

1 July 2016

Cities Division  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
1 National Circuit,  
Barton ACT 2600  
Via email to: cities@pmc.gov.au



**Australian Institute of Architects**

To whom it may concern

### **Smart Cities Plan**

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent national member organisation with approximately 12,000 members across Australia and overseas. The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture. The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

The Institute welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Smart Cities Plan and appreciates the extension of time in which to make the submission.

The Institute congratulates the federal government on an ambitious and timely plan for Australian cities. The Institute is passionate about improving the quality of our built environment and addressing the urban challenges Australia is facing in the future, including climate change, housing affordability, an ageing demographic, the geographic disconnect between jobs and homes and the need for more community and public infrastructure. Cities have been the orphan of public policy in the past and architects have long advocated that the federal government focus on Australia's towns and cities by providing investment and strong leadership.

The Institute is pleased to see a plan that places cities firmly on the agenda, recognising the need for less reliance on cars, better public transport connections and the provision of more affordable and diverse housing options.

### **Integrated City Planning**

The introduction of City Deals, partnering the federal government with state and territory governments, is a positive step, but the Institute believes collaboration between all levels of government and industry is the key to making this strategy a success. We believe holistic strategic planning is needed, combined with better coordination across all tiers of government, the private sector, researchers and the wider community, for the delivery of transport, social and green infrastructure.

The Greater Sydney Commission model for linking state and local government through state and regional planning legislation is one which we commend for wider application through federal policy and incentives.

### **Funding Mechanisms**

The Institute recommends incentives and flexible financial arrangements for state governments, linked to specific design and sustainability outcomes, supported by enhanced tax revenue from development for reinvestment in public benefit initiatives.

### **Design Quality**

One area that has not been addressed in the Smart Cities Plan is the critical importance of design in building the cities of tomorrow. While it is heartening to see that the plan includes an examination of housing supply and planning changes, it is essential that architecture and design skills are used early to test possibilities and to produce social and equitable cities.

The Institute believes design quality should be a mandatory requirement for all project funding. Architecture is a substantial contributor to the design of our cities and towns and is integral to the process of improving the sustainability of urban areas. *The Benefit of Design*, prepared for the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia by Galaxy Research in June 2015, found that almost all Australians – 97 per cent – believe that cities and towns are better to live in when public buildings and public spaces are well designed. Moreover, the same report found that 99 per cent of Australians believe it is important to invest in good design of hospitals and schools and 96 per cent believe that homes and apartments provide a better living experience when they are well designed. The Institute recommends extending the NCC to mandate the use of architects on specific building classifications to improve the performance and quality of the built environment, and to ensure the appropriate protection of our national heritage values.

### **Residential Design Quality**

Another key aspect of the success of cities is the introduction of residential design guidelines across all Australian jurisdictions. The federal government could play a strong role in encouraging state and territory governments to implement such standards.

The Institute supports the introduction of design guidelines similar to those currently existing in NSW in the form of the SEPP65 framework. The recent review of SEPP65 confirms that the legislative package has resulted in improved living standards in NSW and has received broad support from the industry sector and local authorities. The most important achievement of the legislation has been the improvement of internal amenity within apartments which has ensured that apartments become good places to live and has encouraged people to embrace the idea of denser, more compact neighbourhoods with all of their associated benefits.

Additionally, the legislation has assisted with the transition of existing areas to higher densities by ensuring that external amenity is maintained by requiring new apartment buildings, and their landscapes, fit into the character of their neighbourhoods. This has been instrumental in the take up of higher densities in lower density settings.

## **Social and Affordable Housing**

Australia is faced with a major housing problem in terms of affordability and accessibility. Unaffordable housing impacts on society's ability to function, as well as family and community cohesiveness. It also affects our overall productivity as a nation and the ability of all citizens to participate effectively in the economy.

One in five Australians identify as having some form of disability and with the first of the baby boomers now reaching their 70s and the number of Australians aged 85 and older projected to quadruple to 1.8 million by 2050. Adopting universal access design principles will assist Australia's ageing population and people with a disability.

Culturally appropriate housing for Indigenous communities plays a crucial role in creating healthier, more stable, secure and socially cohesive environments. This in turn can foster the economic development and prosperity needed for more sustainable environments.

As part of the Smart Cities Plan, we believe the federal government should enter into agreements with the state governments to provide incentives to the development sector in return for the delivery of housing diversity and affordability. These agreements could also facilitate partnerships with the development sector through the release of federally owned land in strategic locations for the delivery of new social and affordable housing models.

It is essential that the federal government promotes revision and harmonisation of planning regulations to introduce clear targets for social and affordable housing, including more flexible housing types and multi-generational occupancy.

We also believe that there is a role for the federal government to drive investment in the provision of new, appropriate housing and in improving existing homes in Indigenous communities and to support local Indigenous people and organisations to deliver and manage their housing services.

## **Design Advisory Body**

As well as ensuring that rules and regulations are effective, the Institute believes the Federal Government can lead by example in valuing good design. Integrated strategies and policies will only be effective if supported by actions to ensure that what is delivered in physical form is enduring and of the highest design quality. The Institute recommends that the Federal Government forms a high-level multidisciplinary expert design advisory body from industry and government to advise on and review major projects and infrastructure.

## **Evidence Based Research**

We encourage prioritising urban-related, evidence-based research through the Australian Research Council. We would also encourage the adoption of an Australian Architectural Policy, recognising architecture's contribution to the economy through its role in developing cultural tourism, technical development of products, development of new business models, and education and research.

### **Federal Government Architect**

The Institute believes the delivery of high quality buildings and spaces would be better achieved with the appointment of a Federal Government Architect. The majority of states and territories have Government Architects providing high level policy advice and design quality programs. If we are to truly achieve smart cities that deal with the challenges and opportunities ahead, this role is needed to encourage high quality buildings and public spaces that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and culturally rich. The Institute also supports the ongoing role of a Minister or assistant Minister to oversee delivery of our cities of the future.

### **Ongoing engagement**

Australian architects have a worldwide reputation for innovative design leadership and the profession is well placed to advise the Federal Government on the most effective strategies to achieve the vision laid out in the Smart Cities Plan. The Institute encourages the Federal Government to engage with this organisation and the Government Architects Network of Australia as it refines and implements the Smart Cities Plan.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further with you and how it may support the finalisation and implementation of the Smart Cities Plan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Maher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Professor Ken Maher

National President, Australian Institute of Architects