



Association of Consulting Architects
The Business of Architecture

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Hon. Donna Faragher MLC
Minister for Planning; Disability Services
7th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

27th September 2016

Re: Association of Consulting Architects, WA Branch
Member Survey on Development Assessment Panels and Design Review Panels

Dear Minister,

This letter and attached Survey report outlines the Association of Consulting Architects, WA Branch (ACA WA) position and key recommendations on the role and terms of reference for Development Assessment Panels (DAP's) and Design Advisory Committees (hereafter noted as "Design Review Panels" or "DRP's" in line with Department of Planning nomenclature)

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 over 800 architects and design professionals. Our members include major national and international firms, and the majority of medium sized practices working in metropolitan Perth.

2016 Member Survey on DAP and DRP's

In August 2016 the ACA WA conducted a detailed member survey on their experiences with DAP's and DRP's. The survey was responded to by over 30 firms, with multiple responses from firms at a senior director level. Practice scales ranged from 5 to 150+ staff firms (majority in 6-30 staff range) with sectors across multi-residential, education, commercial, health, infrastructure, retail, industrial, heritage and public architecture. A detailed report of this survey is attached, but key findings and recommendations are listed below:

Development Assessment Panels (DAP)

Key Findings:

- Overwhelming support for the DAP process over the previous system of Local Authority applications, with majority believing the outcomes are better for their clients than previous system.
- Strong support for administrative reforms to streamline the process including the ability for minor amendments to be dealt with expeditiously.
- Strong support for the ability for all project to "opt-in" to the DAP process regardless of value. This would



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assist in streamlining certain sectors such as industrial and educational which may have had a delegated approval pathway previously. It would also provide clear feedback on local authority performance with the ability for applicants to opt-in (or out) of local authority approvals process.

- A majority of firms have had none or slight improvements in processing times for Development applications through the DAP process compared to the previous system. This may be as a result of prolongations often experienced with existing Design Review Panel processes. Concerns were raised over the time taken for RAR to be completed (often in excess of statutory timeframes requirements), and the limited opportunity for applicants to prepare responses prior to DAP sitting (as little as one day to prepare responses)

Key Recommendation:

The ACA WA strongly supports the continuation of the Development Assessment Panels in Western Australia, and calls for a streamlining of processes relating to minor amendments, and the ability to “opt-in” or “opt-out” to the DAP process regardless of project value or type.

Design Review Panels (DRP)

Key Findings:

- 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 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.
- Support for Design Review Panels to review proposals for strategic or town centre projects.

Key Recommendation:

The ACA WA considers it essential that all DRP's have both a clear operational framework and uniform terms of reference to ensure consistent advice is provided. A stronger link to the approval process is recognised as an opportunity but only if considered as part of an efficient planning approvals process, and with strong statutory time frames for provision of Design Review advice.

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 ACA WA would be pleased to maintain ongoing dialogue with your office, and the Department of Planning as the work of “Planning Reform for Better Design” continues.

Yours faithfully,

Kieran Wong RAIA
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Design Director, CODA Architecture + Urban Design
Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

Encl: ACA DAP/DAC Member Survey Report 2016