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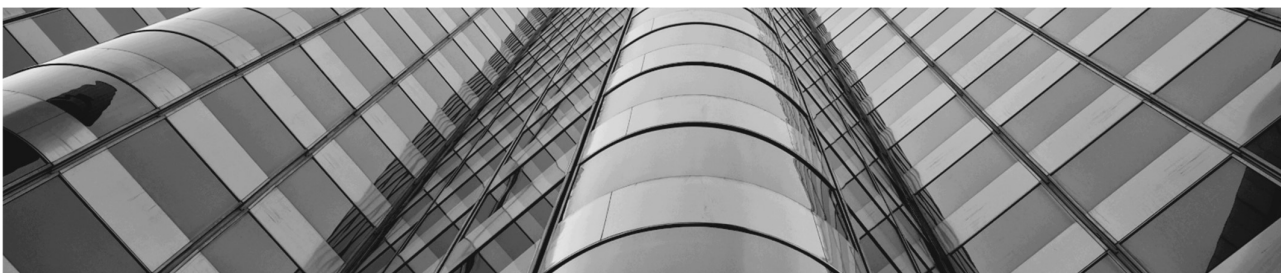
# Matters Affecting Regional Australia

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Submission to House of Representatives Select Committee  
on Regional Australia

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## SUBMISSION BY

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## PURPOSE

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This submission is made by the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) to provide comments on matters affecting Regional Australia.

## INFORMATION

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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 12,000 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.

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Well designed buildings and places can be transformative. This is true in both urban and regional settings. Good design is also contextual, in that it responds to the surrounding environment and contributes to the existing quality and future character of a place. It is inclusive and caters for diversity, creating places for everyone to use and enjoy, ensuring equitable access to deliver a strong social connection and sense of shared responsibility.

Architects have a key role to play when governments seek to deliver place-based infrastructure and community services. Equally they can transform private spaces. Architecture is not just for major cities and not just for the elite and the wealthy, it is something that can contribute meaningfully to the lives of people in all corners of Australia.

Opportunities for architects and associated design professionals to participate and contribute strategically from the early planning stages is the key to ensuring that projects provide creative and welcoming solutions that maintain and reinforce local character and community.

Australian architects have a worldwide reputation for creative and innovative design leadership and Australia is known for producing contemporary and breakthrough architecture. We have a well-recognised, high quality and liveable built environment and to maintain this into the future to support a burgeoning population in both urban and regional centres, we must create buildings and public spaces that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and culturally rich.

Governments and industry in Australia must deliver places for communities that are built and connected in a way that enhances liveability, wellbeing, sustainability and productivity. While our cities have traditionally been the generators of our national wealth, rural and regional communities have a greater future role to play. To support this transformation, they must be well-connected to urban centres and their services. This requires the integration of planning, transport, design and implementation.

There is a large body of Australian and international research that shows good design and architecture leads to improved liveability. In turn, well designed, liveable places become centres of social and economic activity creating sustainable, long-term returns on initial investments.

Almost all Australians (97 per cent) believe that cities and towns are better to live in when public buildings and public spaces are well designed.<sup>1</sup> Governments are therefore central to delivering on community expectations of how the built environment will support Australian society.

Each regional community has its own opportunities and challenges to face, and not all will be on a growth pathway. Architects have contributed to a wide range of projects that have proven that both small and large investments in civic space and public amenities, driven by good design can revitalise regional well being, sense of community and foster increased local investment.

### Recommendations

- Implement processes to support regions to play a leading role in developing their own growth strategies.
- Realign existing government processes and programs to enable local decision making and the delivery of integrated services to communities.
- An Australian Government Architect should be appointed as an expert advisor to support an integrated approach to built environment policy and practice across all tiers of government and to engage meaningfully with industry to advance public outcomes.

