

# Solid research needed to measure the impact of Airbnb on rental markets, expert says

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HOBART would be a “wonderful laboratory” for researchers to measure the impact of websites such as Airbnb on a city’s rental market, says University of Sydney affordable housing researcher Peter Phibbs.

Speaking at last night’s Sharing Hobart: Managing the rise of Airbnb forum, Professor Phibbs said short-term renting was an attractive option for many investors.

“If you can make more money out of your property in the tourist market why wouldn’t you put it on Airbnb rather than open it to the rental market,” he said.

“As an affordable housing researcher, giving up your rental stock for tourists isn’t a great strategy if you’re trying to look after the people living in the city.

“Lots of other cities have regulated to stop that. We haven’t really seen that much in Australia.”

Prof Phibbs said there were two types of accommodation offered through Airbnb: that provided by a host who lives in the house, or an investor renting a property to tourists.

Airbnb public policy associate Huw Phillips said there were about 90 Airbnb listings in Hobart.

Mr Phillips said this represented less than 1 per cent of homes in Hobart.

“Of that less than 1 per cent, the overwhelming majority of those [properties] are the hosts’ own primary place of residence. These are not properties that are being taken of the rental market at all.”

He also said the factors affecting housing affordability in Australia — such as negative gearing, capital gains tax discounts and planning constraints — were complex and predated the rise of Airbnb.



About 350 people attended the Sharing Hobart: Managing the Rise of Airbnb forum at the University of Tasmania. Picture: MATT THOMPSON

Prof Phibbs said “solid research” was needed to investigate how many homes had been listed for short term holiday rentals that otherwise would have been available for the rental market.

“Hobart would be a wonderful laboratory to look at the impact of Airbnb and other platforms on the rental market,” he said.

Prof Phibbs said regulation of short-term holiday rentals in Tasmania and interstate was “much more laissez faire” than that in other cities around the world.

“Looking around the world there’s very different strategies or policies or regulations in different cities.

“Where cities have got a lot of spare accommodation [it is] more or less open slather for Airbnb and for other platforms.

“In cities like Vancouver where I’ve just visited where their [rental] vacancy rate’s the same as Hobart, 0.6 per cent, they don’t let investors rent out properties ... whereas the sharing of the extra bedroom in the home is completely open slather.”



The Sharing Hobart: Managing the Rise of Airbnb forum panel: Professor Peter Phibbs, Dr Anne Hardy, Luke Martin and Huw Phillips with Professor Richard Eccleston. Picture: MATT THOMPSON

Institute for the Study of Social Change director, Professor Richard Eccleston, who chaired the discussion, said Airbnb had benefits as well as costs for Tasmania.

“I don’t see this as being a conflict between tourism and housing,” Prof Eccleston said.

“If you get the settings right we can ... and should capitalise on the benefits of the technology and sharing economy.”

Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania chief executive Luke Martin said self-contained hosted accommodation was not a new phenomenon in Tasmania, but sites such as Airbnb had made it more widespread.

“Self-contained hosted accommodation has been ... the heart and soul of the industry essentially for decades,” Mr Martin said.

But he said the name “sharing economy” used to refer to sites such as Airbnb was misleading.

“Let’s call it what it is, which is an aggressive expansion of the market.”

University of Tasmania tourism academic Anne Hardy, who is also an Airbnb host, said it was important to consider why tourists chose to use Airbnb.

Dr Hardy said Airbnb appealed to people who wanted to “live like a local” and current Tourism Tasmania advertising campaigns also attracted those people.

“The brand of Tasmania at the moment and the offering that Airbnb gives to visitors sits very closely,” she said.

“It’s not really competition for hotels because dedicated Airbnb users don’t really like hotels that much.”