

Submission 1

Review of the Planning System Tasmania

Introduction

In a review of the Tasmanian Planning process and procedures, efficiency would be improved, and made more effective, by establishing a system of planning information that is uniformly accurate and centralised at the state level. This information would greatly assist in ensuring greater rigor and allow comparisons and/or a changing situation to be monitored appropriately in a timely manner. In addition a planning information data resource could be used as an indicative tool for a regional approach to land supply and infrastructure planning and help smooth out peaks and troughs in the system.

How to streamline decision making by establishing a Planning Information Data Resource

A simple idea to streamline, and make the Planning System in Tasmania more efficient and effective would be a Statewide centralised Planning Information data base.

This would speed up the presentation of supporting evidence as a basis for planning decisions at both the State and Council level. The development of a Statewide Planning Data Base of land use information would aim to provide factual and unambiguous information on the current State and Council land zoning:

- Total number of hectares of all categories of zoned land as allocated by Council Planning Schemes;
- Total number of hectares of zoned land available [undeveloped] as allocated by Council Planning Schemes;
- Total number of approved Planning Permits by number and size of lot; disaggregated by zone and District area within a Council Planning Scheme [the land currently available for development by planning zone];
- Number of vacant lots [no building permit issued] in each planning zone; disaggregated by zone and District area within a Council Planning Scheme.

This information would be easy to collect and update from existing records. The analysis of this data would be valuable at both the State and Council level to support and inform planning decisions. It would put a spatial dimension to population growth and the potential need for services and infrastructure provision disaggregated by Council area and District.

The primary benefit however would be in streamlining the decision making process for amendments and the development and review of Planning Schemes where so much justification argument is based upon unsubstantiated submissions of anecdotal evidence. This situation leads to a great deal of time being allocated by the RPDC to test the veracity of claims

made by both representors and Council Officers in the review of planning schemes and amendments as the result of the lack of measurable information being tabled at hearings

Another benefit in the aim to streamline planning in Tasmania is that with the availability of Statewide land use planning data, Councils and their Planning Officers would be able to propose planning strategies to elected council members. These proposals could seek to address issues or opportunities based upon measurable inputs. Much of the current planning effort is reactive planning, “fighting forest fires”, to solve immediate planning problems.

Land Use Planning data would also remove some of the ‘political’ value based inputs currently used to support Planning Schemes and Amendments. If the Planning System Information was linked to an education program and made available on the internet, it would allow individuals to make informed decisions in land purchases or develop proposals in each zone within a planning scheme. Many representations made to Draft Planning Schemes are based upon a perceived loss of value, particularly in rural areas.

The implementation of the State Protection of Agricultural Policy [PAL] requires that land zoned as a Rural Resource should be used primarily for agriculture and consequently Planning Schemes seek to limit residential development in rural areas. Many representations made at hearings on matters of zoning, are based upon arguments of unmet demand; for example, no land available to supply potential demand or “we bought the land on the understanding we would be given permission undertake our development”. A Statewide Planning Information Resource would inform this debate by confirming the veracity of such propositions.

The removal of ambiguity in the supply, location and availability of zoned land based upon factual data would also help to reinforce the ideal of using the Tasmanian Planning System to support more sustainable communities in Tasmania. Current and proposed zoning information should reflect existing and proposed infrastructure availability in each Council area. Arguments and decisions based on maximizing the use of such expensive resources as part of a sustainable agenda would add a great deal to streamlining the planning system.

Post Script

There is a human resource problem in the planning profession in Tasmania with a limited number of planning professionals available to administer the complex Planning system processes and procedures. These limited resources are spread very thinly across the 29 councils who independently develop and control their planning schemes.

This human resource shortage is a large factor in the perceived lack of efficiency as it slows the preparation and submission of a certified Planning Schemes and/or Planning Amendments by Councils. A reason is that Council planning staff resources are stretched in the day-to-day administration of the Planning processes. Further planning resource time is required, following

public display of schemes and amendments, as Councils are required to prepare and approve Section 35 reports discussing each issue raised by representors before submission to the RPDC.

The RPDC review process requires considerable planning resources to undertake the time consuming and complex task of, conducting public hearings with the subsequent formal reporting process. This review is required for reports on each representation, both from the Council and individual representors, in addition to submissions and evidence taken in the hearings from State Government Departments, private organisations and associations. The review also requires the evaluation of a Planning zoning change to assessed against National and State Government Policy, the certified Council planning ordinances and regulations and best practice planning outcomes. This review process, of necessity, has to be thorough and as a consequence takes a considerable amount of time and effort with the available planning resources in Tasmania.

The difficult is done quickly, the impossible takes a little longer!

John Webster

Written submissions can be made until 16 June 2008 email to Planning.Review@justice.tas.gov.au