- The Australian Government Architect should lead the development of a National Architecture Policy.
- Involve architects and design professionals early in project planning. This can drive highly successful outcomes from regional renewal projects.
- Local councils must prioritise detailed planning and positioning to successfully engage with Australian governments. This will enable opportunities to leverage existing and future grant programs to benefit the community and revitalise civic space.
- Local council must partner with architects to deliver strong levels of community engagement and high quality public and community spaces.
- Community engagement must be central components in the design and delivery of civic space. This will ensure completed projects celebrate people and place, instil identity and community pride and bring the community together in new and enlivening ways.
- Allow regional communities to determine for themselves what success looks like and to drive change.
- Enable a strong partnership between the future users of government and community services and the architectural design team. This will significantly enhance the quality of the services local government is able to provide to citizens.
- Support early community consultation to ensure the inclusion of design elements that foster broad based support for projects and generate opportunities for fundraising.
- All Australian governments must facilitate the involvement of Australian architects in competitive design processes for publicly funded projects.
- Procurement options for significant community developments should include the use of design competitions when relevant.
- Design competitions can result in a wide range of diverse design ideas and can be a useful way to engage and empower the community in decision making processes.
- Design competitions must be undertaken appropriately to ensure that government is an informed client and that the opportunities afforded by a competition approach to the provision of civic space can be fully realised.
- Design decisions for projects should be considered with sustainability, functionality and longevity as major themes.
- Design solutions should reflect the future needs of the region and community members and attempt to maximise wellbeing, amenity and foster healthy placemaking.
- The design and construction of community services and civic spaces can support regional development, particularly when the design closely aligns with existing regional construction and design competencies and efficiencies.
- Regional projects should be delivered wherever possible as a collaboration between local and regionally placed design and construction professionals.
- The use of Master Planning can heighten the cumulative impacts of multiple projects coming together. A Master Plan can also act as a powerful catalyst and aggregator of design and construction capability for the delivery of better community services and civic spaces.

- Master Planning can be used to coordinate the effective connection of regional areas to urban centres and their services.
- Master planning can enhance opportunities for aggregated procurement bringing additional skills and capabilities into regional areas.
- Even small projects can benefit from architectural expertise and community engagement throughout the design phase.
- No project scope is too small (or large) for good design to make a significant contribution to ensure excellent outcomes.
- The Australian Government should establish a national plan towards zero carbon buildings by 2040 that can be supported and led where appropriate by state and local government.
- Strong mandatory minimum standards must be set for the energy performance of buildings and appliances and energy efficiency programs must be adapted for existing and new buildings.
- Incentives for the private sector to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the built environment must be considered and implemented.
- Government at all levels must ensure that they only purchase architectural design services that deliver the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the built environment.
- Local Indigenous people and organisations must be supported to deliver and manage their housing services.
- New, appropriate housing must be invested in and existing homes must be upgraded.
- Government programs must look to support the purpose designed and constructed delivery of diverse and inclusive community housing, like Common Ground.
- Federally owned land must be released in relevant locations. The development sector must become partners to provide new social and affordable housing.
- Clear targets for social and affordable housing must be developed and include more flexible housing types and multi-generational occupancy.

## **1. Introduction**

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is the peak body for the architectural profession in Australia, representing around 12,000 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.

Architects are a key component of Australia's \$100 billion built environment sector and there are around 13,500 architectural businesses in Australia with around 40,000 employees. Approximately 25,000 people in the labour force hold architectural qualifications (Bachelor degree or higher) and architectural services in Australia in 2017-18 had revenue of \$6.1 billion and generated \$1.1 billion of profit.<sup>ii</sup>

The Institute welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia inquiry into regional Australia. The comments provided by the Institute relate to the following Terms of Reference:

- B: Examining the contribution and role of regional Australia to our national identity, economy and environment.
- C: Promoting the development of regional centres, cities, towns and districts including promoting master planning of regional communities.
- G: Investigate the development of capital city size regional centres in strategic locations and the benefits this offers regional cities, capital cities, the Australian economy and lifestyle.
- J: Examining the ways urbanisation can be re-directed to achieve more balanced regional development.
- K: Identifying the infrastructure requirements for reliable and affordable health, education, transport, telecommunications, clean energy, water and waste in a new settlement of reasonable size, located away from existing infrastructure.
- I: Consider other measures to support the ongoing growth and sustainability of regional Australia.

