

Constitution of the South-East Queensland Union of Renters

SEQUR

Contents

Article 1. Principles of the Union	4
Article 2. Membership & Dues	5
Article 3. Union Decision Making & Structure	6
Article 4. Delegate Positions	8
Article 5. Working Groups & Committees	10
Article 6. Safer Spaces Policy	11
Article 7. Complaints Procedure	12

The following is the constitution of the South East Queensland Union of Renters, also referred to in this document as SEQUR and the union. SEQUR organise on the occupied lands of the Kabi Kabi, Yugambeh Jagera, Yugara, Yugarapul, and Turrbal Nations. We pay our respects to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Article 1. Principles of the Union

1.1. The South East Queensland Union of Renters (SEQUR), is an organisation of committed community members who believe that the balance of forces currently sits too far in the favour of landlords and real estates industry and that for renters to counter this we must organise ourselves together in a union, to leverage our collective strength. Our collective strength is the best defence that we have in the face of evictions, rising rents and dodgy real estate practices.

1.2. SEQUR organises across the breadth of South East Queensland across a variety of First Nations countries. SEQUR acknowledges that it organises upon stolen land and that sovereignty was never ceded, and seeks to build relationships of solidarity between First Nations struggles, and the struggles for secure and safe housing. This solidarity extends to all struggles of the oppressed and exploited. Solidarity between struggles provides us with our greatest strength and must be actively encouraged.

1.3. SEQUR as an organisation believes in direct struggle, and rejects using its energy to achieve change through elections, or the actions of a politician or party. Instead we seek to build the power of renters and their communities at the level of the community itself, and to directly struggle against landlords and real estates on our own terms. We support reforms in the realm of housing and renting, but believe rather than diverting our energy away from struggle to the realm of reforms, reforms will occur through the expansion of direct struggle.

1.4. SEQUR is a directly democratic and participatory organisation. To facilitate this, SEQUR is a dues-paying organisation and requires members to participate in leading their own struggles, and showing solidarity in the struggles of their fellow members. Our strength is in our numbers and our capacity for collective action, meaning all members are encouraged to actively participate in the life of the union as much as their capacity allows.

1.5. SEQUR seeks to create a space in which we can come together to defend and enforce our right to dignified housing. We believe housing is a human right, and as such should cease to be treated as a commodity. From this, SEQUR fights for an end to homelessness and for community control of housing by building community power.

Article 2. Membership & Dues

2.1. SEQUR is a mass organisation democratically – which is to say collectively – run by its membership.

2.2. Full membership of SEQUR is restricted to those that rent, or who are currently homeless. Full membership stipulates voting rights and the right to hold delegated positions.

2.3. Homeowners may hold solidarity membership, in which they have a voice in the organisation but no voting rights, nor the right to hold delegated positions.

2.4. Landlords, real estate agents and their employees, property managers and police officers may not be accepted as members of SEQUR under any circumstances, nor permitted in SEQUR meetings or assemblies.

2.5. SEQUR is a dues-paying organisation, as membership dues allows SEQUR to maintain an independent income stream, which it can use to fund its operations without requiring donations from the state, political parties, or donors, which may influence the union away from its stated goals.

2.6. SEQURs dues structure exists on a sliding scale, with those with higher incomes contributing more than those on lower incomes.

2.7. Each Member is expected to pay income contingent dues equal (After tax) to:

- \$1- \$5 per month for those who make under \$1,600 per month.
- \$5–20 per month for those who make between \$1600 to \$3200 per month.
- \$20+ per month for those who make over \$3200 per months

2.8. Fundraising activities may be organised separately from dues, and members are welcome to make additional financial contributions to the organisation at any time.

2.9. A member's dues can be waived at the discretion of the treasurer for up to 6 months.

2.10. Dues may be paid in cash, or online, and may be paid as far in advance as required.

2.11. Should a member fall out of good standing – defined as 3 months behind on dues – they may maintain their participation in SEQUR, but will void voting rights until good standing is regained. All delegated positions are required to maintain good standing.

2.12. All members are encouraged as much as possible to participate in the running of SEQUR and in its decision-making. A union is only truly democratic when all its members are active in its life.

Article 3. Union Decision Making & Structure

3.1. The highest decision-making body of SEQUR is the general union assembly, which is open to all members as a space to discuss and decide on collective decisions. Only the general union assembly has the power to alter the union constitution and bylaws, and develop unionwide strategy.

3.2. General union assemblies must be held at minimum once a month and must be called at least one week prior to the meeting date.

3.3. Proposals for changes or additions to the union constitution, bylaws or strategy must be submitted to the membership with at least two weeks notice. General proposals are encouraged to be submitted with at least 48 hours notice.

3.4. Quorum of the general union assembly is set at 10 good-standing members or 20% of good standing membership, whichever is lowest.

