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**Select Committee on Intergenerational Housing
Inequity Submission**

Abundant Housing Network Australia | April 2026

WHO WE ARE

The Abundant Housing Network Australia is a national alliance of independent, grassroots campaigners working to build a new vision for housing and cities—one that's more sustainable, liveable and affordable for everyone.

Our members—Greater Brisbane, Greater Canberra, Sydney YIMBY and YIMBY Melbourne—came together in 2023 to forge a new urbanist politics that brings together renters, homeowners, planners, transport advocates and all lovers of cities.

We represent thousands of people across Australia who want to see their cities grow and mature, who want secure and affordable rentals and who want to live near their families, friends and communities—but who feel drowned out by a debate dominated by a few loud voices.

We believe housing abundance—**building more homes where people want to live**—is key to solving the housing crisis and building the kind of cities people love.

Abundance gives everyone greater choice in where they live, gives renters better bargaining power, encourages better use of public infrastructure, and is more environmentally sustainable than sprawl.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Abundant Housing Network Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We would like to pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

A broken housing system hurts First Nations people more sharply than others and housing equity is a step on the path of justice and reconciliation we have failed to take.

We acknowledge that we are on stolen land and that sovereignty was never ceded.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



Executive Summary

There is now **abundant evidence** that governments' greatest tool for reducing the cost of housing is to remove restrictions that block new homes being built in places where people want to live. This submission does not seek to debate or relitigate this well-established empirical evidence. We refer to the Grattan Institute's [More homes, better cities](#) report, Jonathan O'Brien's [The Problem with Urban Planning](#), and [Donovan and Maltman's review](#) of Auckland's zoning reforms for a comprehensive summary of the available data.

While land use regulation is typically managed by the states, the Commonwealth is not bereft of tools—particularly the National Competition Policy. For immediate federal actions to alleviate the crisis, we refer to our 2025 election policy guide: [The Brick Book](#).

Planning is a driver of inequity

Current planning systems are the primary drivers of spatial and intergenerational inequity in Australia. These systems often enforce **artificial monopolies** that benefit existing property owners at the expense of renters and first-home buyers.

- **Wealth disparity:** In restrictive environments, homeowners can accumulate significantly more net wealth—up to 56% more over 20 years—than equivalent renters.

- **Displacement:** By restricting supply while demand rises, planning controls concentrate competition, driving up prices and pushing lower-income residents out of desirable areas.
- **Generational impacts:** Evidence shows that upzoning attracts younger populations and families, whereas restrictive zoning leads to aging populations and declining numbers of children.

Local participatory democracy fails to empower

The current model of participatory democracy in planning has led to a **paradox of empowerment**. While intended to be inclusive, these processes systemically empower the "time-rich" and socially advantaged—typically older, wealthier homeowners—who use local government to hoard opportunity and block affordability.

- **Metropolitan disenfranchisement:** Small local council boundaries prevent aspirational residents or those already displaced from having a political voice in the areas they wish to live.
- **Stymying social housing:** Wealthy areas are often the most hostile to non-market housing. "Town planning issues" and "lawfare" remain primary reasons for delays in major public housing rollouts, such as Victoria's Big Housing Build and the federal Housing Australia Future Fund.



1 | Urban planning systems are a key driver of housing inequity

Planning restrictions are the primary driver of spatial inequity across Australia.¹ It is uncontroversial to note that the history of town planning is deeply intertwined with its historical use as a tool for discrimination.

For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, ‘brick areas’ were used by local councils across Australia to mandate that all new homes in a given area be built out of brick, rather than more affordable options like weatherboards and timber. This meant that only wealthy people could afford to build homes in these areas, an example of segregation seeded through planning regulation. The early subdivision patterns of Canberra sought to enforce social segregation by lot size, creating suburbs for the wealthy (Forrest, Red Hill), and for the working class (Kingston). These sorts of rules laid the foundation for the spatial inequity that legacy planning systems continue to reinforce across our cities today.²

The use of planning to achieve segregation is not unique to Australia. In the United States, restrictions on apartments were adopted as a means to lock black people and other minority groups out of traditionally affluent areas. One North Carolina researcher found that “a one percentage point increase in

¹ We will use “restrictive zoning” and “restrictive planning” as colloquial terms. This can refer to other planning controls beyond zoning, such as minimum lot sizes, height limits, setbacks, etc.