## **2. Empowering regions**

The Institute recognises that governments at all levels have diminishing control over the issues that are shaping Australian society, including in regional areas. Factors at play include the impacts of the global economy, technological change, demographic pressure and social change, natural disasters, climate change and the use and availability of natural resources.

In this environment government has a key role to play in setting the right political and policy environment to support Australians to adapt and thrive. All governments must work together to deliver high quality health, education, community and infrastructure services, and there exists a particular challenge to maximise outcomes and ensure the effective and efficient delivery of services in regional Australia. If not done well, there will be ongoing negative impacts on regional wellbeing. The capacity of regional Australia to keep pace with the accelerating speed of change and respond flexibly to challenges will also be significantly undermined.

The overlap between tiers of government and their roles, responsibilities and related activities needs to be co-ordinated as efficiently and effectively as possible. Although in the past regional issues have often been viewed primarily as a local or state responsibility, each tier has a role to play.

Given the diversity of pressure points and ongoing volatility at play, regional Australia itself is best placed to identify, understand and work to solve issues. Empowering regional Australia to be dynamic and resilient in the face of change, will allow regions to thrive, despite uncertainty, and will be the most effective way to develop successful pathways forward. Top down decision making and generic program delivery regardless of location will also need a careful rethink and realignment.

Regions will need to play a leading role in developing their own growth strategies. Government at all levels must work to realign existing processes to enable local decision making and the delivery of integrated services to communities. The pathway forward is a collaboration between regions, their citizens and the local and state governments in partnership with the Australian Government.

#### **Recommendation**

- Implement processes to support regions to play a leading role in developing their own growth strategies.
- Realign existing government processes and programs to enable local decision making and the delivery of integrated services to communities.

### **3. Government plays a pivotal role in ensuring architects can deliver good design**

Architects have a key and unique role to play in supporting regional Australia to solve ongoing and emerging issues, and local government, in particular, has a pivotal role to play.

Many Australian state and a territories have appointed a “Government Architect” to provide leadership and strategic advice to government in relation to architecture and urban design.

The vast majority of the built environment that Australian citizens experience has required local government involvement. As a result, each “Office of the Government Architect” offers a range of guides and frameworks to assist. This is because:

*from parks and gardens, to buildings and streets, our urban spaces provide enormous opportunity for creating public value. Well designed buildings, streets and recreational places often influence our decisions to live or establish business in a particular area. Design quality affects our health, well-being, prosperity and the way we engage with our communities. Good design creates economically, socially and environmentally sustainable places that serve our needs and enrich our cultural identity.<sup>iii</sup>*

There is a large body of Australian and international research that shows good design and architecture leads to improved liveability. In turn, well designed, liveable places become centres of social and economic activity creating sustainable, long-term returns on initial investments.

The *Principals of Good Design* as captured by the South Australian Office for Design and Architecture<sup>iv</sup> also have universal utility and applicability to regional planning and development:

- Good design is **contextual** because it responds to the surrounding environment, and contributes to the existing quality and future charter of a place.
- Good design is **inclusive** and universal because it creates places for everyone to use and enjoy, by optimising social opportunity and equitable access.



- Good design is **durable** because it creates buildings and places that are fit-for-purpose, adaptable and long-lasting.
- Good design adds **value** by creating desirable places that promote community and local investment, as well as enhancing social and cultural value.
- Good design **performs** well because it realises the project potential for the benefit of all users and the broader community.
- Good design is **sustainable** because it is environmentally responsible and supports long-term economic productivity, health and wellbeing.

The Office of the Victorian Government Architect has identified that councils at the local government level influence the quality of our public realm through “the infrastructure they commission and design, the projects they initiate and support and their planning approval processes.”<sup>v</sup>

Local government is a significant purchaser of design consultancy services and outcomes depend as much on the skills of the client as the quality of architectural consultants. A level of in-house expertise is required for the effective selection and management of consultants.

Local planning processes must therefore be positioned to support good design at all levels. Decision making by council needs to be informed by expertise in urban, landscape and architectural design. When a council undertakes design and construction work in-house for even the smallest projects, for example foot path replacement and kerb renewal, this has both an immediate and cumulative impact on the quality of the built environment and how citizens interact with it.

