



Association of Consulting Architects
The Business of Architecture

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Attn: Design WA
Western Australian Planning Commission
Gordon Stephenson House
140 Williams Street
Perth WA 6000

Response to Design WA Documents and Policies:

The Association of Consulting Architects (ACA) leads the discussion on business matters in architecture in Australia and is the key body representing architectural employers in Australia. The ACA was founded in 1987 as the national peak body representing the interests of employers in industrial matters. It now addresses the "Business of Architecture" more broadly, with industrial relations as a vital core of ACA activity.

The ACA helps architectural firms navigate the changing world of practice by providing regular advice and information on business and employment matters, by promoting awareness of and discussion about business issues, and by advocating for better business practices and legislative frameworks.

Through this leadership, support and advocacy, the ACA helps to ensure the long-term health and viability of the profession, and thereby supports the important contribution that architecture makes to our cities, environments, communities and cultures.

In Western Australia, the ACA-WA Branch has a membership of over 50 practices, representing more than 800 architects and design professionals. Our members include major national and international firms, and the majority of medium sized practices working in metropolitan Perth.

The ACA WA is pleased to provide a clear evidence based approach to the planning system. Our members are in the 'front-line' of the processes required for our clients to obtain development assessments and approvals, and mediate the responsibilities to our clients (and their commercial interests) and our shared aspirations for better quality design of the built environment.

As a continuing component of our advocacy for high quality and efficient planning processes, we strongly urge you to consider both our member's experiences and our key recommendations. The feedback outlined below has come from a wide cross section of practice types and scales, and it should be made clear that not all members have provided consistent feedback. Wherever possible we have sought to include the range of views and positions within this letter.

Our members are involved in the planning, design and delivery of multi-residential projects across the state and have reviewed the proposed documents and policies with great interest. I am pleased to provide a consolidated response to the Department from our members to the following documents. An appendix with some of the more detailed commentary from members involved heavily in multi residential design is attached.

Our feedback on the documents are noted below.

State Planning Policy 7 – Design of the Built Environment:

The ACA has previously advocated strongly for the delivery of a State Planning Policy (SPP) on Design. Our members believe that the quality of the built environment is critical to the ongoing success of our cities and towns, and creates both a need and demand for quality, well trained design professionals.



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A key objective of the SPP should be greater uniformity and consistency across local authority and redevelopment authority jurisdictions on the criteria and objectives of design quality, to enable proponents and designers to develop equitable design responses across the State. The current fragmented planning system, with most local Planning Schemes out of date, or with considerable amendments, results in a poor response to the orderly planning, and quality of design across our city and suburbs.

Given the vast range of both age and breadth of many local planning schemes, and the wide array of differing design quality policies, frameworks and guidelines, any move by the state to both simplify, streamline and strengthen the design process is welcomed.

The ACA supports the four core Objectives and three key Measures of Design Principles, Design Review and Design Skills outlined in SPP 7. We endorse and support the introduction of SPP7 into the State's Planning system.

Apartment Design: Vol. 2 SPP 7.3

The ACA strongly supports the introduction of an Apartment Design Guidance Document for Apartments and Mixed Use Developments. Our members who work in the multi residential sector have provided a range of feedback and detailed commentary on much of this guide, and for brevity we have included several of these in the appendices.

In general, members feedback was that the Apartment Design Guide is a positive move forward, and will assist in reducing the impetus for poorly planned and designed apartments. Our members understood that the Objectives of any control could be met through Design Criteria or Design Guidance, but expressed concern that local councils may (in the absence of a DRP) resort to using the Design Criteria as a fall back metric assessment, thereby limiting design innovation.

Clearly for the Apartment Design Guide to work at its full potential, projects submitted under this framework must be reviewed through a DRP process.

Overall the Apartment Design Guide is well laid out, easy to read and clear in its intent and execution. Several the controls were noted by members as being of concern in delivering innovative housing, affordable apartments, or projects on smaller scaled site, with lower levels of urban built form adjacent.

