

Bidding war as rentals dry up

QUEENSLAND may soon be forced to put up the "no vacancy" sign for rental properties as unprecedented demand dries up the once plentiful market.

The lack of available rentals has fuelled big increases, in some cases caused by landlords and agents conducting auctions between desperate customers.

In central Queensland's coal-rich Bowen Basin, chronic accommodation shortages in mining towns are forcing many well-paid workers to live in tents.

Bidding by prospective tenants has, in some cases, led to a doubling of the original asking price.

In Moranbah, 200km southwest of Mackay, where the median house price has skyrocketed in the past year to \$300,000, tenants are paying up to \$750 a week.

The *Sunday Mail* found a real estate agent in Rockhampton advertising "open house" for a rental property last month and urging people to make an offer.

In one case in Brisbane, the rent for a three-bedroom house in West End went up \$90 in one hit.

Some tenants have resorted to offering to pay 12 months rent up front just to secure a home.

Households are also swelling with families sharing to ease the burden of rent, which went up 15 per cent in southeast Queensland last year.

Richardson and Wrench Strathpine property manager Alana Barry said families were offering \$10-\$15 extra a week to secure a three-bedroom house being let for \$300 a week.

The latest statistics show Queensland's rental vacancies at a record low, plummeting to below 1 per cent in some areas

By AINSLEY PAVEY

compared with 10 per cent in 2000.

In Brisbane, soaring demand is set to worsen this month as more than 35,000 international students arrive in the state to start university.

More than 220,000 bonds were lodged with the Residential Tenancies Authority last financial year, but the number is expected to increase this year.

A record 15,000-odd disputes were also handled by the RTA over bonds, rent increases and repairs.

Social service providers have declared the situation "chaotic".

Salvation Army business appeal co-ordinator Paul Reis said social workers were pleading with agents for rent breaks.

Queensland Council of Social Service president Karyn Walsh said many families and single parents were living with friends or relatives.

"Some people have had nine addresses in 12 months," Ms Walsh said.

"It is now almost impossible to get affordable housing in inner suburbs of Brisbane.

"And if you are indigenous, less educated or on welfare, you don't stand a chance. You are the tenant of last resort."

Real Estate Institute of Queensland chairman Peter McGrath denies rent bidding is a problem.

"The number of complaints is negligible," Mr McGrath said.

The RTA's reviews of the Residential Tenancies Act and the Residential Tenancies (Accommodation) Act will go out for public consultation later this year.