

# A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF PLANNING REFORM

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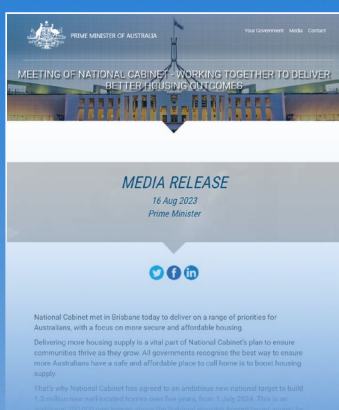


Australia is facing a once in a generation housing supply crisis. All levels of government are grappling with major housing supply and affordability challenges and are looking for solutions in all policy spheres. Planning has long been at the centre of National debate around its restriction on development and the crucial role it can play in addressing the housing supply crisis. In recent months, Federal and State governments reached a crucial milestone to identify the overarching planning reform requirements to drive change and boost housing supply across the country.

## NATIONAL PLANNING REFORM – THE BLUEPRINT

In August, the National Cabinet convened in Brisbane with a key focus on addressing the security and affordability of housing for Australians. The Prime Minister introduced an extensive strategy aimed at strengthening housing supply throughout the nation – The **National Planning Reform Blueprint** (the Blueprint). The Blueprint takes a multifaceted approach and places an emphasis on encouraging the development of medium and high-density housing in well-connected areas, situated near existing public transport hubs, amenities and centres of employment.

Click the image below for a summary of the Blueprint.



To tackle the issue of housing supply there is an agreement nationally, that more needs to be done from a planning perspective. The Blueprint acts as an agreement for states and territories to:

- Update state, regional and local strategic plans to reflect housing supply targets
- Undertake planning, zoning, land release and other reforms to meet their share of housing supply targets
- Streamline approval pathways, including strengthened 'call in powers', and prioritising planning amendments to support diverse housing
- Promote medium and high-density housing in well located areas close to existing public transport connections, amenities and employment
- Implement reforms to support the rapid delivery of social and affordable housing
- Implement reforms to address barriers to the timely issuing of development approvals
- Consider the phased introduction of inclusionary zoning and planning to support permanent affordable, social and specialist housing
- Rectify gaps in housing design guidance and building certification to ensure the quality of new builds, particularly apartments
- Improve community consultation processes
- Adequately resource built environmental professionals, including planners, in local government.

These objectives are logical and meritorious, however we must acknowledge that we are not on an even playing field – in terms of existing planning systems, levels of demand, physical setting nor political alignment. Based on this each jurisdiction has had to examine its own circumstances against these objectives and respond accordingly.

**“URBIS IS IN THE UNIQUE POSITION OF BEING ABLE TO APPLY A NATIONAL LENS AND PROVIDE INSIGHTS ON THE RESPECTIVE POLICY POSITIONS, REFORMS AND IMPACT ACHIEVED AT BOTH A NATIONAL LEVEL AND ACROSS EACH JURISDICTION.”**

Ray Haeren, Planning Director





## THE NATIONAL OBJECTIVES DRIVING JURISDICTIONAL CHANGE

The Blueprint is part of a collection of national initiatives to deliver more housing across the nation, largely driven by the National Housing Accord agreement. This has set the ambitious goal of constructing 1.2 million new, well-located homes over the next five years commencing in July 2024. However, one key question remains; how will Australia deliver these 1.2 million new homes and what planning reforms are being implemented across the nation to address these challenges?

Key themes across many jurisdictions include:

- balancing local and regional objectives in decision making
- local resistance to densification
- infrastructure delivery and coordination
- increasing complexity and coordination between various agencies.

Fortunately, Urbis' national planning team has deep understanding and relationships within the government and development sectors providing invaluable insights and a clear understanding of the evolving landscape in each state and territory. Click the boxes below for an overview of the reform initiatives and priorities in each state and territory.



## Australian Capital Territory

The ACT has been on a path to reforming their planning system for a number of years. With the reform agenda evolving with recent agreements to increase housing supply and diversity. The planning system reforms, which include district strategies, the Territory Plan, and accompanying design guides will support growth. This in turn will allow for more medium density development in areas where people want to live. The reforms are expected to be approved later this year.

### Key reform initiatives:

- Planning reform
- Refreshed district strategies
- Updated Territory Plan
- New design guides
- Increasing built-to-rent

## New South Wales

For years, NSW has had a standing agenda item to improve its planning system by cutting red tape and streamlining processes. With a new government and a national agenda to enable increased housing supply and accelerate planning decision making, there has never been a more opportune time to deliver on these difficult tasks.

The NSW government has been steadily working towards introducing new pathways to increase residential density while also providing increased levels of affordable and social housing. A full action plan to deliver on the overarching national planning reform agenda is outstanding but this is set to come with the release of revised Metropolitan Plans and additional planning reforms. Existing initiatives under the previous government's Planning Reform Action Plan are continuing with additional measures being sought to deliver more efficient planning outcomes.

### Key reform initiatives:

- State assessed rezoning pathway
- Faster Assessments Program
- Artificial Intelligence in planning assessment
- Density bonuses for projects with affordable housing
- New Transport Orientated Development planning policy
- Establishment of Homes NSW
- Maximising opportunities for social and affordable housing on government land
- Build-to-Rent pilot programs
- Updates to strategic Metropolitan Plans
- Rapid Assessment Framework

## Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Government has been implementing planning reforms in phases to help deliver a best practice system. This system helps to deliver better planning outcomes, stronger community engagement, and encourage new investment. Phase one came into effect in 2020 and phase two has been split into two stages. Stage one was implemented in February 2023. The amendments made changes to the planning scheme, the Planning Act and Regulations, and updated the pre-existing online processes.

