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Re: National Urban Policy Consultation

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide this submission to the National Urban Policy (the Policy) consultation. The Committee for Greater Hobart commends the Australian Government for re-engaging with urban policy and undertaking this critical initiative. We support the Policy goals of creating more liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient urban places.

Australia's cities are the critical engines that will drive forward Australia's economy. Our capital cities are home to two-thirds of the country's population and contribute approximately 70% of Australia's GDP. Our urban areas are gateways for global talent, incubators of innovation, concentration of investment and capital and deep, highly skilled labour markets.

Future national prosperity and global competitiveness requires the collective economic and social might of our cities to be leveraged in support of national economic priorities. A collaborative approach between all levels of government is needed to align national economic and industry policy with urban policy to unleash this potential.

The Policy presents a huge opportunity to address urgent challenges facing our regions such as housing, productivity, transport, social cohesion and decarbonisation while planning for the long-term needs and challenges for our communities.

Greater Hobart is facing similar challenges to many other urban areas in Australia, although given the acute issues regarding disadvantage, education, transport and health in our region, the need for transformational change must be a priority for all levels of government. Above all else, Greater Hobart urgently needs engagement for an overarching vision and plan that can help inform land use planning, infrastructure, transport and services, and enhance the liveability of our region for now and for future generations. We hope that initiatives such as the Urban Precincts and Partnership Program can catalyse this work for our community.

Who we are

The Committee for Greater Hobart (CFGH) is a member-funded, independent, apolitical, not-for-profit organisation working with the Greater Hobart community

to create a better future for all. The CFGH was founded in 2023 and is the 23rd Committee for Cities in Australia. We have a strong membership base that includes business, community, arts, education and training and local government.

The Greater Hobart region encompasses the Hobart, Glenorchy, Kingborough, Clarence, Sorell, Brighton and the Derwent and Huon Valley local government areas, as well as surrounding council areas where relevant (eg tourism infrastructure in the Tasman and Glamorgan-Spring Bay LGAs).

National Urban Policy Governance Needs

Urban policy, like all spatially based policy, is complex. It requires policy to consider the drawing together of a wide range of portfolios and “levers” into one framework. Therefore, responsibility is also spread across multiple Ministers, Departments and Governments, creating a challenge for policy-makers in the operationalising of initiatives at all levels.

The Policy identifies a wide range of these challenges and intersecting issues (eg. Appendix B - ‘National Initiatives Underway’). However, it needs to consider a formal mechanism or structure across relevant Australian Government portfolios that ensures clear responsibilities, integration and coordination, and delivers reportable outcomes.

National Urban Policy needs to encourage enduring local governance models

Globally, urban development and policy is littered with examples of good intention but failed implementation. The success stories generally have a few key strategic attributes:

- Clear objectives and vision;
- Strong community and cross-sectoral engagement and ownership; and
- Enduring and robust governance that is focused on the long term, and not influenced by short-term political cycles.

It is important that the Policy articulates the best practice attributes in governance for regional and urban transformational change and focuses support for lifting capacity and implementation across communities. Requirements should be contemplated for demonstration of best practice governance in consideration for relevant funding.

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Given the scale and complexity of the Policy, it will be important that there remains a central point of coordination and responsibility for the NUP within Federal Government. Ongoing commitment to the necessary resourcing to manage the Policy, deliver on key programs, and undertake the necessary coordination across governments will be critical.

Private Sector and Community Engagement

The Committees for Cities draw membership for a diverse range of sectors – business, industry, university and education, not-for-profit, government and individuals. The framing of the Policy is currently focused on the three tiers of government, with mention of private sector and community. Given that a large portion of the engagement and effort required to bring the Policy to life will be delivered by non-government sectors, it is recommended that there is more emphasis placed on involvement with private sector and community throughout. This is especially in the case of successfully mobilising the necessary private capital required for the transformation of our urban spaces in the coming decades (eg. housing).

Goals

The stated goals are generally good and a welcome evolution from previous urban policy. There could be more clarity and definition underneath each in the descriptions, but the Workshop consultations will have provided more content. One area for consideration would be the intergenerational and long-term nature of the challenges and investments considered in this policy. Other than the “sustainable” goal, they otherwise feel framed in current issues, rather than recognising the long-term opportunities. It is noted that this is referred to in Appendix A: Principles (specifically Principle 1, ‘City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive’), however it should be brought forward and more central to the core of the policy formation.

Definitions

There needs to be a clear definition of “urban” and a consistent definition of social and affordable housing.

Objectives

Objective 1 ‘No one and no place left behind’ and Objective 2 ‘all people belong and are welcome’ seem very similar and large areas overlap. These could benefit from better defining language that clearly delineates issues for each. In Objective 3, ‘Our urban areas are safe’, “safe” can be subjective as well as objective. A place can be safe on the statistics, but not feel very safe. Objective 4, ‘Our urban areas are sustainable’ is repetitive to the corresponding goal “sustainable” and could be reframed and made more substantive.

Targets and Reporting

The Policy could consider the development of KPIs for priority areas that drive liveability. This may also assist in aligning across portfolios. For example, mode shift in transport, social and affordable housing and decarbonisation of key sectors. This should be considered in the context of the State of the Cities report (Figures 1 and 2). Further key decisions and investments could be required to complete and publish an assessment against key indicators.

Conclusion

The Committee for Greater Hobart congratulates the Australian Government for re-engaging in the urban policy agenda, especially given the urgent issues of housing, transport and climate. We look forward to the progression of the policy

and are keen to be engaged in its further development, including specific action plans and initiatives that impact our region.

The Australian Government can and must play a strong leadership role in driving a clear vision and urban policy given the national implications of many of the issues being faced by our communities. It will be critical that there is strong alignment of funding and policy with targets and priorities, and therefore providing guidance on expectations to State and Local governments, while respecting local ownership, knowledge and decision-making.

Thank you for this opportunity and we look forward to further discussion and engagement on this critical policy for the future of our urban places.

Regards,

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