² Ethan Gilbert, [Urban planning has always been about economic segregation](#), 14 November 2025

black population growth causes cities to zone nearly one percentage point less residential land for multifamily housing.”³

The majority of planning practitioners do not intend to undertake or exacerbate segregation. But land use regulation is a blunt instrument, and it faces the limitation of only being able to restrict rather than enable development, and only raise costs rather than reduce them. Modern urban planners are often trapped in systems where crucial architectural decisions were taken centuries ago for explicitly discriminatory purposes, which they have limited ability to reform.

The costs of these tools and status quo settings should be weighed against the benefits, but planning systems rarely undertake this sort of rationalisation, and as a result continue to implement policies that increase inequity across Australian cities and settlements.⁴

1.1 | Restrictive planning controls create winners and losers by enforcing artificial monopolies

The main beneficiaries of planning restrictions are existing property owners. Their wealth increases as a function of scarcity, which is significantly increased by bans on new housing and development.

³ Alexander Sahn (2025), [Racial Diversity and Exclusionary Zoning: Evidence from the Great Migration](#), The Journal of Politics, Volume 87, Number 4

⁴ See [The Problem with Urban Planning](#) for a more detailed analysis.



When demand for housing increases but planning restrictions ban supply from meeting this demand, the inevitable outcome is high prices.

These restrictions entrench a system of winners and losers. The winners are typically incumbent land-and-homeowners, and the losers are typically renters and prospective first home buyers. Research from the UK found that the average household that owned a home in a highly restrictive planning environment between 1999 and 2019 accumulated a staggering 56% more net wealth compared to an equivalent renting household.⁵

Critically, this inequality was most pronounced in the most tightly regulated metropolitan areas, such as inner-London. In these locations, the Gini coefficient for wealth inequality increased by 13% between 1999 and 2019, whereas less regulated metros saw stable or slightly declining inequality.⁶

This increase in inequality is driven by restrictions on new homebuilding. These restrictions cause demand to translate into significantly higher prices, rather than new construction. Incumbent homeowners profit from these windfall gains, while renters face escalating costs, and greater barriers to achieving homeownership in the first place.

⁵ Christian A.L. Hilber & Tracy M. Turner (2024), [Land use regulation, homeownership and wealth inequality](#), Discussion Paper No. 2003, Centre for Economic Performance

⁶ *ibid.*

1.2 | Restrictive planning controls exacerbate displacement

Restrictive planning controls do not just increase inequality within well-connected suburbs—they push poorer people out of these suburbs all together.

Restrictions on homebuilding directly result in less supply, which in turn means more competition between homebuyers and renters—leading to higher prices and rents. This is because regulation that bans new housing does not decrease demand for new housing: it just concentrates the demand among a limited supply of existing homes.

Only a stronger provision of housing supply—both private and public—can effectively reduce displacement. Where supply is fixed, housing becomes zero-sum, meaning that one household's gain is necessarily another household's loss. Ensuring that supply is not fixed, and is instead enabled to increase in response to demand, is the best way to combat displacement. This will require the broad reassessment of all restrictive planning controls that restrict supply in well-connected, high-demand areas.

That new supply reduces rents and displacement is substantiated by a large evidence base. Leading Australian research finds that every 1 per cent increase in the housing stock lowers prices and rents by 2.5 per cent.⁷ This aligns with

⁷ Trent Saunders and Peter Tulip (2019), [A Model of the Australian Housing Market](#), Reserve Bank of Australia, Research Discussion Paper



a large, well-established overseas literature. For example, a study on the effects of supply increases in San Francisco found that new market-rate construction reduces rents and displacement—a similar study in Sweden found the same.⁸

1.3 | The positive effects of upzoning on young people and children

In the same way that restrictive planning increases inequity, planning that enables more housing decreases inequity, with particularly stark impacts on young people and children.

