

20th April, 2020

National action on Planning reform welcomed – but more is needed in NSW

Urban Taskforce CEO today welcomed the announcement made by Hon Alan Tudge MHR, Federal Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure, of urgent reforms to planning laws to ensure there is no increase in the timeframes for planning decisions.

The good news is that all Planning Ministers across Australia, as well as the Local Government Association have agreed to a set of principles. The agreed principles are:

- “ Decision making in the public interest is a paramount theme in all planning systems and this must continue as a guiding consideration.*
- Transparency for stakeholders about changes to systems and particular decisions.*
- Decisions made within jurisdictions are consistent, where possible.*
- Consideration of the level of public interest in a particular planning change or development proposal.*
- Balancing administrative and legal review rights with the need to address the pandemic emergency and to assist community and economic recovery.*
- All reasonable effort is made to maintain the usual pace of planning approvals recognising, as far as practical, community consultation will continue through new forms of communication recognising social distancing requirements.”*

However, in NSW, the Planning system had stagnated well before COVID-19. The emphasis on strategic planning has resulted in Councils focussing on the preparation of Local Strategic Plans (LSPSs) and Local Environment Plans (LEPs). The problem was highlighted by the NSW Productivity Commissioner well before COVID-19. Late in 2019 he found that NSW was the slowest in Australia.

“In NSW, just ‘keeping up the pace of planning decision making’ is not good enough. We need to cut red tape and duplication of planning processes and kick-start the economy. The status-quo will not sling-shoot the economy out of recession, it will exacerbate it.

“NSW State Government leadership is necessary to prevent an economic crisis”, Mr Forrest said.

Urban Taskforce CEO expressed some concern however, that we have heard this all before.

On **27 November, 2019**, the Premier announced “MAJOR PLANNING REFORM TO DRIVE JOBS AND INVESTMENT IN NSW”. These reforms were to focus on:

- 1. Cut red tape, increase transparency, reduce assessment timeframes and make e-planning mandatory for metro councils;*
- 2. Supercharge new hubs across NSW to ensure people can live in communities close to their work;*
- 3. Fix the uncertainty of developer contributions to boost investment; and*
- 4. Preserve our heritage, create beautiful new public places, and promote good design.*

“Urban Taskforce supports all of these goals, but we urge the NSW Government to take action on Planning Reform.

“There is no time for ‘a plan for a plan’.

“There are billions of dollars-worth of private sector investment capital which have been stuck in the planning system and therefore not flowed into the NSW economy. Recent initiatives taken by Minister Stokes and Treasurer Perrottet to fast-track projects through the bottle necks are strongly supported but changing the system to ensure they don’t get stuck in the first place is also critical, particularly now.

“Reform in Planning has been on the agenda since the Premier’s announcement in November 2019. So far, the Government has delivered mandated e-planning; the appointment of the Productivity Commissioner to look at developer contributions for local infrastructure; and some significant improvements to the operation of the IPC. While welcome, these improvements do not address the Premier’s mandate.

“The special measures established to deal with COVID-19 are all welcome – but more fundamental reform is urgently needed”, Mr Forrest said.

end

*The **Urban Taskforce Australia** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.*

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