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NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FOR AUSTRALIA

To whom it may concern,

As one of Australia's largest multi-disciplinary design practices, we focus on creating a better future by designing the world's best places. We have particular interest in cities, regenerative design and communities and we commend the Federal Government in progressing the national urban policy for Australia.

The draft policy marks the first step in recognising the importance of cities to Australia. We acknowledge the complexities in creating a policy where there is inherent responsibility overlap across all levels of government. However, it is important to ensure an overarching position on how cities need to be shaped for a sustainable and resilient future, responsive to community needs.

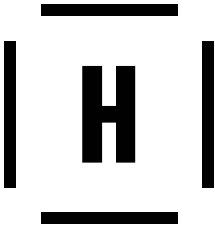
In this submission, we highlight areas where the policy could be improved, through this and subsequent rounds of review.

AMBITION

The draft policy establishes a shared government vision across a range of goals. The focus on cities being liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient is important, and help frame the scope of the policy. However, we think the Federal Government should be more ambitious in its approach to city policy. The policy needs to reflect the rapid change facing our society and the substantial impact this will have on our urban populations. The policy statements, in their current form, reflect a business-as-usual setting, and do not adequately prosecute the case for radically different urban systems that support our future.

GO BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY TO FOCUS ON REGENERATION

Sustainability is a clear pillar of the draft policy. However, the focus of the policy is to reach point-zero; that is, policy settings that do no further harm to environment and environmental systems. These policy settings do not enable a focus on regeneration, on the need to better integrate cities with their environmental systems or enable the repair of environments holistically at a policy level. The draft policy should push further to promote regeneration as a critical pillar.



THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN

Creation of cities and neighbourhoods is fundamentally a design task. The draft policy does not sufficiently recognise the need for careful and considered design processes to enable great city-making outcomes. Through design, the needs of cities can be tested, the shape of city systems better understood and the inter-relationships of complex networks focused to enable a regenerative future. Design puts a focus on communities – the people, animals and ecosystems that inhabit cities, through analysis, through collaboration, through design testing and realisation of the future state. The draft policy should elevate the role of design, and design assurance to enable quality place outcomes across our cities.

REFLECT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

NSW Government is leading the way in providing a framework for the design of places to have a meaningful connection with Country. This framework requires designers, developers, policy makers and authorities to have a meaningful connection to place through conversations, careful analysis and the forging of ongoing relationships with First Nations communities. By emphasising the importance of a connection with Country, sustainable and regenerative outcomes can be much more effectively achieved within our cities. The draft policy should elevate the importance of Country Connection as a pillar within its objectives and areas of focus.

ELEVATE URBAN ECOLOGY AND PLANNING FOR ANIMAL LIFE

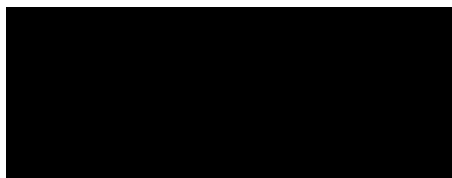
We know that a healthy environment is fundamental to the resilience and success of our cities. Without it, our cities and societies will fail. The draft policy needs to more effectively recognise that the design of cities is not just for humans, or to deliver economic outputs. Cities are a habitat for urban life, and this must include fauna, flora, ecology and enable urban biodiversity. This approach will bring significant benefit to the health of people, the resilience of cities to climate change, and the comfort of cities by helping to diminish the impact of urban heat. This fundamental approach to the design of cities needs to be a guiding factor for the draft policy.

By refining the policy to incorporate these important themes, a more holistic platform for a sustainable future can assured.

We have assisted governments and advocacy organisations in the development of policy across biodiversity, connecting with Country, urban design and urban planning throughout Australia. We would be happy to engage with the Department to develop the policy further.

Thank you for taking a leadership role in urban cities policy at the federal level. Federal recognition of the importance of cities is fundamental to their success, and with most of the Australian population living in an urban environment, that recognition is so important to ensuring resilient communities going into our future.

Yours sincerely,



Scott Davies
Environment and Communities Sector Leader