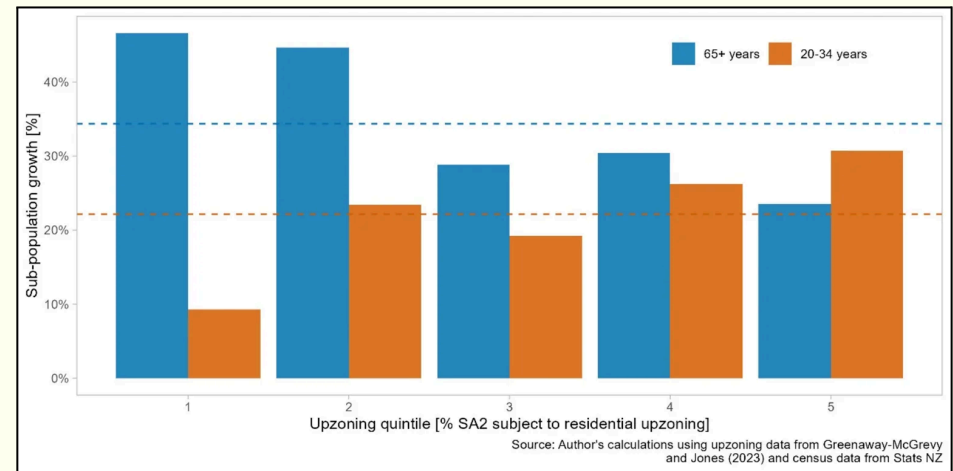
Preliminary analysis of Auckland’s upzoning found that neighbourhoods that experienced minimal or no upzoning experienced higher than average population growth of people aged 65+, and lower than average growth for young people aged between 20 to 34. The opposite was found for neighbourhoods that were upzoned the most.⁹

YIMBY Melbourne found similar dynamics at play in Melbourne, where areas in the highly permissive Capital City Zone, such as the CBD, Southbank, and Docklands saw significant increases in child populations, relative to the more restrictive middle

suburbs, which saw declines in the number of children between the 2016 and 2021 censuses.¹⁰

A greater diversity of young families in established, wealthier areas has positive impacts on overall education outcomes.¹¹ Researchers have also previously found that increasing supply of rentals, increased opportunities for renters’ children to attend higher-performing schools—this led to significant gains in academic achievement for the renters’ children.¹²

Figure 1.1: Population growth versus upzoning quintile for sub-populations aged 65+ and 20-34 years in Auckland



⁸ Kate Pennington (2025), [Rents, Movers, and Stayers: The Spillover Effects of Construction in San Francisco](#), Working Paper; Brunåker et al. (2024), [Revitalizing Poor Neighborhoods: Gentrification and Individual Mobility Effects of New Large-Scale Housing Construction](#), Working Paper, Uppsala University; See [Michael Wiebe \(2026\)](#) for a comprehensive review of the literature

⁹ Stuart Donovan (2025), [Less Crowded Houses. NZ's housing policy success and implications for Australia](#), Centre for Independent Studies

¹⁰ YIMBY Melbourne (2026), [Research note: the Activity Centre Program is redistributive](#); Docklands is in the Docklands Zone which functions similarly to the Capital City Zone.

¹¹ Katie Roberts-Hull (2025), [The Price Children Pay for Exclusive Suburbs](#), Inflection Points

¹² Tom Mayock and Kelly Vosters (2026), [Educational achievement gains afforded by moving to single-family rentals](#), Journal of Housing Economics, Volume 71

Every dollar saved in housing costs—whether renting or mortgage repayments—are dollars that households can instead spend and invest in things that matter to them as additional discretionary income. For many families, this is the difference between being in poverty or not.

For governments to reverse the negative effects of making housing scarce, they must make housing abundant. The evidence is clear that this can only be achieved with ambitious upzoning programs that focus on increasing housing capacity.

1.4 | The Commonwealth pays the price for restrictive state and territory planning controls

A feature of the vertical fiscal imbalance between the Commonwealth and the States is that while the States have constitutional control over the planning controls that increase housing costs, it is the Commonwealth—not the states—that foots the bill for. This is because high housing costs flow through to increases in social spending, and a reduction in the tax base.

This manifests itself in several ways:

1. **Restrictive planning controls drive up the cost of delivering public and social housing** under Commonwealth funding programs like the Housing Australia Future Fund (discussed further in chapter 3), and the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness and its predecessors.

2. **Increasing rental costs place pressure on the full spectrum of Commonwealth social payments:** Jobseeker, the Aged Pension, the Disability Support Pension, the Carer's Payment, the Family Tax benefit and others. This is because the majority of Australia's most disadvantaged are housed by the private rental market,¹³ rather than by social housing providers.
3. **High housing impacts the cost of NDIS support plans** as they relate to housing costs.
4. **High housing costs impact the willingness and ability of the working age, tax-paying population to shoulder the tax burden** necessary to pay for government services and service the national debt.
5. **High housing costs reduce economic growth** and therefore also reduce federal GST and corporate taxation receipts, by sucking money out of the consumer economy.¹⁴

The fiscal position of the Commonwealth Government is practically borne by current working generations and future generations of Australians. While decreased housing costs benefit Australia's younger citizens directly, they also benefit indirectly by improving the Commonwealth's budgetary bottom line.

