![Australian Institute of Architects]

Matters Affecting Regional Australia

Questions on Notice

House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia

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SUBMISSION BY

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PURPOSE

This submission is made by the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to answer supplementary questions on notice following the House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia hearing attended by the Institute on 28 May 2020. The Institute was represented at the hearing by National President Professor Helen Lochhead and Chief Executive Julia Cambage.

INFORMATION

The Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia. It is an independent, national member organisation with around 12,500 members across Australia and overseas.

The Institute exists to advance the interests of members, their professional standards and contemporary practice, and expand and advocate the value of architects and architecture to the sustainable growth of our communities, economy and culture.

The Institute actively works to maintain and improve the quality of our built environment by promoting better, responsible and environmental design.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   Introduction

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia, representing around 12,500 members. The Institute works to improve our built environment by promoting quality, responsible, sustainable design. Architecture influences all aspects of the built environment and brings together the arts, environmental awareness, sciences and technology. By combining creative design with technical knowledge, architects create the physical environment in which people live, which in turn, influences quality of life. Through its members, the Institute plays a major role in shaping Australia's future.

The Institute continues to welcome the opportunity to contribute to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia inquiry into regional Australia. The Institute was represented by National President Professor Helen Lochhead and Chief Executive Julia Cambage at a Committee Hearing on 28 May 2020.

After the hearing two supplementary questions on notice were provided by the Committee to the Institute:

1. Could you tell the Committee what the geographic distribution of architects and related design professionals is when comparing regional and urban areas?
2. Are there any issues faced in design professionals potentially being physically distant from their projects and the communities they service?

The following discussion will address these questions in turn.

2.   Snapshot of the Architectural Profession in Australia

2.1   Australia's architecture sector: registered architects

Architects are a key component of Australia's $100 billion built environment sector with architectural services in Australia in 2017-18 having revenue of $6.1 billion and generating $1.1 billion of profit.

Architect Registration Boards regulate the practice of architecture in their respective state/territory. All Australian architects are registered by one or more state or territory architect board. For individuals to apply for registration as an architect, they must usually:
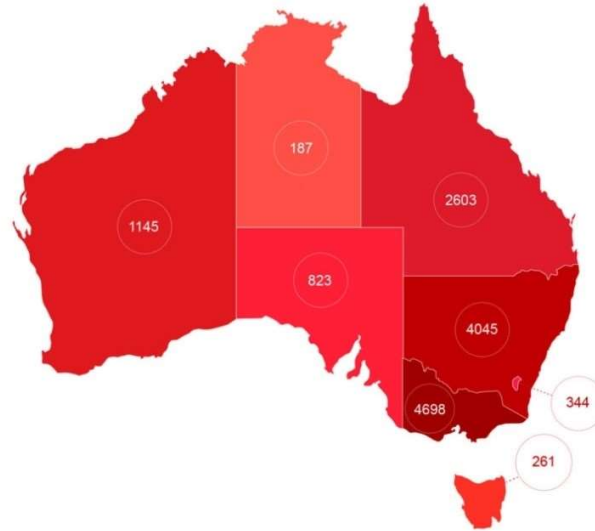
- complete a five year/ten semester higher education program leading to an accredited Master of Architecture qualification or accepted equivalent;

- obtain at least two years' experience working in the industry; and

- pass a three-part competency assessment process – the Architectural Practice Examination – including completion of a logbook, a written paper and an interview with current practitioners.

The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia snapshot report – [Profile of the Architectural Profession in Australia](#) –provides a range of data on the number of registered architects and the architectural profession in Australia. The following discussion draws heavily from this report.

In December 2017, there were approximately 11,800 registered practising architects in Australia. This is based on total registrations of 13,567 discounted to account for registrations in multiple jurisdictions.

