



MEDIA RELEASE

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Still more to do to meet housing demand in regional Victoria

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) has welcomed the Allan Government's announcement that land around some of our major regional centres will be protected for agricultural and industrial uses, but warned that major obstacles remain if Victoria is to meet its targets for new housing.

RCV had hoped *Plan for Victoria* would express a vision that put regional Victoria at the heart of the state's growth strategy and encouraged a greater proportion of the population to live in our regional cities.

"Regional cities see an opportunity to attract the key workers we need in our regional hospitals, schools and local businesses, while easing the pressure on housing in Melbourne at the same time," said Cr Shane Sali, RCV Chair.

RCV's submission to the government called for a broad plan that would drive decisions and investment to attract more people to live and work in regional Victoria; better connect our regional cities to Melbourne and each other; coordinate housing growth with infrastructure investment; protect rural amenity and support resilient, healthy communities; increase housing choice and diversity; and address housing affordability for locals.

Cr Sali said Victoria still needed a concrete and practical plan to address the main problems stopping the fast-tracking of new housing.

"Whether extra housing is in new estates on the edges of our regional cities, or it is units and townhouses being built on the traditional large blocks near the centre of town, these builds often can't happen without government funding for bigger water pipes, larger sewerage plants, new roundabouts or traffic lights, and widening of local roads," Cr Sali said.

"We also need a plan to train the people necessary to expedite decisions. Councils too often get the blame, when the hold up is directly related to a national shortage of planning officers, building surveyors, and civil engineers.

"These critical workers are necessary to ensure new homes are built properly, not built in a flood zone, are able to be insured, and to engineer all of the new pipes, roads and sewerage plants.

"The number of students studying town planning has collapsed – despite housing being one of the top policy issues of our time. There are nowhere near enough graduates to meet demand.

"State and local governments are cannibalising each other as we try to recruit. It's a zero-sum game unless we train more workers," Cr Sali said.

"Without these workers, Victoria cannot build the number of new homes that we need to."



Regional Cities Victoria's submission to Plan for Victoria called for:

- o Amend the Development Facilitation Program guidelines to remove the block that excludes higher-density infill housing projects in regional cities with more than 5 years of greenfield land supply from this fast-track pathway.
- o An arbiter within the Victorian Government to resolve disagreements between water authorities; electricity distributors; CFA; the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action; EPA Victoria; Resources Victoria; and Heritage Victoria who each have a say in planning decisions. Today, councils are left to try to broker these discussions, leading to avoidable delays.
- o Shared strategic and statutory planning work, such as flood studies, to remove duplication and enable the Minister for Planning to more quickly rezone land and approve Precinct Structure Plans.
- o Addressing the critical shortage of planners, building surveyors and engineers must be on the agenda of National Cabinet. Governments should consider short-term financial support to sustain university courses where low enrolments currently make them unviable; scholarships and/or job guarantees; HECS-HELP debt waivers for practitioners who commit to working in the public sector; and skilled migration to fill these jobs in the short-term.
- o The bigger water pipes, sewerage plants, new roundabouts or traffic lights and widening of local roads that is often required before a new estate can be built or townhouses can be built on the old large blocks near the centre of town.
- o A Victorian Integrated Transport Strategy, to ensure extra local bus services, V/Line frequencies and transport infrastructure are planned for and delivered ahead of, and commensurate with, housing developments and population growth in regional cities.
- o State Government funding for community infrastructure outside of Melbourne, because higher populations place greater demand on council-run facilities and services such as public libraries, community centres, playgrounds, parks and open spaces, and maternal and child health services.
- o Attract skilled and other migrants to live in regional Victoria, assisting with the management of population growth and limiting the detrimental impact on housing availability and affordability in Melbourne's established suburbs.
- o Exempt councils from the Windfall Gains Tax when developing council-owned land for housing.
- o Enforce green wedges and reassess Urban Growth Boundaries based on an 'as at 2051' basis, to manage sprawl and protect biodiversity and land for agricultural and industrial uses. This must factor the impacts of climate change and consider the higher risk of floods and other natural disasters in the decades to come.

Read more [here](#).