

RDA Tasmania Response

National Urban Policy
Public Consultation Questions



Initial comment

Before responding to the structured questions from the online consultation format, there are a few overarching comments to the National Urban Policy draft.

Definition of 'urban'

The definition of urban varies across the Department's programs and policy. The National Urban Policy does not clearly outline the definition of urban in the draft, although the answer to our question in the webinar was that it would remain similar to the previous policy (cities with over 100,000 residents), although it would be flexible. This definition differs from the Urban grant programs from the Department. The urban Precincts and Partnership Program (uPPP) and Thriving Suburbs Program use an ABS definition, that for Hobart includes rural areas as well as peri-urban suburbs. A consistent or clear definition of 'urban' from an Australian Government perspective would be helpful.

Policy Governance and Responsibilities

The responsibilities for urban planning and development fall across the 3 levels of government. While the Australian Government is in the position to provide leadership and oversight, their responsibility and authority is limited and correlated to state and local government planning and decisions. It would enhance the policy if these responsibilities were broadly outlined with an explanation of the role of this policy across the three levels of government.

The governance around this policy and the plan to deliver and measure outcomes should be made clear. What gap is it filling? What does success look like?

In addition, how this policy connects to existing policy and initiatives should be outlined, for instance, how does this policy align with the Regional Investment Framework and urban grant programs (mentioned above)?

Short Questions

1. How do you think the Australian Government could be more involved in urban policy? Choose one option.
 - a. Provide greater investment in state/territory identified major projects and infrastructure.
 - b. Manage Commonwealth infrastructure and major projects only.
 - c. Deliver more local funding for community informed projects
 - d. Work with states and territories on urban planning and policy matters**
 - e. Ensure alignment across governments on spatial and strategic planning
 - f. Provide national research and information about cities
 - g. Set national urban policy targets.
 - h. The Australian Government does not need to be more involved.
 - i. Other (list)

2. If listed other: Where should the Australian Government be more involved in urban policy?
3. What goal in the draft National Urban Policy is the highest priority for you? Choose one option.
 - a. **Liveability**
 - b. Equity
 - c. Productivity
 - d. Sustainability
 - e. Resilience
 - f. Undecided
4. What other key goals should be included in the National Urban Policy? Include a brief description of why. (Open word text to continue from previous question, 100 characters)

Interconnected - to surrounding regions, and supporting how people and freight move
5. What do you think would most improve the liveability of Australia's cities? (100 characters)

Planning of schools, services, transport, recreation and spaces to create local communities
6. What do you think would most improve equity in Australia's cities? (100 characters)

Plan for social/affordable housing to be located near transport, services and amenities
7. What do you think would most improve productivity in Australia's cities? (100 characters)

Reforms to encourage downsizing, housing tailored to modern life, digital and transport connectivity
8. What do you think would most improve Sustainability in Australia's cities? (100 characters)

Integrate environment into planning of spaces and developments, smart and efficient homes
9. What do you think would most improve the resilience of Australia's cities? (100 characters)

Spatial tech for better planning, build for resilience flood/fire, plan community spaces and access
10. Which of the following do you see as the most important objective? Select all that apply.
 - a. **No-one and no place left behind**
 - b. All people belong and are welcome
 - c. Our urban areas are safe
 - d. **Our urban areas are sustainable**
 - e. **Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing**
 - f. **Our urban areas promote productivity**
 - g. Undecided

Longer Questions (3000) Characters

Question 1: (Dropdown) Do you agree with the Australian Government's goals for cities and suburbs? (Liveable, Equity, Productivity, Sustainable, Resilient)

Yes

The goals are very broad so it's hard to disagree with the sentiments. How these goals are implemented or achieved is the challenge.

Question 2: Do you think the Australian Government focussing on the objectives will lead to the achievement of the goals?

No

The objectives are broad, with some very like others and some key objectives not obvious. All OECD countries are ageing, and Tasmania has the most rapidly ageing demographic in Australia. The objectives (and policy in general) appear to focus on active cities for young city workers, but is there also consideration of what the population may look like and need in 20-30 years?

Specifically: Objectives 1&2 are very similar. Diversity in Objective 2 fits with Objective 1; Objective 2 could focus more on liveability.

Some of liveability is covered in Objective 5, but it's more than health and wellbeing. Liveability includes the need to better plan schools, services, sport & recreation, and community spaces to ensure urban areas are designed to encourage local connection, walkability, accessibility for ageing demographic, services and amenities, meeting spaces etc.

Housing planning and design should be fit for purpose for current demographics and lifestyles such as a mix of rentable and purchased homes, single person apartments, family homes, accessible dwellings, and potential for shared housing (eg increase in older female homelessness and demand for cheaper housing). Plan what housing best suits the future residents and put mechanisms in place to ensure long term housing stock is suitable and located in the right place to create a vibrant, liveable city; not just left up to what and where developers prefer to build. Objective 5 is quite narrow, accessibility (ageing population) could be included here, buildings and spaces designed to capture sun, fresh air and provide connection.

Question 3: Are there other key urban challenges that you think are important on a national scale that are not included in the draft National Urban Policy?

Yes

Changing demographics and working styles impact how people use our cities.

In Tasmania, Treasury population projections show a rapidly ageing demographic. In less than a decade (2032), migration will be Tasmania's sole source of positive population growth. The number of Tasmanians aged 85 years and over will increase from 1 in 41 people in 2023, to 1 in 15 people by 2053.

Ageing impacts accessibility, transport and housing preferences. Urban centres need to be planned well to cater for this change in demographic. Like much of the developed world, the number of workers and waged taxpayers in Tasmania will shrink as a share of the population.

Working styles have changed since COVID, with many office workers choosing a hybrid working from home mix with work in the office. This change is the new normal and impacts on office space, commuting and the customer base for inner city retail and services. This change is new since the 2011 National Urban Policy and should form part of the consideration of the policy update.

Question 4: Each objective in the draft National Urban Policy includes potential actions. What other actions would you like to see included?

The possible actions look positive, but the actual outcomes will be the challenge; the implementation pathway needs to be stronger.

The diversity of cities that will come under one national policy adds complexity. Hobart is a very different city to Melbourne or Sydney, and while many challenges are common, the scale is vastly different. The draft policy is very broad. How the objectives and actions translate in practice to place will be the measure of the policy's success.

Tasmania and the NT are the outliers under this policy with our smaller capital cities and population base. Funding from the Australian Government for key infrastructure can be transformational at this scale compared to a similar investment in one of Australia's larger cities.

Question 5: Do you agree with the principles in Appendix A?

Yes

It is hard to disagree with the sentiment of the principles in Appendix A. It is positive to see that connection with the regions and the importance of a place-based approach are mentioned in principle 1, and education and digital equity in principle 6. Almost every issue gets a mention somewhere. It is how these priorities, principles and actions operate in practice that is difficult to gauge from this draft policy.

An additional Principle should be for a commitment to long term planning and investment as opposed to short term, budget-cycle thinking.

Question 6: Do you have any other comments?

As mentioned above, it is challenging to comment on such a broad strategy. It is doubtful that anyone would argue about the merits of liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient cities; it is how this might be achieved that is still unclear from the stated objectives and possible actions.

The draft is missing an emphasis on access to health and community services, including GPs, allied health services, aged care and residential living, and how this is integrated into urban planning.

Our introductory comments on definition of urban, and governance and responsibility may also be applicable here.

RDA Tasmania welcomes the opportunity for further engagement:

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