¹³ See: Brendan Coates ['Where is home for marginalised consumers?'](#) *The Grattan Institute*, p. 3.

¹⁴ The Parliamentary Budget Office's [Structural Trends in GST](#) report noted that increased spending on rent by younger people was a major driver in the declining GST to GDP ratio since 2000.



For the broader community, and the Commonwealth, to benefit from land use reforms they will need to sharpen the incentives for the States and Territory Governments.

As per *The Brick Book*, we recommend the following be implemented via a revitalised National Competition Policy:

Recommendations

1 | Introduce a National Townhouse Accord

Auckland-style upzoning—for all of Australia

- A. Set a nation-wide 'code-assessable' framework for townhouse development, ensuring ample permissible residential density across all urban areas.
- B. Remove local planning restrictions that are less permissive than the National Townhouse Accord framework.
- C. Exempt all developments that comply with the National Townhouse Accord from any state's third party appeal processes.

2 | Fix the National Housing Accord incentives

Pay the states to fix planning bottlenecks and build homes faster

- A. A new tranche of the National Productivity Fund should deliver incentive payments for implementing a number of deliverables such as:
 - a. Upzoning around transit hubs, CBDs, and core town centres.
 - b. Modernising and simplifying planning regulation.
 - c. Codifying all residential and mixed-use development with a deemed-to-comply standard.
 - d. Providing best-practice frameworks and cost-benefit analysis structures for land-use regulation and decision-making.



2 | Participatory democracy and local governments exacerbate housing inequity

Land use planning has long been entangled with participatory democracy—a model of governance that emphasises the direct involvement of constituents in political decisionmaking, rather than relying on elected representatives.

Strategic plans dictate what can be built and where it can be built, and often go through multiple rounds of opt-in community consultation and council meetings over the span of years.

Planning permits are also advertised to the local community, and objections are often given mandatory consideration. Given a high enough volume of objections, permits are often debated by the public at a local council meeting or planning panel, and the outcome is determined by elected councillors, rather than professional planners.

This process is often characterised as highly democratic because it allows participation of anyone and everyone. But the reality of participatory democracy is that it is not for anyone and everyone. In fact, it is a mechanism which systemically empowers the already socially advantaged and time-rich.

This is because participation is not free. It is expensive. It requires someone to have enough resources to be free during workdays or weeknights. It requires the civic skills to understand what a planning scheme is and how local government works. And these processes are usually only open to people who already live somewhere, rather than those who would like to live there but currently do not. The result of these

barriers is to place participatory democracy beyond the reach of most people, who tend to be busy with the quite ordinary burdens and responsibilities of day-to-day life.

Political scientists call this the **paradox of empowerment**,¹⁵ where the broadening of participatory processes reinforces the advantages of the time-rich and the disadvantages of the time-poor. This is because opt-in processes that cast a wider net do not catch a greater diversity of participants—they catch a greater number of participants with similar demographic traits.

It means that as more opportunities to participate in land use planning processes are created, the further entrenched the power of incumbent property owners become.

This creates a context in which wealthier and older homeowners can weaponise local government against housing affordability and enable them to opportunity hoarding. For example, Alexander Sahn (2025) analysed public comments made to the San Francisco Planning Commission and found that “commenters at public meetings are unrepresentative of the public along racial, gender, age, and homeownership lines.”¹⁶ Similarly, Yoder (2020) found those that rock up to

¹⁵ Kevin J. Elliott (2026), [Participatory Democracy and Its Limits](#), Annual Review Political Science, Volume 29

¹⁶ Alexander Sahn (2025), [Public comment and public policy](#), American Journal of Political Science, Volume 69, Issue 2

council meetings are more likely to be older, white and homeowners.¹⁷

The available Australian evidence suggests that these dynamics are alive and present in our local governments.

