

National Urban Policy

City of Hobart Submission

July 2024

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City of HOBART



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10 July 2024

The Hon Catherine King MP

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Submitted via email: Urbanpolicyinput@infrastructure.gov.au

Dear Minister

RE: National Urban Policy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the consultation draft of the Australian Government's National Urban Policy, released on 23 May 2024.

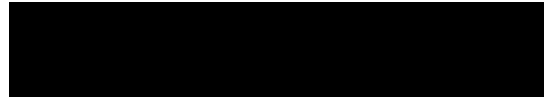
The City of Hobart ('the City') would like to commend the ambition of producing a National Urban Policy, 13 years after the foundational *Our Cities, Our Future* ('the draft Policy'). The City would like to articulate some of the most pertinent local challenges it currently faces as part of its role shaping the future of Hobart through delivering infrastructure, services and as the planning authority for Australia's southernmost capital city and second-oldest city. Please note this submission has been prepared at an officer level.

Part 2: Shared Government Vision and Roles

The role of local government appears to be significantly underplayed throughout this document and, in particular, in this section. The City advocates for its role to be more adequately represented and elevated, specifically for the role that local government plays in determining the strategic policy direction and framework for fostering sustainable development by performing its strategic and statutory functions as a local Planning Authority. Indeed, local government leads the reform and operation of its planning scheme and through this mechanism is an enabler and facilitator of sustainable urban growth and climate resilient cities.

It is recommended, that the role of the planning system at the local government level, which involves synthesizing and balancing competing interests for the long-term public good, be appropriately highlighted and more comprehensively articulated throughout this document

The draft Policy appears to be premised on a growing population for Australia's cities and the opportunities and challenges this creates. However, Tasmania has had long periods of low or minimal population growth (i.e. 0.65% over last 30 years) and, all other variables being equal, is projected to continue this trend in the future. This has affected the capacity of Tasmania's towns and cities, including Hobart, to adapt and evolve in response to changing social and economic demands. It is then important to consider how places like Hobart can deliver on goals of the draft Policy when population growth is not the main driver.



Nevertheless, the City commends the National Cabinet's commitment to planning for stronger growth as a national priority and First Ministers for supporting a national approach to the growth of the Nation's cities through this Policy.

The City looks forward to taking a leading role in working collaboratively with the Australian Government to prioritise and guide investment and policy decisions in the future. This role also extends to working as a close partner with the Tasmanian Government in pursuing its important planning reform agenda.

Part 4: Australian Government Objectives

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

The concept of all levels of Government enabling and promoting 'compact urban growth' should be a central tenet of the Policy, however, it only appears twice in the whole document, in reference to international examples and at the end of the document under Appendix A: Principles.

It is recommended that this concept be included as one of the key urban challenges (under the dot point 'urban development patterns') under *Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind* and as one of the key factors one that determine sustainability under *Objective 4: Our Urban areas are sustainable*.

Few places in Australia have a greater need for higher density housing than in Hobart which has the unenviable statistic of the lowest density housing of all capital cities, with only 15.4% of dwellings being unit accommodation.

Therefore, the issue of encouraging and facilitating compact urban growth is one of the most important development challenges faced by Hobart. This is, in part being addressed by the City through the development of strategic land use plans (Structure Plans) for Central Hobart, North Hobart and Mount Nelson and Sandy Bay. However, the challenge remains significant given the incredibly low base rate the City is starting from.

Equally pressing is the need for more affordable housing. A stark reminder being Hobart's property prices rising by 35.9% from March 2020 to February 2024 and remaining one of the most unaffordable capital cities in Australia, in particular when taking into account the generally lower average household incomes.

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

One of the key urban challenges under this heading, the 'Preservation of First Nations cultural heritage' is an objective the City entirely commends. However, it is suggested that First Nations cultural heritage not be limited to being preserved as a static element, but rather, appreciated as a living and evolving continual connection to Country, in the myriad of forms that it takes across Australia.

The City believes that it is befitting of a capital city to properly acknowledge and respect its first peoples, and in the context of Hobart, the palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal people, in a way that is



culturally appropriate. This may take the form of making key elements of the Country including the skies, land and waterways of the area known as nipaluna/Hobart healthier, more visible and widely understood.

The City continues to work closely with palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal people on place based strategic land use plans (Structure Plans), built environment guidance, community plans, etc. to incorporate connection to Country as a fundamental planning principle to guide future decision making.

Nevertheless, the City recognises there is much more work to be undertaken in this area and looks forward to working closely with and being led by the palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal community to determine the most appropriate ways to preserve, restore, acknowledge and make visible palawa cultural heritage in Hobart.

The City also seeks to work collaboratively with all levels of Government to meaningfully realise this objective, while acknowledging that the integration of palawa content to any project is foundational to its authenticity and success.

Other areas where the City has had a long-established and leading role are sports, arts and culture, both in terms of infrastructure, program delivery and partnerships. The City welcomes the recognition of the need to invest in sports infrastructure and how this can be better integrated into our urban environment. Furthermore, arts and culture should go beyond access and accessibility and also be about investment. It is now well understood that arts and culture is a significant employer, increases social and cultural capital and is vital for the health and resilience of our communities. Consequently, further Commonwealth investment and support in these areas will be clearly beneficial.

