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The Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts

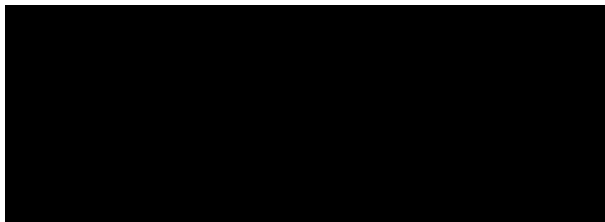
GPO Box 594, Canberra ACT 2601

To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission on Draft National Urban Policy

The UNSW Cities Institute welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Draft National Urban Policy. Please find attached our submission, and should you have any questions please contact Hannah Bolitho, Manager Strategy UNSW Cities Institute by phone: [REDACTED], or Email: h.bolitho@unsw.edu.au.

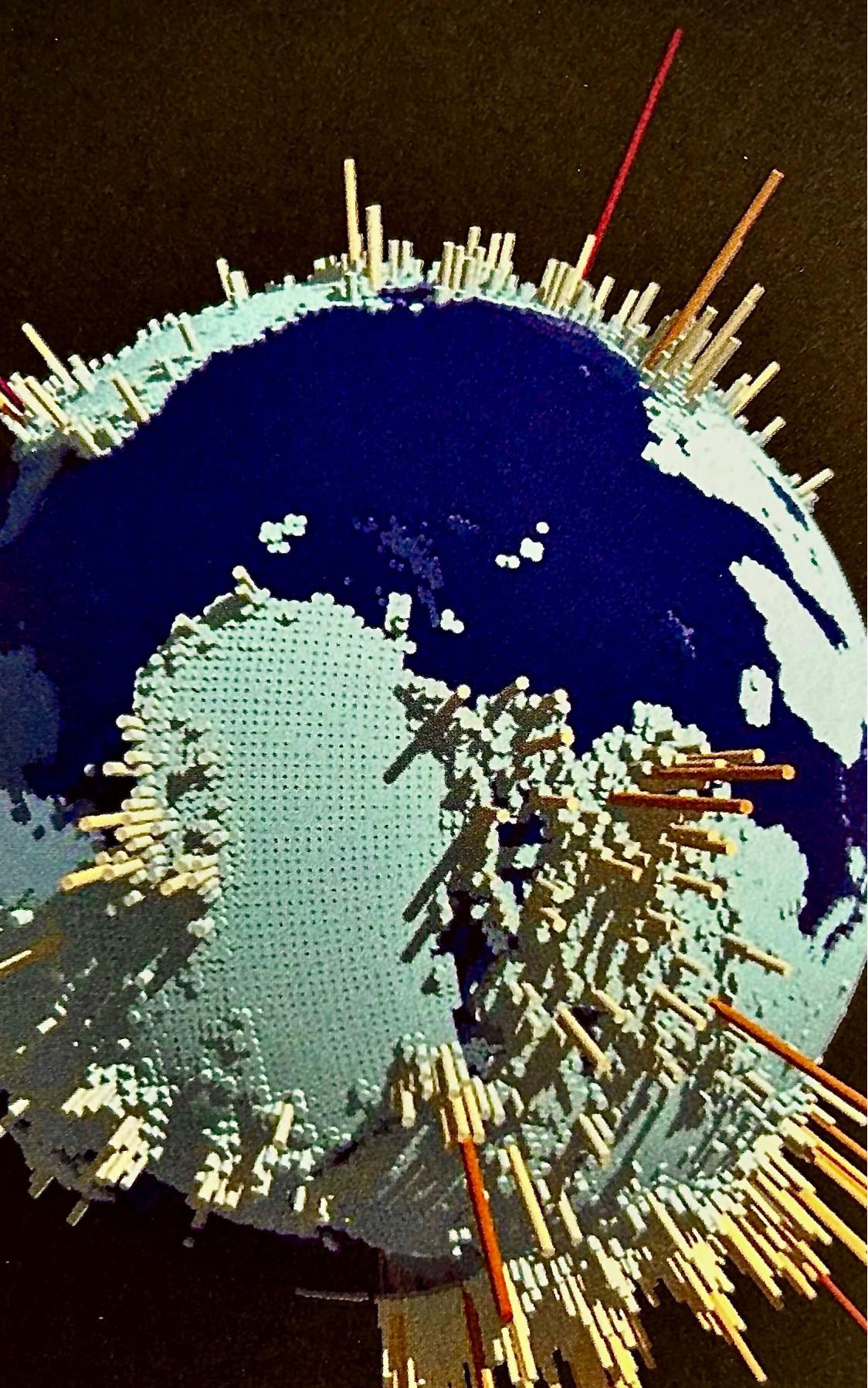
Regards,



Professor Peter Poulet
Director, UNSW Cities Institute

UNSW

Cities Institute



**Submission:
National Urban Policy Draft Consultation**

4th July 2024



UNSW
SYDNEY

Statement of support

The UNSW Cities Institute strongly supports the development of a National Urban Policy for Australia. The Asia Pacific (APAC) region is home to almost half the world's population but the rapid transitions in our region (social, demographic, age etc.) put additional and unforeseen pressures on the shape and nature of our booming cities. There is an urgency around enabling city systems in the region to transition at pace to respond to significant stressors for the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants. The UNSW Cities Institute believes that strong, clear urban policy is critical to responding to the wicked issues facing our region, driven by migration and climate change.