These include:

Plot Ratio Provisions are considered to be too low in certain urban areas – a PR of 3.0 may should be considered a minimum in certain areas such as high amenity, inner ring suburbs, or areas with excellent public transport networks.

Tree Retention: The ACA is not aware of any precedent in planning documentation in Australia that enforces the proposed “five-year rule”, and this focuses the tree retention strategy in size, as opposed to other factors such as canopy type, shade or soil effect. The ACA is cautious in its support of this control, but acknowledges the benefits to the urban ecosystem of maintenance of tree canopy.

Deep Root Zone percentage areas are considerably higher than the NSW SEPP65 requirements (12% instead of 7%) this may have a significant effect on smaller to medium scaled development projects, and should be carefully reviewed.

There was a general concern that some of the controls (namely ventilation, setback and separation) could make sites less viable, or drive the base costs of apartments higher, due to a reduction in yield to meet development controls.



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Cross ventilation requirements could make certain smaller scaled sites difficult to deliver at maximum yield, or within height restrictions. Members noted on smaller scaled development, this requirement could be difficult to achieve efficiently and that DRP's are generally not capable of detailed analysis of cross ventilation alternative solutions.

Building separation distances were generally seen as too large (refer to Hillam Architects full submission in appendices) although some members noted that several Landcorp Design Guidelines have been using the SEPP 65 criteria (upon which this is based) successfully for some time now.

Consistent plot ratios were noted as possibly compromising the delivery for diverse and varied streetscapes.

There was some confusion as to how the Figure 4.4.a (p94) would apply if the unit had a balcony extension of considerable depth, versus an apartment with no balcony but a deeper floor plate. Both could achieve similar light levels, with only one being acceptable under Design Criteria.

Clarity is sought on how the Sustainability Checklist is intended to operate. At present, some of the controls are poorly worded ("consider robust materials") to enable appropriate assessment against the Objectives. Given the ongoing and ever changing role of sustainability measures (both in the NCC, and through other mechanisms) this Checklist could become quickly outdated, or difficult to implement.

Overall ACA welcomes the Apartment Design Guide, and expects that the implementation process of such a policy will have a frequent and short to medium term review cycle, with an opportunity for further industry engagement and feedback.

Design Skills

The ACA strongly supports Option 1 with a threshold approach similar to that enforced in New South Wales.

The quality of multi-residential buildings in New South Wales is noted by the ACA, with relevance to the SEPP65 requirements and minimum threshold standards requiring registered Architects.

The ACA acknowledges the particular skills, experience and ongoing training registered Architects have compared to other building design professionals. Of interest to this issue for consumers is the requirement for Professional Indemnity Insurances to be held by Registered Architects in practice. Although not specifically noted in the Design Skills discussion paper, this protection to consumers and community is another key element of security of the registration environment.

Option 2 is considered to provide too many areas of possible confusion in the development, maintenance and assessment of performance criteria for different design professionals and is not supported.

Some members did note that a hybrid model of 1 and 2 may be an option, with the ability for building designers to apply for accreditation to allow for the design of projects above the threshold noted. The ACA believes this approach could be of some benefit in assisting the "anti-competitive" concerns of the State, with the ability of highly qualified, experienced and trained Building Designers with demonstrated design quality and track record to be able to design projects in a similar manner to registered architects.

This would need to be reviewed in a periodic way, in much the same manner as architectural registration is an annual and ongoing commitment to professional development, training and design skill development.

Option 3 is not supported by the ACA. This option does not provide for certainty in outcome, nor protection for the broader community in regards to appropriately trained and qualified designers delivering the built environment.

As a key measure of SPP7, Design Skills should insist upon an accreditation process that is annually reviewed, with professional development and professional indemnity insurances for all projects above a certain thresh-



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old. Only registered Architects are capable and committed to this process in Western Australia.

Design Review Guide:

The ACA has previously written to the Minister for Planning in relation to our membership survey on Design review panels prior to the launch of the Design review discussion paper. Our covering letter to this survey report is included again in the appendices.