YIMBY Melbourne found that opt-in community consultation on urban planning matters was heavily biased toward older residents and homeowners. In 94% of their sample consultations, older residents were overrepresented compared to the actual demographics of the local government area—homeowners were over-represented across 100% of sample consultations.¹⁸

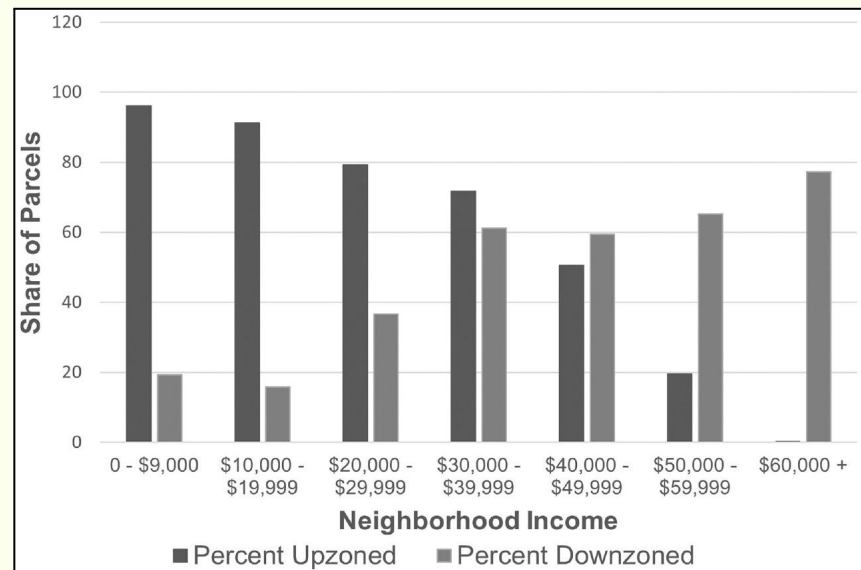
2.1 | Participatory politics consistently results in more inequitable planning outcomes

The influence of participatory politics on housing inequity is most stark in the strategic planning process. Even Auckland’s upzoning, one of the most boldest upzoning programs globally, was made worse by participatory politics.

The Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP), as originally proposed, faced intense local backlash when it went to community consultation, particularly from the wealthier homeowners in Auckland’s inner-city.

In response to the backlash, the council sought to water down the plans, until the central government intervened and rescued a majority of the plan. However, the councillors and wealthy inner-city residents continued to fight, and as a result many of the city’s wealthiest areas were excluded from the upzoning.¹⁹

Figure 2.1: Share of parcels upzoned/downzoned in the AUP by neighbourhood income.

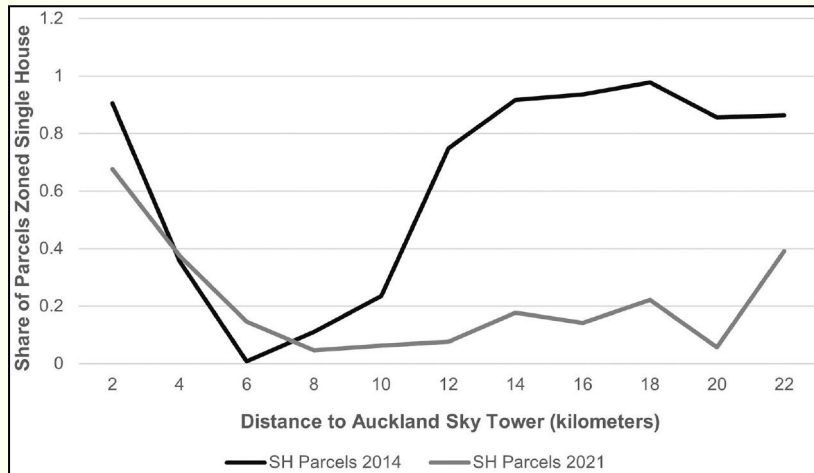


¹⁷ Jesse Yoder (2020), [Does Property Ownership Lead to Participation in Local Politics? Evidence from Property Records and Meeting Minutes](#), American Political Science Review, Volume 114, Issue 4

¹⁸ YIMBY Melbourne (2025), [Research note: Community consultation is unrepresentative and biased](#)

¹⁹ Eleanor West (2024), [Up-zoning New Zealand: the localisation of a globally mobile policy idea](#), Economic Policy Centre, University of Auckland, Policy Paper No. 003

Figure 2.2: Share of parcels zoned single house in pre-AUP (2014) and post-AUP (2021) by distance to Auckland Sky Tower.



Researchers measured exactly how the AUP played out along both socio-economic and spatial dimensions.²⁰ The results are stark. Wealthier areas experienced little upzoning and more downzoning, while lower-income areas were almost fully upzoned (Figure 2.1).