In relation to the night-time economy this is an area of increasing importance for the City, as is recognised in our City Economy Strategy 2023-2028. The significance of tourism, partly driven by events like Dark Mofo, is an important contributor to our night-time economy. What is less well recognised and is somewhat absent in the Policy is how many essential services need to take place at night, such as hospital emergency departments. The role of the 24/7 services needs to be better recognised and considered when referring to the night-time economy.

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

The City supports the 'Possible actions' under this heading, including 'delivering inclusive social infrastructure such as community centres, parks and public spaces', however, the delivery of such infrastructure remains problematic in Tasmania in the absence of an established, coherent legislative framework for applying infrastructure contributions that is consistent, predictable, accountable and equitable.

Tasmania is among one of the last jurisdictions across Australia to implement this critical public policy reform to achieve a best practice legislative framework. At a fundamental level, all development is wholly dependent upon the timely, efficient and fairly apportioned financing and



delivery of infrastructure, without which it cannot occur in an orderly, coordinated, and economically viable manner.

Indeed, the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) has spearheaded a campaign to reform infrastructure contributions for a number of years now. The development problems currently being experienced in Tasmania, outlined in LGAT's *Infrastructure Contributions Discussion Paper*, include delayed development, inequitable cost distribution, development subsidisation and poor infrastructure outcomes. Currently, the Tasmanian approach to levying infrastructure contributions is dispersed across multiple pieces of legislation that apply only in specific circumstances for certain types of infrastructure. What further undermines certainty across the development industry is that the charging of infrastructure is open to dispute and appeal processes.

The City would like to reiterate in the strongest terms the concerns raised by LGAT and strongly urges the Commonwealth to support the Tasmanian Government, where the responsibility lies, to initiate this legislative reform. Without a coordinated and integrated approach to funding infrastructure, Tasmania will ultimately struggle not just to provide much needed social infrastructure, but achieve the housing targets set by the Commonwealth Government's National Housing Accord, to deliver up to 10,000 new homes by 2032.

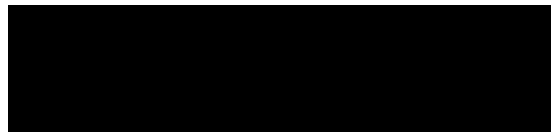
National settlement strategy

As articulated by the Australian Planning Institute, in their 2018 report, *Through the Lens: The tipping Point*, Australia requires a holistic plan to accommodate growth in our urban areas to ensure more balanced growth between our larger urban areas and cities. We recommend that the draft Policy include a recommendation to consider the development of a National Settlement Strategy. A National Settlement Strategy should:

- get the community involved and lead a balanced national discussion about the future of our cities and regions as places to live and work
- help us look for factors that influence regional population growth and change
- provide a framework for addressing climate change resilience, hazards and carbon reduction in the built environment
- tackle the underlying trends that are shaping cities and towns.

Placemaking and urban design

Urban design is recognised in the draft Policy as providing a means to help deliver on *Objective 3 Our urban areas are safe* and on *Objective 5 Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing*. Arguably, urban design and placemaking, which has a stronger emphasis on enabling communities to shape where they live, work and recreate are approaches that can help deliver all the Goals and Objectives contained in the draft Policy. This is evident in *Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities* that addresses many of the same matters as the draft Policy.



There is an opportunity for the draft Policy to provide the impetus for stronger place-based planning, design and development that has a greater ownership and impact for local communities and businesses. Placemaking and urban design can be key means to help achieve this.

While the importance of place-based approaches like urban design, and more recently placemaking, should be well established, the reality is that in Tasmania they have limited reach and impact. This is where a foundational document like the National Urban Policy can be means by which to deliver these goals.

Therefore, the opportunity for better urban design and/or placemaking outcomes should be more clearly expressed in the draft Policy. Furthermore, it is suggested, that an action or implementation pathway is to review, update and encourage the application of the successor of the Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities.

General concluding remarks

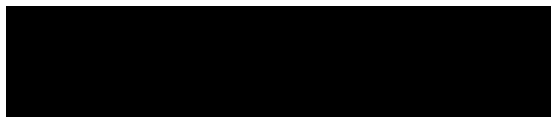
While the draft Policy intent and direction is supported by the City, it is noted that it is not a document that strongly prioritises the top initiatives or actions for Australia's cities in the decades to come. The Policy may also benefit from some key inspirational directions that are more memorable, speak to a better future for our Nation's cities and encourage Governments, civil society and our communities to deliver on the Policy's vision and goals.

The document could benefit from some editing by using less verbose language and avoiding repetition. Similarly, a greater emphasis on visual communication in the final Policy would likely improve its capacity to engage and convey its content to a wider audience. Arguably, this editing process would encourage greater readability and ensure the language is more meaningful and impactful.

It would be helpful if the final Policy incorporates a monitoring and review framework, including potential key qualitative and quantitative indicators, to facilitate its tracking over time. This should be tied to the future State of the Cities reports so they seamlessly 'talk to each other'. Such a framework would also likely be of value to LGAs and, potentially, assist us in helping deliver on the Policy's vision, goals and objectives.



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