The Institute recognises that government resources must be extended across a range of competing demands, however good design takes into account whole-of-life costs and contributes to real value for money. Well designed buildings and places can be transformative. This is true in both urban and regional settings. Good design considers not only the aesthetic of a building but also the surrounding environment and landscape. It is inclusive and caters for diversity, creating places for everyone to use and enjoy, ensuring equitable access and social opportunity.<sup>vi</sup>

Building Australia’s capacity to deliver liveable regional cities and communities requires governments to support Australian skills and expertise, ensuring a strong and vibrant built environment industry. All Australian governments have a responsibility to support the development and growth of high value knowledge based built environment jobs within Australia.

Australia has 0.5 architects per 1000 people, which is similar to the United Kingdom and France, higher than the United State (0.3 per 1000) but lower than Germany (1.6 per 100) and Italy (2.4 per 1000).<sup>vii</sup> Architectural tourism in Australia is valued at around \$824 million.<sup>viii</sup> For example, The Sydney Opera House is estimated to contribute \$640 million in yearly expenditure by visitors to Sydney.<sup>ix</sup> While data from the 2014 Tasmanian Tourism Survey shows that 16 per cent of visitors to the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) stated that visiting MONA was their primary reason for travelling to Tasmania.

Recognising that the Australian architectural profession provides innovative design leadership both locally and internationally, the Institute recommends that the Australian Government partner with state and local government to:

- support the retention of a strong Australian architectural skills base.
- commit to good design to maximise economic benefits and create a rich legacy of civic buildings and urban spaces via government procurement.
- ensure fair and open procurement practices that enable local architects an equitable opportunity to compete.

- recognise the high calibre of Australian architects and involve them in competitive design processes for publicly funded projects.

Australian architects have a worldwide reputation for creative and innovative design leadership and Australia is known for producing contemporary and breakthrough architecture. We have a well-recognised, high quality and liveable built environment and to maintain this into the future to support a burgeoning population in both urban and regional centres, we must create buildings and public spaces that are environmentally, economically, socially sustainable and culturally rich.

Governments and industry in Australia must deliver places for communities that are built and connected in a way that enhances liveability, wellbeing, sustainability and productivity. While our cities have traditionally been the generators of our national wealth rural and regional communities have a greater future role to play. To support this transformation, they must be well-connected to urban centres and their services. This requires the integration of planning, transport, design and implementation.

Almost all Australians (97 per cent) believe that cities and towns are better to live in when public buildings and public spaces are well designed.\* Governments are therefore central to delivering on community expectations of how the built environment will support Australian society.

Government structures must support the provision of independent, expert advice across portfolio areas on urban design and infrastructure and to allow for the coordination and collaboration of all tiers of government, the private sector, researchers, and the wider community.

To ensure this occurs the Institute recommends that the Australian Government appoint a Australian Government Architect, as an expert advisor, to support an integrated approach to built environment policy and practice across all tiers of government and to engage meaningfully with industry to advance public outcomes. Once appointed the Australian Government Architect should lead the development of a National Architecture Policy that recognises and extends architecture's contribution to the delivery of great, sustainable places for all Australians, regardless of location.

There is also a role for the Australian Government to provide incentives and flexible financial arrangements for state and local governments. These should be linked to specific design and sustainability outcomes, for example through the City Deals program led by the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure. Any new program funding should also be linked to ensuring architectural expertise is harnessed to ensure outcomes that enhance sustainability and contribute to a local sense of place.

#### **Recommendations**

- An Australian Government Architect should be appointed as an expert advisor to support an integrated approach to built environment policy and practice across all tiers of government and to engage meaningfully with industry to advance public outcomes.
- The Australian Government Architect should lead the development of a National Architecture Policy.

#### **4. When combined, good planning and design can deliver exceptional community outcomes**

Many regional communities have grown in population and become more urban. Generally, this increase in population has resulted in better provision and access to services and greater industry

diversity leading to a more stable economic environment. At the same time, other regional areas have seen a contraction of population, leading to reduced economic activity and a rise in social disadvantage. Many of the enduring arguments around regional development are focused on population growth and diversifying the economy, allowing the provision of services to become easier for governments and easier to access for citizens.

