



MEDIA RELEASE

Regional Cities Victoria welcomes more housing for the regions but warns that regional communities will have less say over major developments

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Regional Cities Victoria welcomes the Victorian Government's *Housing Statement*, which seeks to make it quicker and easier for people to build new homes but has warned that the State's take-over of major housing developments worth more than \$15 million must come with a commitment to listen to local communities.

In the statement, the Government predicts that regional Victoria will grow by 500,000 to 2.3 million by 2051. To facilitate that growth, it has set a target of 425,600 new homes for regional Victoria, 152,000 of those to be built over the next decade.

This means that more than 40 houses need to be built in regional Victoria every single day for the next 10 years to meet the demand for new homes.

Chair of Regional Cities Victoria, Cr Andrea Metcalf, said RCV welcomed the announcement of future housing stock for the regions and was particularly pleased to see a commitment to review and rewrite the Planning and Environment Act 1987, which RCV called for in its Planning Paper earlier this year.

"Regional Victoria has been growing faster than predicted over the past five years, a trend exacerbated through the pandemic, and that growth will only continue over the next 10 years," she said.

"We knew that to accommodate that growth, an overhaul of the planning system was desperately needed as it was clearly not benefitting our regional cities, so we applaud the State Government for making it a priority."

While additional housing is welcome in the regions, RCV cautions that the expanded Development Facilitation Program will remove councils as the decision makers for state-significant developments in regional towns worth \$15 million or more, or where they deliver at least 10 per cent affordable housing.

Planning approvals for these developments for these developments will now include a fast-tracked timeframe of four months (currently 12 months).

"It is pleasing to see government's recognition that water connections to new housing developments must happen more quickly. But there is no detail on how this new infrastructure will be paid for – this has been the key issue delaying many housing projects in regional Victoria," Cr Metcalf said.

The Government has committed to a \$400 million package of works in Melbourne's growth corridors for "things like toilets, shelter and lighting upgrades at bus stops and train stations, footpaths and cycling paths". RCV calls on a similar commitment to civic infrastructure in growing regional towns and cities.

RCV is a regional leadership group dedicated to building a sustainable Victoria by providing strategic advice, coordination and advocacy to State and Federal Governments to support policies which enable Victoria's regional centres to grow and develop. Comprising Mayors and CEOs of the 10 largest cities in regional Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga – RCV is focused on achieving real change in regional Victoria through policy development and active implementation of those policies.



“In our submissions to government we acknowledged that the shortage of housing is an urgent issue in the regions. It is critical that land supply is unlocked and enabling infrastructure built, however this cannot come at the expense of regional residents’ ability to have a say in developments,” Cr Metcalf said.

“As the Minister for Planning becomes the decision maker for significant residential developments that include affordable housing, grassroots campaigns to influence development will have fewer avenues to have their voices heard.”

RCV also notes the establishment of a new Short Stay Levy of 7.5 per cent on short stay accommodation platforms. RCV is supportive of the Government’s decision to direct 25 per cent of funds gathered from this levy to regional Victoria. RCV will be closely analysing the flow of these funds to ensure that regional Victoria is not short-changed.

Changes to the planning approvals process and new ‘Deemed to Comply’ residential standards will benefit councils, developers, and residents by fast-tracking the approval process for new homes, and in some instances, removing the need for planning permits entirely.

RCV is concerned that the Victorian Government’s hiring of 90 planners will drain resources from regional councils, causing additional challenges for Regional Councils and delays for applicants in regional Victoria. RCV calls on the State to work with the sector and implement actions to address the acute shortage of statutory planners working in Victoria.

Regional Cities Victoria comprises the 10 largest regional cities in Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.

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