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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Fed Govt Inquiry into Sustainable Cities
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INQUIRY INTO SUSTAINABLE CITIES 2025

INTRODUCTION

We note that your discussion paper "Sustainable Cities 2025" identifies an impressively wide variety of factors that need to be considered on this subject. We do not feel that we can add to the scope of this subject matter. We do however wish to comment, by way of example, on the manner in which the scope of alternatives available are assessed. We request that in the final analysis and decision making stage an evidence based approach rather than an ideological approach be adopted.

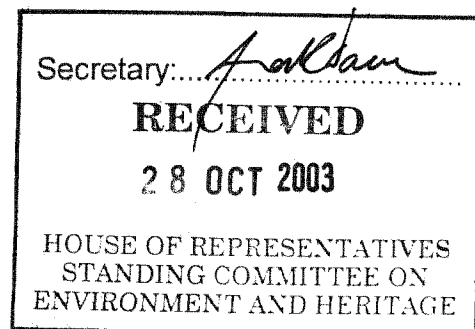
THE NEW SOUTH WALES APPROACH

In New South Wales the State Government has undertaken a program of forcing higher population densities onto existing communities to increase sustainability.

STATED RATIONALE

As a result of my request for the rationale for this policy the then Minister of Urban Affairs and Planning advised (21 February 2000) that the basis was:

- Improved traffic conditions and air quality
- Saving of farmland and bushland
- Less pollution



- More housing choice
- Saving of cost

However on investigating these factors I have found:

TRAFFIC CONDITIONS

There is no developed high-density city in the world which does not experience extreme traffic congestion (even with highly developed public transport systems). Both in Australia and overseas there is a clear correlation between higher population density and increased traffic congestion.

SAVING OF FARMLAND AND BUSHLAND

As typically only 40% of a city is comprised of residential areas the area saved by higher population densities (unless these are truly heroic) is negligible. If smeared along the perimeter of Sydney the 8500 hectares the NSW planning department claims to have saved would be a strip of only some 700 meters deep. Furthermore, to accommodate higher population densities, gardens and remnant bushland within the city are destroyed to provide increased residential accommodation.

POLLUTION

The increased traffic congestion increases atmospheric pollution – there is a high correlation between the population density of developed cities and concentration of vehicular exhaust pollutants. The reduction in vegetation mentioned above results in reduced pollutant removal by trees. The increased proportion of hard surfaces decreases the proportion of rain absorbed by ground and this rushes off into storm water channels carrying pollution with it. Some enters sewers already overloaded by the number of users exceeding the original design capacity which causes overflows into creeks and water expanses. It is well documented that higher densities cause increased noise which results in closed windows leading to a higher use of airconditioners. This causes increased energy usage as do lifts, clothes driers and lighted public areas of unit blocks. For urban consolidation viable single residential houses are torn down and replaced by buildings incorporating concrete and steel, the embodied energy of which amortised for a 50 year life being a significant amount.

HOUSING CHOICE

Communities have tended to develop individual characteristics reflecting the desires of the residents which can intensify as new arrivals reinforce the characteristics that originally attracted them. If all communities are forced to be homogenised by retrofitted higher densities, housing choice is reduced as each local government area tends towards common characteristics. Higher densities are hostile to children and it is now widely acknowledged and a cause for concern that the proportion of children living in the inner ring of Sydney is falling.

COST

Multiunit housing costs 1/1/2 to 2 times the cost of single residential housing. Enforcing higher population densities by restricting cities with increasing populations within defined boundaries is given as a significant reason for the increase in the cost of housing in Australian cities and overseas – Portland, Oregon is an example.

Further it is likely that higher densities retrofitted onto suburbs originally designed for lower densities do not save long-term infrastructure expenditure as the existing infrastructure is then overloaded, necessitating expensive inefficient piecemeal upgrades by future generations.

CONCLUSION

It appears to us that the rationale provided by the New South Wales government to justify their planning policies are unsupported and that the results of these policies are detrimental to the community. We request that every effort be made in your inquiry to reduce the chance of such a scenario being repeated.

Tony Recsei

President