However, each regional community has its own opportunities and challenges to face, and not all will be on a growth pathway. Architects have contributed to a wide range of projects that have proven that smaller levels of investment in civic space and public amenities, driven by good design can revitalise regional well being, sense of community and foster increased local investment.

As state governments provide the planning framework for local government and manage the supply of many core services such as education, health, infrastructure and energy, they therefore have the ability to impact the quality, cost, quantity and location of infrastructure and services.

Local government supports the investment scene for business, applies planning legislation and provides community facilities. They play a vital role in supporting bids for funds from the Australian Government and state and territory counterparts. They also work to ensure that the interpretation and application of associated laws facilitates local construction and supports and enables local investment.

Opportunities for architects and associated design professionals to participate and contribute from the early planning stages is the key to ensuring that projects provide creative and welcoming solutions that maintain and reinforce local character and community.

The Maitland Riverlink Building<sup>xi</sup>, designed by architecture firm CHROFI with McGregor Coxall and constructed by Graph Building, is a public project that has supported a revitalisation of the central business precinct (CBD), extending it beyond the main street to the river. The project received the 2019 Institute of Architects National Architecture Walter Burley Griffin Award for Urban Design, Award for Public Architecture and the NSW Chapter Architecture Awards Sulman Medal for Public Architecture, Award for Urban Design and Blacket Prize.

In 2009 the “Central Maitland Structure Plan”<sup>xii</sup> developed by the Maitland City Council detailed a vision for the future of Maitland that improved the connections between the Hunter River and the CBD. Following a series of devastating floods, the town centre had turned its back on the river, disconnecting it from commercial and community activities. The river was no longer seen as an asset, but as a threat to the community.

The extensive planning undertaken to develop the Central Maitland Structure Plan positioned the council to successfully obtain funding of \$9.92 million from the NSW Government’s Restart NSW Resources for Regions programme<sup>xiii</sup> to undertake the construction of the Riverlink Building, as well as upgrades to the Bourke Street Link and the Riverwalk.

The Riverlink Project acts as a marker to other regional councils without the larger budgets of urban counterparts. It demonstrates that great architecture which enhances community life and revitalises community spaces while leaving a lasting legacy for current and future generations can be within economic reach for most towns.

The project also shows that with proper planning and positioning, local councils can successfully gear up to engage successfully with all Australian governments and leverage existing and future grant programs to benefit the community and revitalise civic space. Maitland Council started the process with the development of the Central Maitland Structure Plan, the end result

demonstrating that time and effort taken at the planning stages can pay substantial dividends for the community over the longer term.

#### **Recommendations**

- Involve architects and design professionals early in project planning. This can drive highly successful outcomes from regional renewal projects.
- Local councils must prioritise detailed planning and positioning to successfully engage with Australian governments. This will enable opportunities to leverage existing and future grant programs to benefit the community and revitalise civic space.

### **5. Designed spaces bring the community together in new ways**

A partnership between architects and the entities delivering civic space – notably local council – can be harnessed to deliver strong levels of community engagement. The Wellington Shire Council in Victoria engaged architectural firm Francis-Jones Moorhen Thorp (fjmt) to revitalise the historic precinct known as the Port of Sale<sup>xiv</sup> into a multi-use cultural hub to accommodate civic, tourist and community facilities.

Following extensive stakeholder and community consultations undertaken during the development of the design, the local residents have a strong sense of ownership of the newly co-located Public Library, Gippsland Art Gallery, Visitor Centre, Council Chambers, social enterprise café and flexible meeting and workshop spaces. Former disused courtyards have been transformed in expansive atria, with the design creating links to outdoor parks, waterways and bike paths.

The community was fully engaged in all aspects of the project, membership of the library and gallery have increased, new community groups and visitors alike are using the shared spaces and are now exposed to what the gallery and library have to offer in new and exciting ways.

The local economy not only received benefits during the construction process, but also from increased art tourism since the precinct opened in 2018. The Port of Sale project demonstrates that the careful revitalisation of facilities can uplift their value and contribute to better regional spaces.