### Key reform initiatives:

- Planning reform phase 1
- Major Remote Towns overlay
- Subdivision exemptions in remote communities
- Delivery of a Land Development Strategy
- Subdivision development guideline
- Release of Crown Land for residential development

## Queensland

The Queensland government has been rapidly implementing a system-wide housing response which is changing how planning in the state works. Since the Housing Summit in 2022, the government has been actively seeking to progress key actions, the most recent of which has been the Housing Availability and Affordability Bill which also aligns with recommendations from the Planning Reform Blueprint. These initiatives add to improving the state's planning framework to ensure that it is effective and robust.

### Key reform initiatives:

- Queensland Housing Availability and Affordability Bill 2023 [link to article](#)
- SEQ Region Plan Draft Update 2023
- Centralisation of state interest assessment
- Streamlined assessment processes for state interests
- Local Government Housing Strategies
- Housing Investment Fund
- Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025
- De-regulation of housing types and alternative planning pathways
- Queensland land audit
- Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative



## South Australia

In South Australia, planning reform has been a significant focus in recent years, aiming to streamline and modernise the state's planning system. These reforms encompass various aspects, including changes in zoning regulations, development assessment processes, and community engagement practices. The overarching goal is to promote sustainable development, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and facilitate efficient urban and regional planning to better meet the needs of South Australians. From July 2019 to March 2021, the state underwent the biggest modernisation of its planning system in 20 years with the full implementation of the Planning and Design Code. With this now in place, the focus has shifted to strategic planning. The state is currently preparing seven regional plans which will cover the entirety of the state. New dynamic and electronic planning instruments from the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016 are also being finalised.

### Key reform initiatives:

State Planning and Design Code
Proponent initiated code amendments
Affordable housing overlay and policy incentives
A Better Housing Future Plan
Land Supply Dashboard
Regional Plan Conversion
Establishment of the Office for Regional Housing (ORH)
Housing Infrastructure Planning and Development Unit

## Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government has been advancing planning reform to make the system more efficient with a stronger emphasis on strategic planning. The recent budget allocated funding to continue reforms and amend Regional Land Use Strategies to consider land for residential development. Further, the draft Greater Hobart Plan has advanced efforts to improve strategic planning. The rollout of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme continues, aiming to establish consistent planning rules across the entire state. Work is also underway on developing Tasmanian Planning Policies. This will offer high-level strategic guidance and principles for the planning system and ultimately shape the content and scope of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme.

### Key reform initiatives:

Tasmanian Planning Scheme
Tasmanian Planning Policies
Housing Land Supply Act
Regional Planning Framework
Greater Hobart Plan
Medium density design guidelines

## Victoria

The Victorian Government has embarked on a journey to revamp its planning system over the last five years, with several reform initiatives already implemented. A significant milestone was the release of the Victoria Housing Statement (the Statement) in September 2023. The Statement aims to facilitate an extra 250,000 new dwellings over the upcoming decades. It also identified a number of changes to planning and housing policy changes which will set up a whole of state approach. The reforms have been widely seen as a positive step to expedite the provision of housing supply across the state, with many calling for others states to view this as a best practice example for reforming their own planning policies.

### Key reform initiatives:

Victoria's Housing Statement – link to <a href="#">article</a> and <a href="#">here</a>
'Future Homes' pilot
Residential zone reform
Big Housing Build
State Projects
Improving the operation of ResCode
Greater infill targets within 'Plan Victoria'
Future Homes Victoria
Inclusionary zoning pilots
Turning Best Practice into Common Practice

## Western Australia

Planning reform in Western Australia has been ongoing over the past decade. Recently these reform efforts have been concentrated on promoting consistency among the many local government areas. Such as simplifying planning processes, improving design outcomes, and creating more opportunities for higher-density development. In recent weeks, planning reform has taken a step forward with the State Government introducing the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2023 into Parliament. The Bill aims to deliver a modern, efficient and more consistent planning system. The Bill closely aligns with the National Planning Reform Blueprint and progresses the government's 2019 Action Plan for Planning Reform.

### Key reform initiatives:

WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030
Housing diversity pipeline
Stamp duty concessions for apartments
Reforms to development assessment panels and significant development pathway
State Planning Policy – Medium Density and Apartments
Precinct Structure Plans
Release of additional land for greenfield development
Surplus government land prioritised for higher density infill development

## WHERE TO NOW?

Across the nation, planning reform has picked up pace, driven by a national consensus that delivering reform can help alleviate the housing crisis. While planning reform alone cannot solve the crisis, it has a pivotal role in addressing some of the key issues facing every state and territory. With the establishment of a National Planning Reform Blueprint, it now falls upon each jurisdiction to take action and ensure implementation. Some governments have been quick to release reforms and initiatives while others are yet to reveal their strategies. In this rapidly shifting space, the Urbis National Planning team are across the ever-changing planning policy environment.

### Key trends and themes include:



*Unlocking government land.*



*Supporting/encouraging build to rent and mixed use.*



*Increased density in suitable locations.*



*Enabling delivery of social and affordable housing.*

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