This meant that restrictive planning controls were retained or even strengthened across much of the city’s well-located inner middle suburbs, while land furthest away from the CBD was upzoned more substantially (Figure 2.2).

²⁰ Cheung et al (2024), *The heterogeneous impacts of widespread upzoning: Lessons from Auckland, New Zealand*, Urban Studies, Volume 61, Issue 5,

This sort of outcome of participatory democracy is not unique to Auckland. When a new California law required local governments to explicitly outline which parcels of land should accommodate new housing—including some low-income subsidised housing—researchers found that most wealthy local governments did not modify their strategic plans to allow affordable housing, and the ones that did concentrated the affordable housing in their poorest neighbourhoods.²¹ In France, limiting local government discretion increased social housing provision by 30%.²²

In Melbourne, when local councils were allowed to apply new residential zones, the wealthy Boroondara Council applied the most restrictive zone across more than 80% of its residential land. Meanwhile only 0.8% of the residential land was zoned for higher density, and it took Government intervention to increase this to just 1.6%.²³

This underlines the strong political economy problem at hand. The costs of new housing—noise from construction, some additional traffic, and so on—are locally concentrated. But the benefits—lower rents and house prices, and greater productivity thanks to more workers within the labour market—are dispersed. This all greatly exacerbated by the paradox of empowerment.

²¹ Monkkenon et al (2025), *Meaningful Action: Evaluating Local Government Plans to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing in California*, Housing Policy Debate, Volume 35, Issue 2

²² Helena Pedrotti (2025), *Local Discretion in Low-Income Housing Policy: Evidence from France*, Working paper

²³ Karin Derkley, *Reform locks up our suburbs*, The Age, June 15, 2014

The Abundant Housing Network believes that representative democracy, particularly that on a state/territory level, is the only democratic institution capable of overcoming these challenges. This level of Government overcomes both the flaws of participatory politics and the democratic boundary problem, which we will discuss next.

2.2 | Local council boundaries disenfranchise people

The issues with localised democracy are also partly due to the democratic boundary problem, which describes the inherent conflict between boundaries as defined geographically, and how people relate to each other and power.²⁴

The core problem in the case of planning is that few people identify their local government area as a meaningful community of interest.

On the other hand, the city is understood intuitively by most people as the metropolitan boundaries, most easily defined by an urban growth boundary. But outside of Queensland and Canberra, no elected decision-makers represent that metropolis.

Most of the Australian population elects state representatives who are concerned with both cities and regions, and local

councillors who are concerned with small areas that reflect historic rather than contemporary communities of interest.

Australian urbanists have coined the term *metropolitan disenfranchisement* to describe how geographically small councils systematically and often unconsciously privilege existing residents over future or aspirational ones.²⁵ In fact, councillors, in the proper execution of their duties, are often obliged *not* to privilege future or aspirational residents.²⁶

This results in a situation where economic pressures like rising rents or house prices may displace someone from a given jurisdiction, even if they only move a few kilometres further out of the city. This leaves the dislocated person with no political influence over the council they were forced to leave in order to pressure that council to take steps to avoid similar displacement happening to others in the future, or to facilitate changes that would enable the dislocated person to return.

For example, a young family in Melton wanting to move closer to work in the city has no way to influence an inner urban council to facilitate more affordable housing for them. Nor can a renter in Richmond who is forced further from the city, their work, and their community influence their local council to permit the homes that would prevent their friends being forced out too.

²⁴ Pablo Magaña (2023), [The Boundary Problem in Democratic Theory: A Methodological Approach](#), Res Publica, Volume 30

²⁵ Gleeson et al (2010), [Metropolitan governance for the Australian city: The case for reform](#), Urban Research Program, Issues Paper 12

²⁶ Victoria's [Local Government Act 2020](#) states: the role of a councillor is "to represent the interests of the municipal community in that decision making."



This also means the cost of population growth is unevenly borne by councils themselves. If one council fails to deliver housing supply, it shifts the burden onto others. Outer suburban councils who have seen the majority of population growth in recent decades already face an infrastructure shortfall compared to high-amenity inner-urban councils, and this deficit continues to grow.

Local government reformers have argued for metropolitan-wide governments—either to replace local governments entirely or be created as a fourth-level of Government—in order to improve the democratic inclusion for the currently-alienated groups like renters, and to better align city-wide strategic planning. We believe that this approach is unviable for a few reasons.