#### **Recommendation**

- Local council must partner with architects to deliver strong levels of community engagement and high quality public and community spaces.
- Community engagement must be central components in the design and delivery of civic space. This will ensure completed projects celebrate people and place, instil identity and community pride and bring the community together in new and enlivening ways.

### **6. Community ownership of a project can drive investment scale and enhance good design**

Possibly the most important thing is for regional communities to determine for themselves what success looks like, and to drive change.

The Cobram Library and Learning Centre<sup>xv</sup> designed by CohenLeigh Architects is a new extension to the existing Cobram Civic Centre located in the regional town of Cobram on the Murry River in Northern Victoria. The project was shortlisted for the Australian Institute of Architects Victorian

Architecture Awards (2019) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Australian Library Design Awards 2019 (Public).

Prior to 2017 the library was co-located with the local secondary school and as a result lacked a physical connection to the township. The design brief called for a new community library hub that would be one of the regions premier activity centres, reflecting the communities desire not only for a library, but for new flexible community spaces for arts, senior citizens groups, adult learning and youth spaces.

The project was delivered on a tight budget with design elements and strategies harnessed through community fundraising efforts that were encouraged by early local ownership of the project.

A local community steering committee group was formed, together with the architects CohenLeigh, the Goulburn Valley Library Corporation, and council representatives. CohenLeigh consulted with these community reference groups on a regular basis. An example of the ideas that came out of the consulting process was the parametric ceiling element that 'moves and waves' through the internal library space. This was devised as not only a wayfinding feature element but also as an opportunity for community groups to purchase naming rights for each 'fin'. These design elements were significant in terms of generating fundraising and support for the project.

Without community engagement in the project, the scale and scope of the final building would have been diminished, through lower levels of fundraising. Community engagement in good design and a strong partnership between the future users of the service and architectural expertise has revitalised the greater community of Cobram and significantly enhanced the services local government is able to provide to citizens. The result is a warm and important civic piece of architecture that celebrates community and a sense of space.

#### **Recommendations**

- Allow regional communities to determine for themselves what success looks like and to drive change.
- Enable a strong partnership between the future users of government and community services and the architectural design team. This will significantly enhance the quality of the services local government is able to provide to citizens.
- Support early community consultation to ensure the inclusion of design elements that foster broad based support for projects and generate opportunities for fundraising.

## **7. Procurement of architectural services**

The selection of an architect is a crucial early step in the delivery of a successful built project. Thoughtful and thorough consideration at the early stage of consultant procurement maximises the possibilities for design quality, cost savings, and a productive working relationship between the client and consultant group.

Government agencies and institutions in Australia have adopted various methods of quality-based selection (as opposed to cost-based selection) to commission architectural services, including Expressions of Interest (EOI), Request for Tenders (RFT), Request for Proposals (RFP) and Design Competitions. Each of these methods has merit and provides agencies with options to suit the burgeoning type of projects commissioned in the public sector.

Over time, however, the variance and complexity of these methods has increased, as has the onus on architectural practices to respond with more detail and take on greater risks associated with changing procurement models. Many government and institutional clients are aware of the difficulties for consultants in the architectural services procurement process and taking steps to address them. Policy frameworks of all public agencies are constantly undergoing refinement.

The Institute has identified procurement of architectural services as a key policy priority and has recently undertaken research to investigate best practice Expression of Interest (EOI) and Request for Tender (RFT) methods in public sector and educational institutions that commission architectural services. In the context of ongoing change, the research looked to explore the perceptions and experiences of clients and architects of procurement practices, with a view to improving the procurement process. The research included an analysis of industry and government policy documents, interviews with government and institutional clients, and an online survey of Institute members.

The research enabled the Institute to develop a set of Guidelines for EOI and RFT for architectural services<sup>xvi</sup> endorsed by the Office of the Victorian Government Architect. The objective of the guidelines is for potential clients to review their own EOI and RFT methods and documents and align them with best practice to enable an effective and efficient process that maximises the potential for high quality built outcomes and reduces bidding and assessment costs for all.

