

Major parties in NSW must agree to reduce the cost of housing by establishing a 'One Stop Shop' for Government planning referrals

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In the lead up to the NSW election, the major parties must agree to reduce the cost of housing by establishing a one stop shop to efficiently process planning referrals from councils based on the successful Queensland State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA), says the Urban Taskforce.

"Housing costs in Sydney are amongst the most expensive in the world and we need a more streamlined planning system to increase the supply of new homes so that housing becomes more affordable," says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson. "One area where both government and opposition must agree on is to simplify the complex referral system of planning applications to state government agencies that is adding months to the processing of applications."

"It can take a year to get comments back from NSW state government agencies while Queensland's one stop shop approach has nearly all determinations back to a council in 40 business days."

"The Urban Taskforce has been encouraged to push for this reform following a meeting with the General Manager of The Hills Shire Council, Dave Walker, who has found referrals to state agencies can take up to a year to receive a response. The Hills Shire Council has even been taken to court by applicants because of the delays by state government agencies that council is required to refer development applications to. Dave Walker supports the rigour of the Queensland SARA system and recommends that NSW adopt something similar."

"Most of the delays in NSW are because the agency commenting on a referral is focussed on other priorities and has no incentive to get comments back to a local council in a timely manner. Queensland had the same problem some years ago and they have restructured the referral process to create a far better and accountable approach that NSW can learn from."

"Queensland's Referral Agency (SARA) is an excellent model that could make the NSW planning system much more efficient," says Chris Johnson. "In NSW there are 232 clauses in planning instruments that require a council to refer a development application to a government agency for comment and concurrence and both developers & councils are dismayed at the excessive time it takes to get responses from these agencies."

"The NSW White Paper on planning reform proposed a 'One Stop Shop' to co-ordinate referrals to state agencies but the proposal was lost when the opposition in the Upper House voted against the reforms. It is important that both major parties in NSW work together to improve the planning system and the Urban Taskforce is proposing that the first step be the one stop shop for referrals based on the tried and tested

Queensland system."

"The Queensland SARA website sets out KPIs that the agency must meet in making decisions on behalf of state government departments. 98% of total applications are to be decided within 40 business days and 60% within 20 business days. If NSW could match these KPIs then developers and councils would be overjoyed."

"The Urban Taskforce is keen to work with pro-growth councils to better understand opportunities for appropriate growth to help with Sydney's housing and jobs shortage. We are also keen to work with the government and the opposition to ensure that improvements can be made to the NSW planning system for the benefit of the community by getting some consensus rather than the usual party battles."

"After the impasse on planning reform a year ago in the Upper House, it is important that the major political parties don't focus on populist anti-growth issues but take a long term view that ensures the NSW planning system does not add unnecessary costs to the process of planning and developing new housing."

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

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