This figure equates to 0.5 architects per 1000 people, similar to the United Kingdom and France, higher than the United States (0.3 per 1000 people) and New Zealand (0.4 per 1000 people), but lower than Germany (1.6 per 1000 people) and Italy (2.4 per 1000 people):

Architects in Australia

Number of Practising Architects in Australia (01/12/2019)   A A C A

2.2   Australia's architecture sector: ABS census data

According to the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, of the 16,991 people who nominated their occupation as 'architect':

- 62 percent were based in Sydney or Melbourne

- 10 percent were based outside capital cities

- 31 percent were women (up from 28 per cent in 2011)

- 80 percent were working full time

- 52 percent worked more than a 40 hour week

- 34 percent were business owners or sole traders (down from 37 per cent)

- 54 percent of those working full-time earned above the average income of $78,000s (but only 39 per cent of women working full time).

The number of self-identified architects in the Census at 16,991 is larger than the number of registered practising architects at around 11,800 due to the likelihood that the Census figure includes a number of non-practising architects and people working in architectural practices who are not themselves registered, but working under the supervision of a registered architect.

2.3   Australia's architecture sector: members of the Australian Institute of Architects
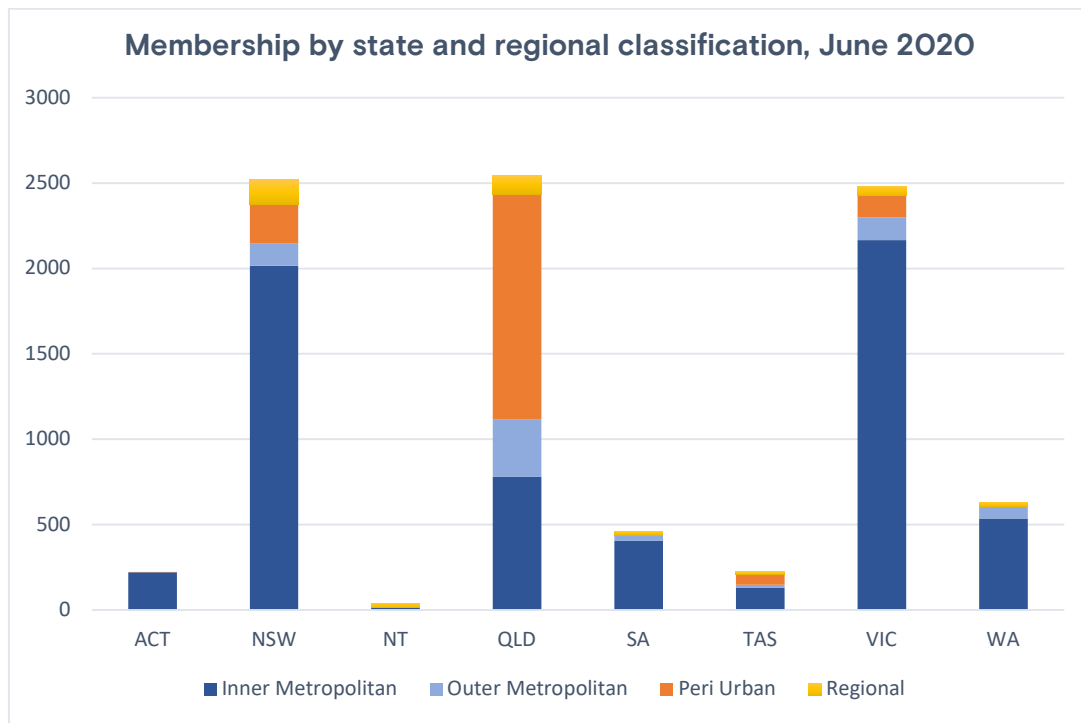
As noted above the Institute is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia, representing 12,500 members, not all of whom are registered architects. Memberships include student, individual, corporate and affiliates and provides access to a professional community and a range of other benefits including:
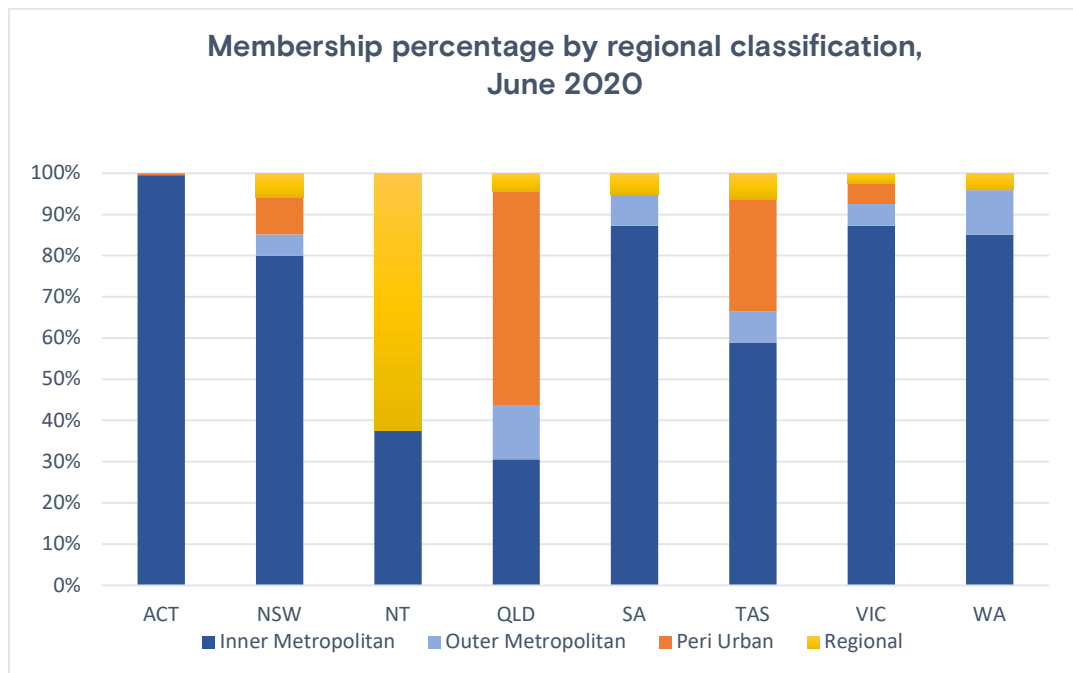
- continuing education programs,

