



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

4 July 2024

Online submission at:

<https://edm.infrastructure.gov.au/survey.php?sid=33361&name=draft-national-urban-policy>

Re: Consultation on the Draft National Urban Policy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the consultation on the Draft National Urban Policy.

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Inc (SSROC) is an association of twelve local councils in the area south of Sydney Harbour, covering central, inner west, eastern and southern Sydney. SSROC acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the peoples of the Darug, Dharawal and Eora Nations.

SSROC provides a forum for the exchange of ideas between our member councils, and an interface between governments, other councils and key bodies on issues of common interest. Together, our member councils cover a population of about 1.8 million, one third of the population of Sydney, including Australia's most densely populated suburbs. SSROC seeks to advocate for the needs of our member councils and bring a regional perspective to the issues raised.

1 Understanding

Background

On 23 May 2024, at the Planning Institute of Australia's National congress, the Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Catherine King, released the Draft National Urban Policy for consultation.

The Draft Policy aims to develop and implement a framework for decision-making about planning, housing, and investment, with the overall goal of addressing the current housing affordability and climate crises and deliver more sustainable and adaptive urban development across Australia.

Drawing on consultation with State and local governments, the Federal Government proposes a suite of goals and objectives to enable urban areas to be liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient, which is intended to be delivered through cross-portfolio engagement.

Overview

The Draft Policy sets a framework to address urgent challenges our cities and urban areas now face, including housing affordability, productivity, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action.

The framework contained in the Draft Policy consists of a suite of goals, objectives and principles which are aimed at delivering what is referred to as a shared vision for better coordination of urban



policy across the country, and better integration of future strategic decision-making, investment and policy moving forward.

Key goals, objectives, and principles for Australian cities

To deliver the shared vision, the Federal Government has set five key goals for what our cities and urban areas should be:

1. **Liveable** – Where people can live in a place of their choosing, within their means, suitable to their needs. This is a safe, well designed, well-built city that promotes active, independent living, quality of life and connections within the community.
2. **Equitable** – Where everyone has fair access to resources, opportunities and amenities, no matter where they live or their socio-economic status.
3. **Productive** – Where cities foster shared prosperity and provide economic opportunities by enabling goods and services to move efficiently, and providing people with access to employment, services and infrastructure.
4. **Sustainable** – Where governments, industry and community work together to appropriately plan for urban growth, reduce emissions, promote a circular economy and adapt to climate change to ensure that our urban areas meet the needs of diverse communities and that our natural environments are rehabilitated for future generations.
5. **Resilient** – Where our cities are economically, socially and environmentally resilient to the impacts of change, including changing climate and increasing exposure to climate-related hazards.

Key objectives

The Draft Policy provides six key objectives which are to be applied to support achievement of the key goals and may be relevant to one or more of those goals.

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

Creating communities with equitable access to infrastructure, education, jobs and cultural activities. We will increase the availability of housing that is well located, well designed, accessible and affordable so everyone can feel safe and secure. As our communities grow and change, our urban spaces should adapt to meet people's needs.

This objective is identified as supporting achievement of the Liveable, Equitable and Productive goals.

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

Promoting equitable access to arts and cultural facilities, as well as ensuring universal design in urban planning, fosters inclusive environments. Celebrating First Nations cultural heritage, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and effectively managing the night-time economy can further contribute to a vibrant, culturally diverse urban landscape. Increasing sustainability and accessibility in tourism, and investing in sport infrastructure can improve social cohesion and a sense of belonging in communities.

This objective is identified as supporting the achievement of Liveable, Equitable and Productive goals.

Objective 3: Our urban areas are safe

Urban safety encompasses inclusivity and crime prevention strategies while enhancing climate resilience and disaster preparedness. Paying attention to public spaces, addressing crime risks for marginalised groups, and implementing evidence-based safety measures are crucial for promoting



community wellbeing. Cities must also address climate challenges, such as flooding, through improved planning, infrastructure standards, and urban design.

This objective is identified as supporting the achievement of Liveable, Equitable and Resilient goals.

