate the State Administrative Tribunal will not accept an application except for a small number of types of matters. These matters are outlined below under the heading 'Dispute Resolution by the State Administrative Tribunal'.

Q: In what circumstances will the Small Business Commissioner provide the certificate?

A: The Small Business Commissioner will issue a certificate upon the request of a party to the proceedings if:

- the matter is unlikely to be resolved with the assistance of alternative dispute resolution; or
- it would not be reasonable to commence an alternative dispute resolution proceeding in respect of the matter; or
- alternative dispute resolution has failed to resolve the matter.

Q: Does the certificate have to be in a particular form?

A: Yes, the certificate must be in a form approved by the Small Business Commissioner. The certificate may include any information about the parties' conduct that the Small Business Commissioner considers relevant.

Q: Can the conduct of a party or parties before the Small Business Commissioner be taken into account by the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: Yes, the State Administrative Tribunal can take into account information about the conduct of the parties provided in the certificate issued by the Small Business Commissioner.

Q: Why is the information in the certificate issued by the Small Business Commissioner important?

A: The information in the certificate can be used by the State Administrative Tribunal when considering whether to make an order for the payment by a party of the costs of another party.

Q: Can the Small Business Commissioner intervene in any subsequent State Administrative Tribunal proceeding?

A: Yes, the Small Business Commissioner may intervene at any time in relation to a matter. However, it is anticipated this would be rare and only occur in exceptional circumstances.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION BY THE STATE ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL

Q: What is the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal is an independent body that deals with a broad range of administrative, commercial and personal matters including retail shop lease disputes.

Q: In what circumstances can a retail tenancy matter proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: A matter can proceed to the State Administrative Tribunal if:

- the Small Business Commissioner has issued the required certificate; or
- the matter is one prescribed by the Regulations as a matter which can proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: What types of retail tenancy matters are currently prescribed and are required to proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: As at 1 January 2013 the following are in broad terms the matters that can proceed directly to the State Administrative Tribunal (without the need for a certificate from the Small Business Commissioner):

1. An application that:
 - the landlord complies with a request for rental information;
 - operating expenses and/or referable expenses be allowed to exceed the proportion permitted under the Act;
 - the renewal period for the statutory option be varied;
 - the lease can be terminated earlier than the term required under the Act;
 - the statutory option of renewal under the Act will not apply;
 - the term of the lease required under the Act is of no effect in relation to the head lease;
 - an alternative relocation provision be included in the retail shop lease;
 - seeks an interim order pending final determination of an unconscionable conduct claim;
 - seeks an interim order pending final determination of a misleading or deceptive conduct application; and
 - a matter before the State Administrative Tribunal be transferred to a court.
2. Approval of a scheme of repayment, to the tenants, of the sinking fund or similar funds (for example a marketing fund) where a retail shopping centre is destroyed, damaged or ceases to operate.
3. Matters requiring an urgent order that a party to the lease do something or refrain from doing something.

Q: Can the State Administrative Tribunal determine:

- whether a lease exists or has existed; and
- whether or not a lease is or was a retail shop lease?

A: Yes, as questions arising under the lease.

Q: Who determines whether it is a question arising under the lease?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal.

Q: Who can make an application to the State Administrative Tribunal to hear a dispute under a lease?

A: Only parties to the retail shop lease (including an assignee and a subsequent purchaser of the leased premises), or in some cases a former party to a retail shop lease. The application can be initiated by either party.

Q: How do parties to a lease make an application to the State Administrative Tribunal to resolve a dispute?

A: By completing an application form and lodging it with the State Administrative Tribunal together with supporting documents and a fee which is prescribed in the *State Administrative Tribunal Regulations 2004*. (\$70 as at 1 January 2013). You must also serve a copy of the application form on the other party or parties.

Q: Where can I obtain the application form and further information about making an application to the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: Application forms and further information about making an application to the State Administrative Tribunal can be obtained from the State Administrative Tribunal by calling 9219 3111 or by visiting their website at www.sat.justice.wa.gov.au.

Q: What if a party has a problem with completing the application form?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal shall ensure that such assistance as is required for this task is given.

Q: What happens after an application is filed?

A: After an application is filed the State Administrative Tribunal will consider whether the proceedings should be listed for an initial directions hearing or be determined entirely on the documents which have been filed.

Q: What is an initial directions hearing?

A: An initial directions hearing is a hearing where the parties are brought together for the purpose of the State Administrative Tribunal considering how the matter is to best proceed. This can include referring the matter to mediation.

Q: What is the intention of the mediation?

A: To achieve an inexpensive, practical and binding solution to the problem.

Q: How does the mediation work?

A: Both parties meet with a member of the State Administrative Tribunal and are given every opportunity to state their cases. The member facilitates cross questioning and discussion, and endeavours to achieve a mutually acceptable practical solution to the problem.

Q: What happens if a mediation is successful?

A: The State Administrative Tribunal will make an order or orders reflecting the agreement reached by the parties.

Q: Must a party be legally represented at proceedings before the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: No, a party does not need to be represented by a lawyer at or before the initial directions hearing. At this stage the party can elect to not have legal representation provided the proceeding is a **minor proceeding**.

Q: What is a “minor proceeding” at the State Administrative Tribunal?

A: A minor proceeding is a proceeding in which the monetary value that can be given to the matter is no more than \$10,000.

Q: What other choices can an applicant make in a minor proceeding?

A: Additional to the no legal representation choice, the applicant can make one or more of the following choices in a **minor proceeding**:

- that there is to be no hearing (which means the State Administrative Tribunal will base its decision on the documents and there will not be a final hearing); and
- that there is to be no appeal (which means the State Administrative Tribunal’s decision will be final and cannot be appealed).

Q: What if the respondent to a proceeding in the State Administrative Tribunal fails to attend on the allotted day after receiving a notice to appear?

A: Depending on the circumstances of the non-attendance, the State Administrative Tribunal can make orders in favour of the applicant.

Q: Does the State Administrative Tribunal have real powers to hear and consider issues and make binding decisions?

A: Yes. Some of its powers include the making of orders for compensation, rewriting certain lease clauses and stopping certain parties from acting in a particular way, or requiring them to act in a certain way.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Visit smallbusiness.wa.gov.au or call 13 12 49

The SBDC is the first place you should contact when starting your business. We also welcome walk-ins at level 2, 140 William Street, Perth.

WHICH LICENCE?

The SBDCs Business Licence Finder is a one stop source of information on business licence requirements.

Visit smallbusiness.wa.gov.au for more information.

INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE ON LEASING RETAIL PREMISES

The SBDC has a specialist Commercial Tenancy service that offers tenants and landlords information and guidance on the *Commercial Tenancy (Retail Shops) Agreements Act 1985*.

There is no charge for the service which includes all aspects of lease negotiations and operations.

Relevant leasing publications are available for purchase from the Business Information Centre.

- *How to negotiate your way to a better retail lease*
- *Leasing business premises: a commercial and practical guide*
- *Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act (for leases entered into before 1 July 1999)*
- *Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act (for leases entered into on or after 1 July 1999 but before 1 January 2013)*
- *Common questions about the Commercial Tenancy Act (for leases entered into on or after 1 January 2013)*

For more information call the SBDC on 13 12 49.

SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSIONER AND RETAIL TENANCY DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Information about making a request to the Small Business Commissioner to assist in resolving a retail tenancy dispute can be obtained by contacting the Small Business Development Corporation on 13 12 49 or by visiting smallbusiness.wa.gov.au