We received considerable member feedback on the Design Review Panel survey, and much of this feedback was repeated during this review process. Importantly we note that ACA members overwhelmingly support the use of Design Review Panels with the provision of consistent advice, well trained and expert panel members and consistent timelines for each jurisdiction.

Our members support the role of Design Review Panels on all projects contemplated by the Apartment Design Guide, along with strategic and key town centre sites.

There appears some confusion about the possibility of local DRPs being able to set differing weightings for each criteria, and the ACA believes that there should be a standardized approach to criteria, or a clear set of guiding principles to assist DRPs in setting weighted criteria if required.

Many of our members would support a mandatory Design Review Panel assessment at Building Permit to ensure integrity of the design process through the development of the design, and to minimise the increasing challenges of practices being engaged for design services only, to have the project transferred to another practice for documentation and delivery. This can often lead to a reduction in quality of the final project, or simply result in design intent being diluted.

Several members also noted that there are an increasing number of parties/ review processes/ presentations required on major projects, with some of the time spent responding being ironically at the expense of time spent developing better design responses, (exacerbated by fee bidding/ low fee environment)

- **Membership Expertise and Appointment:**

The ACA supports a range of professionals comprising the Panel, including architects, landscape architects and urban designers. Training and clear guidelines about process, protocol and planning frameworks is essential for all panel members.

The ACA supports the inclusion of industry expertise on DRPs ensuring that panel members have current and active relationship with the design and delivery of projects in a contemporary marketplace.

It may be required from time to time that a local DRP requests a specialist member to support the DRP in assessment of particular projects, or of strategic sites.

The ACA also has concerns of the short to medium term implication of all local jurisdictions establishing DRPs and the challenge of ensuring enough appropriately qualified and expert members are available. Already our members report that similar panel members across multiple DRPs can create challenges for probity and diversity of opinion/expertise when managing multiple development applications simultaneously. Consideration should be given to the introduction of DRPs across all local authorities in a staged and timely manner.

- **Funding of the DRP.**

The ACA supports a 'Proponent Funded' model of Design review. The ACA believes this mechanism will ensure design quality and design review is a paramount consideration of clients when selecting an Archi-



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tect, especially if the 'proponent pays' model is utilised.

Determining an equitable funding system across all jurisdictions is thus critically important. Panel member fees should be set at reasonable market rates to ensure and attract the most experienced and expert design professionals onto DRPs.

- Support for Design Review Panels in Local Authorities

Overwhelming support for quality and standardized framework and terms of reference for Design Review Panels. There was considerable feedback that existing Design Review Panels operated inconsistently across jurisdictions, and sometimes within a single DRP decisions would vary depending upon panel composition and the influence of the Chair.

- Design review Panels: Observers.

The ACA supports the CABE approach to Design review in the open and transparent review of projects with public attendance possible at the discretion of the chair. Key to this is to ensure that a calm and orderly process is maintained, and that the public 'gallery' is clearly briefed, but the opportunities for community engagement in design review is significant.

We would also recommend the role of observers from design professions, who wish to submit an EOI for DRP membership to be allowed to observe to build up skills and experience in the Design review process. Commercial in Confidence issues aside, the ACA believes this openness to design review process will be of great benefit to both local authorities, their communities and the design/development teams submitting proposals.

Given the release of the principles in SPP7 a suggestion from one major practice was the development of supporting documentation to provide to DRPs with questions provided in alignment to SPP7. This series of standardized questions could offer a greater level of clarity and consistency for both panel members and architects.

An example of this is the CABE "Successful School design - questions to ask" document. The last point of this guide has criteria called "A successful whole" which seeks to review a project holistically, perhaps the most complex design assessment of all, measured against the principles of "delight, timelessness and appropriateness"

As a continuing component of our advocacy for high quality and efficient planning processes, we strongly urge you to consider both our member's experiences and our key recommendations. The ACA WA would be pleased to maintain ongoing dialogue with the Department of Planning as the work of "Design WAn" continues. If there is anything else you would like to discuss with me, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time,

Yours Sincerely

Kieran Wong RAIA
ACA WA President

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