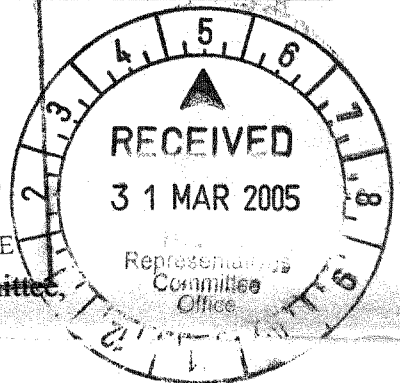


Secretary: *[Signature]*
RECEIVED
31 MAR 2005
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE
Environment and Heritage Committee



Sustainable Cities Enquiry
House of Representatives
Parliament House,
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Sir,

Our organization is made up of residents and residents' associations who are concerned about the increasing densification of residential development and the resultant loss of historic character and amenity in many suburbs.

We are concerned that the policy of urban consolidation (or "urban regeneration") which is now being imposed on local communities is leading to the premature destruction of perfectly good attractive older homes, as well as to the loss of many trees and gardens. We submit that this is not ecologically sustainable.

We are not opposed to all infill residential developments. For example, former commercial sites and disused sites along main roads may be appropriate for some dense multi-unit dwellings. But we do strongly oppose squeezing infill dwellings into inappropriate places (such as rear gardens) in our established suburbs, to the detriment of the quality of life of the existing residents of those suburbs.

We believe that when people buy a house in a street consisting of detached houses and gardens, then those residents have some right to expect this residential pattern to continue. Under our present planning regime, however, many residents live in dread that the house next door will be bull-dozed and replaced with two or more two-storey units with minimal side set-backs and little or no landscaping.

We live in a hot dry continent. Much of the infill development being built is reducing private garden space and increasing the urban heat island effect. This effect has been documented in all cities around the world as building densification occurs. We submit that low-density residential housing has been established as the preferred housing choice of the majority of Australians as it is best able to cope with our climate and our life-style.

Low-density housing also allows householders to minimize storm-water run-off. Increasing volumes of storm-water are a major pollution problem for our urban creeks, rivers and coastal waters which receive polluted run-off. Storm-water disposal is also an increasing burden on local councils as dense residential infill development greatly adds to this burden.

Low-density housing also allows householders to have compost bins to recycle their food scraps and some garden waste.

In view of current concerns about an obesity epidemic among Australians, we feel that low-density housing allows the space and privacy for children to play and adults to pursue active hobbies such as gardening and keeping pets. Gardening is the most popular pastime for adult Australians. Australians are also world leaders in the number of domestic pets which they keep. These physical activities are, we submit, important to the physical and psychological health of people. Cramming people into dense housing often deprives them of the availability of these pursuits.

Australia has led the world in the standard of low-density housing it has provided to most Australians, including those with modest incomes. We urge the committee to consider the importance of this form of housing in the standard of living of people.

Generations of migrants have been attracted to Australia, in no small part due to the quality of housing available. If Australia allows this low-density housing to be demolished for infill housing, then we could reasonably expect to find it harder to compete with Canada and other developed countries for skilled immigrants in the future.

Other environmental costs of dense housing include removing from residents the ability to grow some of their own food (fruit trees, vegetables, eggs from poultry).

The destruction of established gardens is not only increasing air temperatures in summer in our suburbs, it is also removing urban wildlife habitat. In the leafy suburbs, a range of wildlife lives, including birds, possums, bats and invertebrates. Many small bird populations are declining in our suburban areas and even the "common" brushtail possum is under threat due to habitat loss.

The removal of established domestic gardens radically changes the character of localities, often leading to a loss of character and amenity. Many residents have expressed to us their anger and concern over this trend.

The removal of suburban gardens increases air pollution due to the removal of shrubs and trees which tend to trap air-borne pollutants.

We do not have the time or space to fully go into the case against dense housing. For a fuller debate on this issue we refer the committee to Professor Patrick Troy's *The Perils of Urban Consolidation*, Federation Press, 1996).

We submit that Australia's cities can be made more ecologically sustainable by –

1. Protecting the existing low-density housing character of our suburbs;
2. Directing any new infill housing into specific locations which need upgrading or land conversion use;
3. Encouraging the planting of native vegetation;
4. Making domestic water tanks compulsory for new and existing housing (where practicable);

3.

5. Improving public transport and the sharing of motor vehicles;
6. Requiring new housing to be energy efficient;
7. Requiring new housing to have a minimum percentage of open space for the planting of substantial vegetation to provide summer cooling, less pollution and some urban wildlife habitat;
8. Developing a policy for decentralization, so that future population growth can be accommodated in new areas (subject to the availability of water resources and subject to the ability to decentralize employment to some extent).
9. Allowing for modest population growth, but not large-scale population growth as no animal species, not even human beings utilizing new technology, can continue to proliferate endlessly without impacting negatively on the natural environment.

Thank you for the opportunity of making comments to your enquiry. We apologize that this submission is later than we would have wished.

Yours faithfully,



Evonne Moore
(President)

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