3.5. General union assemblies require accurate minutes to be taken, and should be facilitated by a meeting chair, whose role is to ensure that all members have an opportunity to speak and that the meeting runs smoothly and democratically. Minute taking and chairing positions should be rotated throughout the membership to ensure the development of skills.

3.6. Special snap meetings may be called for extenuating circumstances with only 24 hours notice, but these meetings do not have the power to alter the union constitution or bylaws, nor alter union wide strategy. Decisions at these meetings may also be challenged at the following general assembly, if membership believes them to be undemocratic.

3.7. Decision-making at all levels of the union functions of the principle of striving for consensus but deciding based on majority vote. By this it is meant that decisions should be discussed thoroughly and all concerns considered, but that voting maintains the final decision-making power.

3.8. SEQUR defines a successful majority vote as being 50%+1 of membership present for general decisions and 60% for changes to the union constitution, bylaws or strategy.

3.9. Outside of the general union assemblies, local sections may be formed with a minimum required members to form a local section set at 6, with confirmation of the section being required to be by vote at a general assembly.

3.10. Local sections maintain autonomy in how they organise their communities, but remain tied to the union constitution, principles and strategy. Local sections will be expected to elect delegates whose role it is to report to the wider union regarding local activity in order to maintain coordination and accountability.

3.11. Local sections may be formed on the basis of street, suburb, or general area, but must be geographically logical, with the aim to embed divisions as locally as possible in communities.

3.12. Local sections are required to hold at least one meeting a month and maintain their own delegated positions as outlined in article 4.

3.13. Local sections maintain the rights to collect their own dues, with 15% paid to the union as a whole for collective work.

3.14. As the union's membership grows, it is understood that the creation of a number of local sections may be a necessity and that this may require the altering of union structures and decision-making processes.

3.15. The union maintains the right to hold delegate meetings of local sections as an inbetween level between that of local sections meetings and general assemblies. These delegate meetings are to coordinate between local sections as needed, however delegate meetings have no decision-making power in their own right, with that power continuing to reside on the level of the general assembly, or local section directly.

Article 4. Delegate Positions

4.1. Delegate positions are not positions of leadership, nor do union delegates constitute an executive committee. Rather these positions are expressions of delegated union tasks, and should be considered as administrative only, and restricted to clear mandates.

4.2. All positions are elected directly by the membership, and are instantly recallable.

4.3. Elections: Delegates are elected through the regular decision-making process.

4.4. Recall: Delegates may also be recalled through the regular decision-making process for any reason.

4.5. Terms: Terms for delegate positions are 6 months, with a term limit of two consecutive terms. A delegate may be elected to another delegate position, but may not return to a previously held delegate position until 12 months have elapsed.

4.6. Delegate positions should be rotated regularly to ensure members have a wide range of skills. As such, delegates have the responsibility to train any member who is interested in taking on their role in future.

4.7. It should be understood for all positions, that being a delegate does not necessarily mean they must personally complete every part of their mandated task, but that it is their responsibility to ensure the tasks are completed. The union encourages the sharing of tasks and responsibility as much as possible.

4.8. No delegate position shall be paid, nor shall the union attempt to create any paid positions.

4.9. Elected delegate positions of SEQUR are:

- Secretary: The secretary is tasked with keeping up the communications of the union, that meetings are happening as often as required, and that they are well-organised and democratic. The secretary is also tasked with ensuring that minutes are maintained and available to all members of the organisation.
- Treasurer: The treasurer is tasked with accounting for the income and expenditures of the organisation, collecting and keeping records of membership dues, and keeping track of membership good standing. Decisions regarding spending of union funds remains with the membership through the normal decision-making processes
- Social Media Coordinator/s: The social media coordinator/s are tasked with ensuring our social media posts regular quality content, events are being promoted, messages are replied to, and other day-to-day running of social media accounts.
- Materials Coordinator: The materials coordinator is tasked with housing and handling all collective property belonging to SEQUR (literature, signage, banners, flags, bullhorns, etc) and ensuring that it can be made available for use when needed. The materials coordinator is also tasked with ensuring that propaganda such as pamphlets and flyers are well stocked and available as needed.

- Accountability & Support Officers (ASO's): ASO's are trained to guide and support members and supporters through the union's safer spaces policies, and facilitate conflict resolution within the union.
- Membership Delegates: Membership delegates are tasked with reaching out to interested and new members to assist them in becoming active in the union, and ensuring that new members understand the processes and strategies of the union in order to facilitate full participation in union activities.

4.10. The secretary, treasurer and membership delegates constitute the membership committee, tasked with ensuring the development, growth and participation of the union membership.

Article 5. Working Groups & Committees

5.1. Working groups & committees may be formed by members in the union, or local section, through normal decision-making processes at the relevant level.