Without clear and concise tender processes that provide equal opportunity, a fair distribution of project risk and a focus on quality design, clients can squander precious time and public resources in the procurement of architectural services, and undermine the potential quality of their built project. This is true for projects delivered anywhere in Australia.

The Institute is continuing to engage with government at all levels while encouraging members to share the guidelines with potential clients so that together we can promote better procurement practices for all.

#### **8. Design competitions can be leveraged to deliver more for regional communities**

Design Competitions are often used to aid the procurement process for significant community developments. This approach can result in a wide range of diverse design ideas and can be a useful way to engage and empower the community in decision making processes.

The East Pilbara Arts Centre<sup>xvii</sup> a new gallery for the Indigenous art collective Martumili Artists, an organisation representing self-employed artists spread across seven Aboriginal communities in the eastern Pilbara, is a critical cultural facility for the small community of Newman in Western Australia, 1200 kilometres north of Perth.

In 2011 an architectural competition was organized by the University of Western Australia (UWA), in collaboration with the Shire of East Pilbara, Martumili Artists and BHP Billiton. The competition attracted 16 entries which were judged by a panel of Martu artists and design experts and the winning design by Officer Woods Architects was a unanimous choice.

The design brief, to replace the existing gallery, had been well formulated through an extensive consultation process. Notably it wasn't derived from a standard; instead it was aspirational and allowed creativity to respond to a set of principles of what needed to be achieved, rather than a prescriptive or formulaic scope. This allowed the design to be developed from first principles and it was not constrained by pre-conceived notions of what the building might be.

Now completed and occupied, the new building demonstrates the ingenuity of the design response. Officer Woods Architects achieved this by radically scaling up the building in the form of a large commercial shed covering most of the given site. This allowed the rest of the functional brief to be brought inside with the main gallery and administration building, artist/caretaker accommodation, storage rooms and artists' working area now housed and climatically controlled by the outer shell. The space is intimate enough for artists to create in, but large enough to host whole-of-community events.

The Centre was awarded the prestigious Sir Zelman Cowen award for Public Architecture at the Australian Institute of Architects 2017 National Architecture Awards. The jury described the project as a "masterstroke building-within-a-building concept" that "enabled "a group of remote Indigenous artists to make a substantial and tangible contribution to a town centre, thereby exemplifying reconciliation in this country." The jury praised Officer Woods Architects for demonstrating the contribution architecture can make to the greater public good.

Using a design competition to help procure the building was an important part of its successful outcome – it allowed Officer Woods Architects to respond to the incredibly important cultural and physical setting in unconventional ways. To support the appropriate use of design competitions the Institute has produced a set of guidelines to assist purchasers of architectural services to realise the benefits of architectural design competitions.<sup>xviii</sup>

While competitions can generate excellent outcomes for clients and a quality-built legacy the process must be robust. The guidelines therefore seek to ensure that government and industry are more informed clients and that the opportunities afforded by a competition approach can be fully realised.

Covering a range of issues from different types of competitions to formulating a brief and jury selection, the guidelines support government, and non-government entities, to make key decisions about what competition process to use depending on size, objectives, time constraints and the design flexibility of the project.

Architectural design competitions help to open up the field of participants, generating public interest in the project and supporting innovation. The independence of a well-run competition can mitigate political risk, unify disparate stakeholders, resolve conflict and realise the full potential of a project.

There is also scope for design competition objectives and expression of interest guidelines to support the use of local capability and procurement aggregation. When local government looks to coordinate planning and development to support local capability, additional local economic benefits can be leveraged beyond just an increase in built environment amenity and access to community facilities.

#### **Recommendations**

- All Australian governments must facilitate the involvement of Australian architects in competitive design processes for publicly funded projects.
- Procurement options for significant community developments should include the use of design competitions when relevant.
- Design competitions can result in a wide range of diverse design ideas and can be a useful way to engage and empower the community in decision making processes.

- Design competitions must be undertaken appropriately to ensure that government is an informed client and that the opportunities afforded by a competition approach to the provision of civic space can be fully realised.