- law and practice advice including Acumen advisory notes,

- bulletins and publications, including Architecture Australia magazine,

- sustainable design advice through the Environment Design Guide,

- an ongoing program of awards, networking opportunities and speaker events; and

- engagement with university architecture schools, including by participating in accreditation visits.

The Institute membership database has identified that there are over 8500 practicing architects and built design professionals Australia wide and that these are located in the following regions:

- Inner metropolitan
- Outer metropolitan
- Peri urban (located around the fringe of metropolitan regions) and
- Regional/rural

The majority of members, over 80 percent, are located in metropolitan (inner and outer) areas. Only 4.7 percent of the Institute membership, or just over 400 individuals, live and work in regional and rural areas, as captured by the membership database:

Membership by state and regional classification, June 2020

Membership percentage by regional classification, June 2020

2.5 Architectural education and the path to registration

According to enrolment data held by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Australia's architecture schools produced around 1300 graduates from accredited Masters programs in 2017, which is consistent with preceding years. In total, architecture schools enrolled over 10,000 equivalent full time students in bachelor and masters level architectural study in 2017.

The proportion of overseas students in Masters programs generally sits around 34 percent, compared with 30 percent for all program levels. This reflects the fact that a proportion of Masters students complete their Bachelor qualification in their country of origin before undertaking masters study in Australia.

Only a proportion of those who study architecture go on to be architects. The number of people completing a second stage (two year Master of Architecture degree) is approximately two thirds of the number of completions for the first stage three year bachelor degree. In turn, the number of people completing the Architectural Practice Examination on the basis of an Australian qualification, and subsequently becoming a registered architect, was around half the number of people completing a Master of Architecture degree.

There is a wide variety of alternative career paths for people with architectural qualifications, from generalist management and policy positions, through work in architectural firms not as a registered architect, to work in other fields of design (e.g. landscape architecture, interior design, urban planning and industrial design).

It is also important to note that, as Australia uses a 'title registration' model, people can work in architect-like roles indefinitely – including rising to senior management and even partnership positions in firms – without there being an requirement to undertake registration. At the same time, registration conveys key benefits in terms of public and peer recognition and is particularly important for those wanting to start their own practice.

In 2016-17, 667 Australian trained and 52 overseas trained candidates successfully completed the three-part competency assessment process – the Architectural Practice Examination – including completion of a logbook, a written paper and an interview with current practitioners, making them eligible to become registered by the relevant State or Territory Registration Board.