Objective 4: Our urban areas are sustainable

Supporting urban areas to improve sustainability and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This will include ensuring strategic planning, land use and infrastructure frameworks improve climate mitigation, and aid the transition to a circular economy.

This objective is identified as supporting the achievement of Liveable, Sustainable and Resilient goals.

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

Strengthening connections between public spaces in urban neighbourhoods to enable people from all communities to lead healthy lifestyles, socially connect, and access natural environments and services.

This objective is identified as supporting the achievement of Liveable, Sustainable and Resilient goals.

Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity

Improving connection between people and goods through efficient, low-cost, accessible and active transport options and expanded telecommunications connectivity so people from all communities can work from anywhere and easily move between jobs, contributing to improved work-life balance. Ensuring that the migration system attracts workers with the right skills and that an effective and inclusive education system supports workers from all communities.

This objective is identified as supporting the achievement of Productive, Equitable and Resilient goals.

Key principles

The Draft Policy builds upon the key principles developed at the at the [Urban Policy Forum](#) in November 2023, which are aimed helping guide decision-making to achieve the key goals:

1. **City planning and governance must be collaborative and adoptive:** this requires integrated long-term strategic planning, including vertically across all levels of government and horizontally across different portfolios.
2. **Purposeful place-making should increase wellbeing and connection:** this means renewed investment, development and retrofitting must result in urban area design in line with national best practice guidelines, urban areas that improve, urban areas that improve health and wellbeing, adequate standards of living and environmentally sensitive design.
3. **Urban development should actively improve social, environmental and economic outcomes:** avoiding business as usual approaches and seek out transformational changes in urban planning through urban investment and decision-making that reduces urban greenhouse gases, integrates circular practices and employs sustainable procurement practices.
4. **Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation:** this can be achieved through monitoring the implementation of changes in cities to provide the evidence to inform future changes and drive improvement and innovation.

5. **Fair and inclusive development will build equitable communities:** a stronger focus on the consideration of social and environmental outcomes to become a mandatory part of decision-making to enhance urban wellbeing and equity.
6. **Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities:** supporting Australia's education system as a national asset to enable urban communities to diversify and expand skills, technology and innovation.

2 SSROC General Feedback

SSROC welcomes and fully supports the development of a comprehensive and coherent national urban policy framework. The draft injects a powerful and overdue First Nations theme.

Usefully the National Urban Policy tackles the wide-ranging interdependent issues (the interconnected challenges) facing our cities and urban areas. The policy's decision-making principles add some groundedness, but a conceptual matrix or framework needed to summarily tie all of these together with the goals and objectives is currently missing.

Both research-based documents underpinning the draft policy stress the need for detailed mapping of how specific policy transitions will be achieved. "Cross-portfolio engagement" is still undeveloped beyond current ministerial and cross-jurisdictional forums, meetings and working groups.

The draft policy lacks a strong focus on building capabilities as an essential component. It makes some supportive statements on coordinated governance, stakeholder and community engagement, and evidence-based decisions. But there are no specifics in the national objectives, challenges and possible responses on these and related areas. Hopefully the final policy will address this.

A shared policy-level commitment to enhancing transformative capabilities is also essential to moving from 'business as usual'. Furthermore, using regional bodies representing the collective interests of local councils, like SSROC, should be part of this mix.

SSROC agrees with the draft Urban Policy's recognition of the most urgent challenges our cities and urban areas now face, being housing affordability, productivity, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action.

Arguably a National Urban Policy objective should be to stabilise runaway house price growth. Current house growth is unsustainable. Housing is more than a house. While it has become both a wealth creator for some house price growth has created a divide playing out in our cities and urban centres that threatens social cohesion and intergenerational equity as homelessness and rental and mortgage housing stress grow in response. Effective solutions will require concerted coordinated cross-portfolio actions driven by policy.

Some Key Issues and Comments

Affordable rental housing

- The chronic and urgent nature of the housing affordability crisis facing Australia requires continuous, stable, long-term investment in new social and affordable housing supply. The draft policy should include more detail about supporting the role of affordable rental housing in resolving people's housing needs and how the national policy settings and the State planning systems should work to support the growth of affordable rental housing through the adoption of mandatory inclusionary zoning.