5.2. Working groups & committees hold no decision-making power, but exist to facilitate specific work or proposals relevant to the progress of the union.

5.3. Working groups are to be formed based on a specific short term objective or task, and should not be considered long term union bodies.

5.4. Working groups must be open to all members & their meetings must be advertised to the wider membership. Working groups shall be dissolved after 3 months of inactive, once their objective has been completed, or at the discretion of the wider union.

5.5. Committees may be formed at the discretion of the whole union or local section as relevant, based on normal decision-making progress. Committees must have a clear mandate describing their purpose and are expected to keep their work within that mandate. Membership of committees are to be decided upon by the relevant level of the union.

5.6. Both working groups and committees are accountable to the wider membership of the union and are required to submit monthly reports describing their work, and justifying their continued existence within the union.

5.7. Media and Messaging Committee is tasked with:

5.7.1. Developing and maintaining a messaging strategy

5.7.2. Maintaining and providing resources relevant to media and messaging including:

5.7.2.1. Reviews of tenancy unions and relevant readings.

5.7.2.2. Maintain media contacts list.

5.7.3. Provide peer review and proofreading of media content including:

5.7.3.1. Long form social media posts. IE Facebook, not Twitter as the format is short and very immediate.

5.7.3.2. Traditional Media releases

5.7.3.3. Hashtags

5.7.3.4. Media talking points

5.7.3.5. Chants

5.7.3.6. Banners

5.7.3.7. Flyers

Article 6. Safer Spaces Policy

SEQUR is a union committed to upholding the rights and dignity of renters and people in precarious housing. We recognise our membership is diverse and as a union we recognise that oppression is layered, and is used as an instrument of power. As such, we strive to keep our common places free from oppressive action, behaviour, and language. These oppressive actions include but are not limited to: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and any expression of disrespect and/or intolerance of size, gender identity, sexual identity/expression, (dis)ability, age, educational level, and cultural background. We will not tolerate acts of disrespect, violence or oppression to our fellow members, and understand our shared responsibilities to address these wrongdoings if they occur to our fellow members. Because we want to learn from and educate each other, we will each be responsible for addressing these issues in ourselves and others.

Article 7. Complaints Procedure

7.1. If a member feels the Union constitution and or this policy is being / has been violated, to themselves or another member, the following steps should be taken:

7.1.1. Reference the policy to the whole group: for example, “In SEQR, we have a ‘Safer Space Policy’ that all members are mutually responsible to uphold. I feel this policy has been violated by talk of ‘[comments made].’ Please keep the Safer Space Policy in mind.”

7.1.2. If the policy is still being violated, the issue should be brought up to the person in violation directly and/or the chair, an officer, a delegate, or a member whom you would like to act as an advocate on your behalf so that an effective plan of action can be instituted.

7.1.3. If the issue has not been addressed a Union Accountability and Support Office should be brought in to help facilitate a further plan of action on behalf of the affected member and in accordance with the principles of the Union. If a member feels like this policy is being violated and is uncomfortable bringing this up personally, they are encouraged to seek an ally of their choosing to advocate for them. In a meeting, a person can ask for a point of personal privilege to take a break and discuss this with the necessary parties. Meeting chairs, officers, delegates, and members should be conscious of this policy and address issues as they arise.

Further, space shall be defined as any office, meeting, event (including trainings, social gatherings, etc.), internet platform (including email communications and social media, etc.) that is in use by the Union, which includes any body formally recognised by the Union, such as the general assemblies, local divisions, other committees, and any accountable sub-formation of the aforementioned bodies.

7.2. If a satisfactory resolution is not able to be achieved, or attempts to address misconduct have not been made by the perpetrating member, the complainant, or any other member may apply for the perpetrating member to be removed from the Union. The elected advocate and officers will submit a report and timeline of the actions of the perpetrating member with the anonymity of the complainant if requested. This report will then be submitted to the membership at a General Membership Meeting whereby the Union will vote on the expulsion of the perpetrating member. During the period from application of expulsion up to the vote of expulsion, the perpetrating member may have their membership suspended, including exclusion from Union spaces, and all privileges of membership will be renounced.

7.3. An expelled member has the opportunity to appeal the decision of the Union within 30 days of their expulsion. An expelled member may submit their appeal to the Secretary. Measurable and evidenced actions of addressing their behaviour will be required in order for their expulsion to be overturned. There may be a requirement for the member to demonstrate longer term actions in addressing and improving their behaviour.

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SEQUR was started by the political organisation known as Anarchist-Communists Meanjin. SEQUR is a relatively successful experiment in direct democracy and building popular power, having undertaken an impressive array of direct action for its size and age, and building solidarity with other sectors of the working class such as the trade union rank and file.

Hopefully this document can be useful for the housing struggle globally.

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