

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESSES IN NSW

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The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
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Inquiry into Regional Planning Processes in NSW

The Housing Industry Association (HIA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on State Development inquiry into Regional Planning Processes in NSW.

The Inquiry's Terms of Reference cover a broad range of matters and many fall outside the scope of HIA to respond. However we would like to provide the Committee with comments on the current policy and legislation relating to planning in regional and rural areas that may be of assistance.

Regional and rural cities and towns face extremely different challenges in relation planning and development when compared to metropolitan cities. The growth or maintenance of regional and rural towns is most commonly associated with a specific industry sector and the retention of that industry will be the most significant driver of the economic growth or otherwise of the town. In this regard, the role of the planning system to support economic growth by providing timely and consistent guidelines and approval processes is critical.

The role of the planning system to support housing supply in these locations should then be seen as equivalent to critical infrastructure. Without adequate and cost effective housing options in regional and rural NSW rural industries, and hence rural towns, will risk decline.

A fundamental element of regional growth and infrastructure is the detailed strategic plans (State and regional environmental plans) that must provide certainty and offer clear direction on the manner in which the region will grow into the future. Strategic planning in NSW has always operated on a regional basis with regional plans being developed and updated from time to time.

Often regional and rural areas fall behind in terms of these strategic plans through a lack experienced staff that enable such policies to be brought forward to council and thus implemented. Ensuring there is an effective working relationship between the State government and local government planners is critical.

The Standing Committee should include in its examination a review of the current Regional Plans across NSW, noting that three plans have recently been released for public comment and update.

In terms of planning controls and approval processes in regional areas, HIA does not consider there is a need to have a standalone Planning Act or alternate approval processes. However HIA is currently involved with the Department of Planning and Environment's project to develop a draft 'Regional Complying Development Code'.

This approach to have greater use of Exempt and Complying Development within regional and rural areas is supported. The ability of homeowners to access a more appropriate breadth of exempt and complying development in regional NSW will encourage new development and remove the time delays and expenses associated with the current development approval pathway through all councils in NSW, in particular for new housing and for alterations and additions to existing homes.

There should also be greater support to encourage private certifiers to operate in regional areas, and assist Councils who have limited technical and building resources to meet the needs of their communities.

In light of the recommendations from the 'Fit for the Future' Report, it is also timely that the committee consider opportunities to stimulate development outside Sydney metropolitan areas and consider the wider impact of possibly larger more manageable Regional Local Government or Regional Councils.

Should you wish to discuss any matters, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Buckley

Yours sincerely
Housing Industry Association

David Bare
Executive Director