The scale of climate impacts, number of people at risk and economic forces in the region, significantly due to demographics, are unique and pressing. There will inevitably be the need for decisions and trade-offs about how we understand indicators of change in a transparent and fair way. A strong National Urban Policy has the potential to create integrated economic, social and environmental benefits for our populations within the context of planetary health equity.

The UNSW Cities Institute

The University of NSW Cities Institute has been established to bring a new way of working to respond to these challenges. It is a collaboration between practitioners, academics, futurists, policy makers, analysts and experts who take a holistic view of the world and our urban landscapes. UNSW is placed 19th in the QS World University Rankings for 2024. It has a long-held tradition of sustained innovation focusing on areas of critical significance, including sustainability, climate change, global population trends, emerging technologies, health and social justice. The UNSW Cities Institute draws on this disciplinary exceptionalism spanning all faculties, research centres and labs. It has a leadership team grounded in practice with significant government experience in urban policy. It approaches all problems through the lens of what matters and for whom to ensure that cities of the future are both sustainable and equitable understanding that how we make that happen is one of the most fundamental and urgent policy challenges of our time.

Key areas of support

In particular, the UNSW CI supports the:

- Reference to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Sustainable cities and communities; SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing; SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure; and SDG 13: Climate action.
- The appointment of an urban policy forum.
- A focus on First Nations voices.
- Reference to “*Resilient communities (that) have the ability to resist, absorb, accommodate, recover, transform and thrive in a timely, effective manner in response to shocks and stresses that cities can experience.*”
- The six key objectives: *No one and no place left behind; All people belong and are welcome; Our urban areas are safe; Our urban areas are sustainable; Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing; Our urban areas promote productivity.*
- The six shared principles set out in the appendix: *City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive; Purposeful place making increases wellbeing and connection; Urban development should actively improve social, Environmental and economic outcomes; Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation; Fair and inclusive development builds equitable communities; Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhances diversity and broadens opportunities*

Key recommendations

To ensure the National Urban Policy (NUP) drives change in the performance of our urban places to address increasing resilience, improving energy, water and waste efficiency and creating regenerative places some aspects discussed in the NUP need to be addressed. The UNSW Cities Institute makes the following key recommendations:

1. Address wellbeing and planetary health equity as the key priority

“City wellbeing’ moves beyond the mere absence of disease among urban residents. It fosters flourishing communities that are resilient; they actively contribute to the vibrancy of urban life. City wellbeing puts the complex urban (eco)system at its core and recognises the intricate and reciprocate engagement between urban morphology; climate and economy; places and spaces; and human and planetary aspiration.” (Dr Jinhee Kim and Professor Evelyne de Leeuw, UNSW Cities Institute).

It is concerning that *Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing* does not encompass the complexity of urban health equity for wellbeing.

There are three main determinants for health: genetics, individual behaviour, and environment. While genetics determine just about 10% of the health conditions we will develop in life, behaviours are strongly determined by the physical and social environment we live in, that we can impact. Urban development decisions that have the greatest impact on resident health are most often made by those that are not typically considering health impacts (i.e., real estate developers, transport departments, urban planning firms, local governments).

Recommendations

- Strengthen *Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing*, to include policy processes such as health impact assessments to ensure wellbeing and planetary health are considered in urban policy decisions.
- Expand *Objective 3: Our urban areas are safe*, to read “Our urban areas are safe and are inclusive”.
- Include population health expertise on the Urban Policy Forum.
- Prioritise planetary wellbeing and health equity in the areas of focus and shared principles.
- Commit to the enabling and facilitation of a ‘transdisciplinary approach’ that applies multiple knowledge systems, involves academic and non-academic actors, and bridges different paradigms including lenses of sustainability, ecosystem services, resilience, public health and urban planning.
- Provide a framework for accountability for Local and State governments for the measuring of projects and initiatives against key elements of health equity which demonstrate:
 - Recognition and representation of excluded experiences and perspectives
 - Strengthening of community participation and power
 - Distribution of resources, opportunities, and burdens fairly
 - Addressing of systemic barriers and shift to new, fairer systems
 - Stewardship of resources for future generations.

2. Provide clarity around the role of federal government

Given local government strategic planning covers areas of focus and shared principles (in almost all cases), it is unclear what the role of Federal government is in this policy. It is also unclear what is meant by “*City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive*.” There is an opportunity for strong stewardship of delivery and the provision of frameworks of accountability for State and Local governments.

