

Keep planning decisions for small projects with council panels and for large projects with regional panels

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Planning decisions across NSW need to be determined by different independent panels depending on project size, says the Urban Taskforce.

"The current suggestions that development applications should be determined by independent panels will take the politics out of decision making," says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson. "But there need to be different panels depending on the scale of development. Small scale projects should remain with council planners to provide reports to a council independent panel but large projects over \$20 million will need a different process."

"The over \$20 million projects inevitably involve state government agencies like roads and transport so these projects are determined by planning panels. In Sydney these are chaired by the Greater Sydney Commission's District Commissioner. Under the current arrangements local council planners prepare a planning report which is provided to the panel to make their decision. However, the report often takes a negative position on the proposed development, reflecting the views of local councillors rather than providing an independent, merit based analysis of the proposal. A better process for large projects in Sydney is to establish six District Planning Offices in each of the Greater Sydney Commission's districts."

"Currently only 1.3% of the Development Applications that are processed in Sydney are above \$20 million but they are the big projects that represent 47.3% of the total construction value of DAs. These big projects currently take a massive 271 days on average to be approved and they need specialist planning skills to negotiate with government agencies. The six District Planning Offices could second skilled staff from councils in the district into a single office to prepare planning reports. The other 98.7% of DAs should be processed at the local council level by council planners. Both small and large projects can be assessed by independent panels."

"If the NSW Government is going to reform the planning system to make it more independent it should do this in a manner that acknowledges the new governance structure established by the Greater Sydney Commission of six districts. A decade or so ago there were very few large precinct wide apartment projects involving hundreds of apartments as well as commercial, retail and open space but now these sophisticated and complex projects are far more common. The time is ripe for a more sophisticated planning system that supports larger projects that are ultimately the key to driving Sydney's housing supply."

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

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