Firstly, State Governments would be reluctant to abdicate their broad planning powers to a lower level of Government. Secondly, State Governments across Australia—with the exemption of Queensland which has large metropolitan governments already—functionally already act as metropolitan governments with a majority of seats and voters being within bounds of each capital city. Continued urbanisation of Australia's population means that this is likely to become more true with time.

The Abundant Housing Network Australia believes **that metropolitan and peri-urban local governments should have their land use planning functions absorbed in full by State**

Governments, with these powers vested in regional or state-level planning panels.²⁷

This could be **complemented by the creation of local boards**, who would remain a local touchpoint and administrator for responsibilities which make sense to be locally controlled, such as libraries and aquatic centres.

The Commonwealth could use a new City Deal program to help kickstart this process and incentivise the States to embark this reform by providing funding for local initiatives on the condition that these initiatives are administered by new local boards.

The Commonwealth should only adopt these recommendations if they are directly linked to dedicated funding, as specified earlier. Unfunded, unenforceable plans or strategies that do not align with or influence direct Commonwealth spending priorities must be avoided. Such initiatives divert resources from other, more impactful priorities that can actually deliver the desired outcomes.

²⁷ This is already true of all Territory Governments.



Recommendations

- A. The Commonwealth uses a new City Deal program with the states to incentivise state governments to fully absorb the planning functions of metropolitan and peri-urban local governments, with these powers vested in regional or state-level planning panels.



3.0 | Local planning entrenches inequality by stymying public and community housing development

It is important to recognise that despite the dire need for more social housing in high-amenity areas of our nation, it is often these very areas that are most hostile to new housing and social housing projects. Research on Victoria found that higher rates of objections and third-party appeals were correlated with areas with higher socio-economic advantage.²⁸

Some governments, such as Victoria and NSW, in recognition of this problem, have moved to protect social housing projects from third-party appeals and to exempt them from local planning constraints—but this is not the norm across Australia.

For instance, in Canberra, lawfare against social housing remains commonplace. Since 2018, Tribunal appeals have held up 133 public homes. One such case was when the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association successfully blocked the development of three new public homes for a dizzying array of arbitrary reasons such as having an open space exposed to too much sun, despite local controls banning overshadowing on the very same open space.²⁹

Opposition to new social housing development is first and foremost driven by discriminatory views of incumbent residents—particularly those from wealthier backgrounds. Researchers attempted to quantify this by measuring the effect

that the announcement of public housing builds had on house prices in Canberra. They found that house prices in wealthier neighbourhoods dropped by 6% when new public housing was located nearby, representing a \$44,000 penalty.³⁰

Short-term localised backlash should not be prioritised above the needs of the broader community. Legislators and regulators need to recognise that most complaints cease once a building is actually completed. For instance, a 2013 AHURI study looked at attitudes toward new affordable housing builds before and after construction. Interview-surveys of residents showed that the large majority of people who expressed concern during the planning and consultation phase reported no actual impact of the new housing on their lives.³¹ In other words, their fears about the new affordable housing development failed to materialise.

Objections to new housing are often rooted in fear of change. In light of a strong need for social housing, the Abundant Housing Network believes that non-market projects should be treated like other pieces of essential infrastructure, and be exempt from third-party appeals Australia-wide.

²⁸ Cook et al (2012), [Resident third party objections and appeals against planning applications: implications for higher density and social housing](#), Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

²⁹ [Greater Canberra](#), 10 March 2023

³⁰ Hasan et al (2025), [Placing Public Housing: Announcement Effects of New Builds in More and Less Expensive Neighbourhoods](#), Economic Record, Volume 101, Issue 334

³¹ Davison et al (2013), [Understanding and addressing community opposition to affordable housing development](#), Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute



3.1 | Planning constraints affect community and public housing as well

There is a well trodden myth that urban planning does not put a handbrake on community and public housing builds. This mistake is rooted in the assumption that urban planning is about ensuring good outcomes—but this simply isn't the case. Urban planning regulation is only capable of restricting outcomes; it cannot enable them.