As noted above there are low numbers of architects in rural areas of Australia and with few existing architectural businesses, it is hard for graduates wanting to live in the regions to get a start, prepare for registration, and have access to a broader community of professional support. For example, in 2017 there was only one registered architect in the entire of NSW west of Wagga Wagga. Partly this reflects a difficulty experienced by all professions in attracting people to rural practice and sustaining a critical mass of work to keep them there. There are also no architectural schools outside of major centres, and according to data held by the Australian Government Department of Education, fewer than 10 percent of Master of Architecture students come from regional areas.

3. Managing the tyranny of distance

3.1 The business of architecture

Architectural practice in Australia is highly dispersed. There are a handful of large firms employing hundreds of people each, but none with more than two per cent of the market for architectural services. Although the proportion of work undertaken by large practices has been growing, a large majority of architects in Australia still work in small practices. A handful of architects also work in State and Local Government agencies.

According to IBISWorld, there are around 13,000 enterprises in the architectural sector employing around 40,000 people, but only 1.6 per cent employ 20 or more people. Around half of all enterprises are sole traders. The range of roles undertaken by practising architects is wide and can include:

- Pre-design, scoping and feasibility work
- Building design
- Documentation
- Procurement of building services
- Contract administration
- Oversight of building works
- Post-occupancy evaluation
- Other design services (e.g. interior design, urban design, landscape architecture)
- Consultancy work, including project management and strategic planning
- Training and education (e.g. adjunct and sessional university teaching)
- Service to the profession (e.g. boards, committees and juries)

IBISWorld estimates that core pre-design, design and documentation work (items 1-3 above) typically constitute around two thirds of work undertaken by architectural businesses. An estimated 5 per cent of single residential homes in Australia are architect designed, while architects are involved in the majority of public buildings, commercial spaces and multi-unit developments.

Architects are expected to be knowledgeable about the history of architecture on the continent, as well as current expectations about liveable and environmentally appropriate development, including management of risks from natural disasters such as bushfires and cyclones. Architects work with building contractors, engineers, lawyers, accountants, tradespeople, plant operators, drivers and many other occupations to deliver finished building projects to clients.

In addition to their core design function, the architect traditionally plays a 'trusted adviser' role with clients that can cover the whole of a project lifecycle from feasibility to tendering for contractors to contract management. To prepare for this role, architects study a wide range of subjects including design, technology, history and philosophy of architecture, communications, environmental sustainability and professional practice.

3.2 Working remotely

Architects must be both talented designers and skilled communicators, able to balance client wishes, aesthetic values, planning and environment requirements, building codes, good design principles and construction costs in the delivery of a project. These skills are clearly important for the delivery of any project, but particularly key when attempting to deliver a project remotely, and in a regional or remote area.

As noted, around half of all architectural firms are sole traders and the majority of firms employ less than 20 employees. This can be a challenge when seeking to participate in remote work. With a smaller resource base, many firms may struggle to integrate the level of site interaction required to successfully deliver a remote regional project.

From a best-endeavours perspective, architects agree that design quality and effectiveness relies in part on an in real life experience and understanding of site and prevailing conditions, including impacts on local environment (whether built or natural) and including heritage and other stakeholder impacts.

However, anecdotal evidence from the Institute membership indicates that while it is always best to work with locals and to establish a meaningful and face to face relationship between clients/communities and the architectural team, especially at the outset and during construction, distance is not a major barrier to working in more remote locations during the design and documentation phases.

With good digital access a large component of the design and documentation phases can done virtually, and meetings can be held by video conferencing where appropriate. There may be projects that also require specialist expertise not readily available in the regions so collaborations with others can also be facilitated in this way.

As the data on the profession outlines above, communities in regional Australia do not have access to the same architecture services as someone living in a metropolitan area. Technology—from video communication to app-based design services—have enabled architects and designers to reduce the number of face-to-face meetings and time-intensive walk-throughs with clients in their hometowns.

This has the potential to reduce costs for the client but to also increase access to architectural services in regional areas. Being comfortable working remotely has in turn allowed architectural firms to take on out-of-town projects more easily, too.