- A strong clear funded policy that promotes medium density infill where affordable rental housing at scale becomes an essential core component of urban strategies is also needed. Affordable rental housing at scale is required to achieve inclusive renewal of our urban precincts. It will be critical to making the densification of our cities more liveable, fair and vibrant and so help slow down the sprawling growth of the urban periphery, on the fringe of our cities and urban centres.
- Well designed and carefully targeted affordable rental housing can play a pivotal role in: contributing to improved economic productivity through providing affordable housing close by to key workers jobs; maintaining social cohesion by protecting low income renters living in older housing who would otherwise be displaced by population growth and rapid redevelopment of their lower cost housing; and fostering the achievement of net zero goals through building legislation and construction standards that require more sustainable and low carbon residential building solutions.

More formal recognition of the value of a regional perspective in urban planning

- While the draft paper highlights the role of local government in placemaking and service delivery, more emphasis should be attributed to identifying regional needs, issues and collaborative solutions. All of the key national challenges – including housing affordability, productivity, circular economy, social cohesion, disaster resilience and climate action – require coordination between local and regional responses.
- Sustainable waste management is a good example of the urgent need for regional solutions. SSROC has found that strategic waste management and circular economy place based solutions will need a coherent regional approach and specific strategy to be sustainable, efficient and effective. Robust coordinated regional responses, strategies and investment are critical to meeting local, state and national government objectives and successfully developing market-based responses.

Recognising the positive catalytic role for regional organisations of local councils

- In the draft document, the shared vision and the proposed partnerships with the states and territories should be considered as placeholders that need to be further developed and expanded.
- In particular, partnerships need to be expanded to include and engage regional organisations of councils, as collective expressions of local governments' interests. Uniquely they have a focus on, and long-term commitment to, tackling shared regional challenges. As partners they, and their council members, have a deep understanding of regional economic, social and environmental needs and a joined-up picture of councils' and the State's existing and proposed investment strategies that have been designed to enhance community well-being and place outcomes.

Articulating the connections between the National Urban Policy and funding programs will be critical to successful implementation

- At the moment the draft National Urban Policy appears to rely on scores of national initiatives (an array of current federal programs, schemes and agreements) that are currently under way. The National Urban Policy will potentially fail to make a difference unless it connects and taps into actual funding streams and pathways for the myriad stakeholders and services that will need to be engaged.
- A transformative policy framework needs to help continuously drive government and private sector investment and funding commitments. Once the National Urban Policy is adopted there will need to be imperatives for policy makers and Commonwealth and State



Treasuries to support new connections between the strategies contained in the National Urban Policy and the other funded national initiatives. These policy connections should translate strategies, legislative agendas, measurable targets and outcomes together with specific accountabilities from the National Urban Policy into actions in these other initiatives.

3 Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the consultation on the Draft National Urban Policy. SSROC warmly welcomes the development of a comprehensive and coherent national urban policy framework.

SSROC member councils cover a large part of Greater Sydney and have a direct interest in supporting and advocating for integrated urban policy to support strategic planning. Our councils pride themselves on providing orderly, well considered place-based planning for their communities. This submission advocates for this to be supported by National and State urban policies promoting council led master planning of places and growth precincts to achieve expeditiously the National and NSW Government housing goals of density done well as the population grows.

In order to make this submission within the prescribed timeframe, it has not been possible for it to be reviewed by councils or to be endorsed by a formal meeting of SSROC Delegates. I will contact you further if any issues arise as it is reviewed. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mark Nutting, SSROC Strategic Planning Manager on 8396 3800, or ssroc@ssroc.nsw.gov.au.

We look forward to the production of a transformative National Urban Policy which responds dynamically to our key urban challenges and climate risks. A truly transformative policy framework will need to be well connected to secure funding delivery mechanisms that effectively support and sustain local government as important place makers and community builders.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Sloan'.

Helen Sloan
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils