

Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council

Housing Ministers' Conference

Communiqué – 12 February 2010 - Canberra

Joint Meeting of Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council and Housing Ministers' Conference

A joint meeting of the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council (LGPMC) and the Housing Ministers' Conference (HMC) was held in Canberra on 12 February 2010. The meeting was jointly chaired by the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Australian Government Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and the Hon Richard Wynne, Victorian Minister for Housing and Local Government, and hosted by Mr Jon Stanhope MLA, Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory and Minister for Territory and Municipal Services.

Members of both committees discussed projected housing demand and supply, and considered a range of initiatives to support the work of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to improve housing supply and affordability.

A key focus of the meeting was on **increasing the availability of land for housing**. Ministers committed to a range of actions that would ensure that land is developed at a pace that will meet the growing demand for housing. These included improving the quality of land audits and identifying land for housing that can be brought forward to market more quickly.

The Joint Meeting considered the reforms to capital city strategic planning being progressed by COAG, which aim to ensure that Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive and well placed to meet future challenges and growth. Consistent with the intent of these COAG reforms, the Joint Meeting agreed to develop active strategies to identify and progress **infill and redevelopment** opportunities to further boost housing supply, including affordable supply.

The Joint Meeting noted the progress that has been made on **reform of development assessment and approval processes**. COAG agreed at its meeting of 7 December 2009 to implementation plans which included national planning systems principles and harmonised code-based development assessments for single residential dwellings. COAG will receive a further report on where code-based assessment for residential multi-unit, commercial and industrial buildings in early 2010 might be extended. Jurisdictions are also committed to building on the measures that were adopted to streamline development assessment in support of the economic stimulus package. The Joint Meeting agreed that these reforms should be supported and accelerated wherever possible, and also agreed to take steps to reduce unnecessary local and jurisdictional variations.

The Joint Meeting also agreed to promote **greater transparency in decision-making in planning and development assessment**, to promote more consistent and predictable decision making. First steps will include enhancing the accessibility of performance data on local councils' planning outcomes and assessment times, better sharing of information on housing needs, and providing more information to the building industry on the type of developments that would conform to state government plans.

The Joint Meeting agreed that all jurisdictions would work together to develop an **action plan** by end April 2010, as part of their contribution to the Treasurers' review of housing supply and affordability for COAG.

Tenth Meeting of Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council

The LGPMC also met separately in Canberra on 12 February 2010, holding its tenth meeting. The meeting was chaired by the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Australian Government Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The Council considered the progress of the implementation of the **Local Government Reform Fund**. Applications for the Reform Fund have now closed, with 37 individual proposals seeking over \$37 million received. Following further assessment and consultation, it is expected that funding for successful proposals will be provided through a National Partnership Agreement to be established in the coming months.

The Council received an update on activities that support 2010 as the **Year of Women in Local Government**, which Minister Albanese launched at the Sydney Town Hall on 20 January 2010. To assist in achieving the aims of the 2010 Year of Women in Local Government, the Australian Government is providing funding for a three-year 50:50 Vision: Councils for Gender Equity program, for scholarships to enable senior women in local government to participate in the new Executive Leadership Program, for improvements to the collection of data and reporting on the status of women in the local government sector, and to support the Local Government Managers Australia for their 2010 Management Challenge.

In discussions on the topic of **planning system reform**, the Council considered a report which emphasised the importance of strategic planning policy in the context of future growth pressures. It was agreed that regulatory reform including development assessment reform should be carried out as part of a broader agenda which embraces the COAG capital city strategic planning reforms. The outcomes for cities must improve sustainability and liveability as well as productivity. The Council agreed to develop specific recommendations on the application of strategic planning principles.

The Council also considered the report of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) *Counting the costs: planning requirements, infrastructure contributions, and residential development in Australia*, and agreed to continue to identify planning system reform projects which would increase transparency, consistency and simplicity, and which would directly support affordable housing initiatives.

The Council reviewed progress in implementing its current **development assessment reform initiatives** - development of national performance measures for development assessment, development of a set of national planning system principles, development of a road map for electronic development assessment, increased use of code-based development assessments for residential dwellings, and measurement of the benefits of planning reform using the above projects as pilots. The Council agreed to accelerate these reforms wherever possible

The Council noted that **streamlined assessment processes** for multi-unit residential development, within the context of jurisdictions' strategic plans, contribute to housing affordability. NSW reported on its current work to develop a nationally consistent approach. While the Council acknowledged that there are challenges in relation to a multi-unit code assessable residential template all jurisdictions agreed to work collaboratively to meet COAG's expectations. The Council noted the concerns of local government in relation to code-based assessment that will need to be considered in implementing strategies.

The Australian Government's **economic stimulus package** led to jurisdictions' adopting provisions to fast track planning approval processes for the 20,000 new social housing dwellings to be constructed under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus agreement. The Council noted some jurisdictions' intentions to apply these changes more generally into their development assessment systems, and agreed to support the application of lessons from the implementation of the stimulus package to the broader planning reform agenda, particularly the work being undertaken by the Housing Ministers' Conference in relation to affordable housing. This work would be undertaken in consultation with local government.

The Council considered progress by jurisdictions in developing a common set of **national performance measures** that will enable the collection of standardised information for each planning system. The collection of this information is important as it will allow for the monitoring of trends over time ensuring more transparent and efficient planning systems in the future.

The next meeting of the Council will be held in Perth before the end of 2010.

Background

The Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council (LGPMC) is made up of Local Government and Planning Ministers from across Australia and New Zealand as well as the President of the Australian Local Government Association. It is the key decision making body for strategic policy matters affecting local government and planning in Australia and New Zealand.

The Housing Ministers' Conference (HMC) is made up of Ministers with primary responsibility for housing portfolios from across Australia and New Zealand as well as the president of the Australian Local Government Association. It provides a forum for the formulation of nationally consistent policies on housing where cooperation and coordination between jurisdictions will benefit both the development and outcomes from those policies.

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