We can see this quickly become a theme when you investigate why social housing programs are delayed across the country:

1. Victoria's Big Housing Build — the state's flagship social housing program — faced significant delays rolling out the program. When the [Auditor General](#) looked into why the delays happened one of the main culprits was noted to be "town planning issues".
2. Victoria's Social Housing Growth Fund's [funding criteria](#) included assessing "the likelihood of the planned development receiving council planning approval" alongside other matters such as if it helps reduce Victoria's social housing waitlist.
3. The Albanese Government's flagship housing policy — the Housing Australia Future Fund — has faced a slower than expected roll out. One of the noted reasons for why only 700 homes would be built in the first year of its operation: slow planning approvals.³²

³² Lucas Baird, [Big super's cold feet stall Labor's \\$10b low-cost housing plan](#), Australian Financial Review, 15 June, 2025

Moreover, urban planning plays a role in why Governments privatise the delivery of social housing projects. When housing researchers investigated how the private sector participates in the delivery of social housing, they found the following (emphasis added):

Participants advised that risks should be allocated to the party that is best positioned to be able to manage them most effectively and cost efficiently. For example, some policy participants **see developers as being better placed to manage the risk of planning approval**, and reported that government is considering accepting a lower return in the form of less social and affordable housing where the developer takes the planning risk.³³

This by no means is a comprehensive explanation on why Governments have privatised the provision of public housing, but is clearly a contributing factor and one that can and should be easily addressed.

There is strong evidence that when we relax planning controls, social housing, not just private, construction increases substantially. Greenaway-McGrevy (2025) finds that the Auckland upzoning resulted in a tripling of state-built housing production.³⁴

³³ Benedict et al (2022), [Private sector involvement in social and affordable housing](#), Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

³⁴ Ryan Greenaway-McGrevy (2025), [Zoning reform and state-developed housing in Auckland](#), New Zealand Economic Papers, Volume 59, Issue 3

We recommend that the following reforms be implemented:

Recommendations

- A. Future National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness, or any revamped National Housing Accords should include:
 - a. Removing third-party appeals for community and public housing where they currently exist, and
 - b. Granting the relevant Minister powers to approve social housing projects funded by the Commonwealth and/or relevant housing agency, as is the case in Victoria.



Appendix | *The Brick Book* recommendations

The following is extracted from [The Brick Book](#):

1 | Introduce a National Townhouse Accord

Auckland-style upzoning—for all of Australia

- D. Set a nation-wide 'code-assessable' framework for townhouse development, ensuring ample permissible residential density across all urban areas.
- E. Remove local planning restrictions that are less permissive than the National Townhouse Accord framework.
- F. Exempt all developments that comply with the National Townhouse Accord from any state's third party appeal processes.

2 | Fix the National Housing Accord incentives

Pay the states to fix planning bottlenecks and build homes faster

- B. A new tranche of the National Productivity Fund should deliver incentive payments for implementing a number of deliverables such as:
 - a. Upzoning around transit hubs, CBDs, and core town centres.
 - b. Modernising and simplifying planning regulation.

- c. Codifying all residential and mixed-use development with a deemed-to-comply standard.
- d. Providing best-practice frameworks and cost-benefit analysis structures for land-use regulation and decision-making.

3 | Create a federal Targeted Infrastructure Feasibility Fund

A bang-for-buck fund to unlock homes in high-productivity areas

- A. Create a Commonwealth-funded targeted apartment feasibility program, building on existing initiatives in Western Australia.
- B. Focus government support on covering infrastructure connection fees (e.g. water, wastewater, electricity) for infill apartment developments.
- C. Prioritise projects that are shovel-ready to maximise efficiency and reduce the risk of program misuse.



4 | Introduce a national occupational licensing regime

Empower tradespeople to build where they are needed most

- A. Re-establish the National Occupational Licensing Authority with a mandate to focus on the construction sector and for the implemented scheme to be cost-positive or neutral for state/territory governments.
- B. Expand the National Productivity Fund's scope and funding to include national occupational licensing to incentivise state and territory involvement with a national scheme.

5 | Boost Commonwealth Rent Assistance

Bring payments up to a baseline—and ensure they stay there

- A. Raise the maximum rate of Rent Assistance by 50% for singles and 40% for couples.
- B. Index Rent Assistance to the cheapest 25% of rentals in capital cities in perpetuity.

6 | Create better incentives for public, community, and youth housing

Provide more homes for those who need them most

- A. Enable public housing agencies to claim GST credits
- B. Allow public housing tenants to get Commonwealth Rent Assistance
- C. End the youth penalty by amending CRA criteria to give all social housing tenants the maximum Rent Assistance amount receivable.