It is concerning that in one of the first paragraphs of the Policy, the Sustainable Development Goals are called out, except for SDG 11 which sits in another area of responsibility. Integration across government departments must be a goal of this Federal Urban Policy.

It is also noted that there is no reference to other significant SDGs including: SDG 1: No poverty; SDG: Zero hunger; SDG 5: Gender equality; SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation; SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy; SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth; SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 10: Reduced inequalities; SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals. All relevant SDGs should be referenced.

Recommendations

- Provide a framework for integration across levels of government. Use models such as the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) to build into an integrated mechanism for the delivery of equitable urban places.
- Respond to the lack of integration between land use planning agencies, health agencies, environmental agencies, resilience agencies and transport agencies.
- Increase the capacity of Local Government to enable effective integration of infrastructure, at times across local government boundaries.
- Provide a framework for accountability to ensure each of the objectives and themes are measurable against the full list of relevant SDGs: 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,13 and 17.
- Include strategic transport and infrastructure expertise on the National Urban Forum.
- Re-write *Shared Principle 6: City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive* to be: “Ensure policy is adaptive/resilient to the logic of how cities’ pivot.”

3. Partner with universities as independent knowledge centres

Alongside government and industry, universities also contribute significantly to economic development and societal wellbeing. As the global community begins to look to a post-Sustainable Development Goals agenda, universities must now be at the vanguard of those considering diverse world views of change and progress.

As a global research-centred knowledge resource, UNSW is committed to strategic accompaniment with key partners such as the United Nations (UN), and other multilateral and regional organisations as well as local, state and federal government to support community-determined outcomes in our region. These partnerships seek to provide practical support and solutions for resilience to some of the most divisive contemporary global sustainability challenges such as climate change exacerbated displacement; environmental and health issues; water, energy, food security; and coastal/marine adaptation.

Recommendations

- Enable and facilitate options for government partnerships with independent academic institutions for capacity building such as universities and agencies.

4. Ensure First Nations voices are enabled and have power

“Just because planning has noticed Indigenous peoples and has been required – or in some cases voluntarily willing – to bring Indigenous interests to the planning table, the politics of recognition do not automatically guarantee the unfolding of a more socially just and culturally aware planning approach. It most certainly does not herald a decolonization of planning” (Porter, 2017, p. 21)

It is commended that extensive consultation was undertaken in the development of this policy with First Nations people. It is also commended that a significant voice of First Nations planning is included in the Urban Policy Forum. However, in a context where there is no legislative voice for Country, the role of the federal government must be to resource, equip and enable traditional custodians, who are specifically connected to Country, to own, manage and disseminate Cultural knowledge. This group must be given to power to do this, and this should be reflected in the Key Objectives and Shared principles set out in this policy.

Recommendations

- Use this policy as a platform to champion co-governance models that break down power structures in the planning system and enable First Nations voices to be heard and to have power in decision making.
- Commit to resourcing traditional custodians who are specifically connected to Country, to own, manage and disseminate Cultural knowledge.
- Expand *Objective 1: No one and no place left behind*, and *Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome* to reference the enabling of marginalised, groups and unheard voices to have agency in decision making.

5. Embed a framework around sustainability, built around intergenerational equity

It is concerning that there is no reference to intergenerational equity in the Draft policy. Without this, how can policy be nimble to address unforeseen costs and trade-offs? How do we ensure policy is adaptive/resilient to the logic of cities’ pivots? Whose risk is being managed and in which contexts? How can split incentives be transparent?

In places with long-standing populations, sustainability for intergenerationality is built into the ways of knowing (ontology), being (epistemology) and doing (axiology) (Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003). As we face urgent climate challenges and intergenerational inequities in the region, there is a critical need to understand this interface of where Indigenous and other knowledge systems come together including power dynamics and shifting paradigms in the context of sustainability and urban migration. The integration of Indigenous perspectives and models of working is critical for a post-SDG agenda in the APAC region and should inform any National Urban Policy.

Recommendations

- Prioritise equity, in terms of the ability to survive and thrive as a primary priority.
- Embed the principle of intergenerational equity into the core Objectives and principles.
- Commit to a perform of research, design programs and policies that enable and facilitate trust building, fair distribution of power and agency in decision making.
- Expand *Objective 4. Our urban areas are sustainable*, to read “Our urban areas are sustainable, resilient and equitable.”

6. Design measures that matter, specific to the APAC region

It is concerning that there is no discussion of how we measure impact in the Draft Policy. This is particularly relevant in the APAC region, given: *“APAC cities will need measures that are different from European and North American cities, because of the scale of climate impacts, the numbers of people at risk and the spectacular financial/ economic opportunities on offer in the region, in part due to demographics.”* (Dawson, B, Chief Resilience Officer for Sydney, 2024)

Recommendations

- Include a framework addressing questions and measures for sustainable cities and communities in the APAC to support city and regional governments and businesses to drive adaptive, inclusive and regenerative/ nature-based infrastructure and city planning.