## **9. Good design and healthy placemaking**

There is a growing body of evidence that good design can result in places that deliver healthier lives, help prevent avoidable disease, promote healing and increase wellbeing. This is sometimes called “healthy placemaking”<sup>xix</sup>.

One challenge is that built environment practitioners, including architects cannot always demonstrate the impact of their projects, or design proposals on health and wellbeing. Often economic value and delivering outcomes for a price override other concerns. For example, the ongoing maintenance around the longer term provision of communal space – consider an internal landscaped courtyard, verses a paved one – can lead to design decisions being driven by cost, rather than weighing up the various options including opportunities to maximise wellbeing and amenity.

One area where the power of wellbeing, a healing environment and healthy placemaking has been long considered and is now routinely incorporated into the design approach is in the construction of health and hospital precincts. For example, the Bendigo Hospital Project is the largest regional hospital development in Victoria. The \$AUD 630 million project delivers world-class healthcare facilities and aims to provide a welcoming, holistic and positive environment that promotes wellbeing.<sup>xx</sup>

Designed by Bates Smart<sup>xxi</sup> in collaboration with Silver Thomas Hanley, and with Oculus responsible for the urban design and landscape architectural design the project was awarded the prestigious Sir Zelman Cowen award for Public Architecture at the Australian Institute of Architects 2018 Nation Architecture Awards.

The hospital is an inclusive environment that incorporates community facilities such as an indigenous garden, childcare centre and 128 serviced apartments. Importantly the hospital reduces the need for patients to travel to Melbourne and creates an essential asset for the future healthcare needs of a growing regional population.

It is a significant civic building that integrates a holistic framework considering the needs of patients, staff and the community and offers a tranquil and caring environment through the integration of architecture, landscaping, health planning and evidence-based design.

Landscaped courtyards provide amenity for mental health patients, while gardens for cancer patients provide space for quiet reflection. An extensive green roof on the mental health precinct provides patients with a green outlook.

The project was delivered as a public-private-partnership led by LendLease. Design decisions for the project were considered with sustainability, functionality and longevity as major themes. Design solutions reflected the future needs of the region and the success of the public-private-partnership has provided exceptional value for money.

The Bendigo Hospital development is considered a key milestone for central Victoria and will service the region well into the future. The incorporation of healthy placemaking to promote healing and increase wellbeing into the design brief has reaped dividends across all aspects of the project and is a key element of the success of the finished health precinct.



## Recommendations

- Design decisions for projects should be considered with sustainability, functionality and longevity as major themes.
- Design solutions should reflect the future needs of the region and community members and attempt to maximise wellbeing, amenity and foster healthy placemaking.

### 10. Uplifting regional capability through master planning and supporting procurement aggregation

Regionally based architects and members of the Institute have noted that there are dramatic economic benefits whenever architecturally designed projects are constructed in a regional place. Identifiable and measurable benefits include the cash injection to the local community during the construction period; the subsequent activity including business, employment and tourism generated on such sites; the upskilling of the local workplace enabling confidence to propose, bid for and deliver equivalent following projects; general community pride and confidence-building and flow-on demands on infrastructure which then in turn lead to additional upgrades.

This has been demonstrably true in relation to the Bendigo Hospital Project. The City of Greater Bendigo commissioned Master Plans for the coordination and implementation of the hospital precinct and neighbouring areas to manage the development that preceded and continues. Master Planning aims at creating a long term strategic plan or vision for a neighbourhood and a community and in this case the lift to the local economy and the continued positive impact on the region has been directed and enhanced by the Master Plan and includes:

- Monash University and Latrobe University investing heavily in teaching facilities adjacent to the hospital campus and Bendigo TAFE building a new trade skills education facilities.
- Long term visioning work is ongoing for an intra-urban public transport system to connect the hospital precinct with central Bendigo and Bendigo station with its upgraded V/Line services to Melbourne.
- Local confidence and capability heightened during the Hospital project enabled a large number of successful additional bids for work in the development of Ulumbarra Theatre, the Bendigo Art Gallery extension, Kangaroo Flat aquatic centre and the Bendigo Airport runway extension which now supports daily services to Sydney.
- All of these significant projects have wherever possible, incorporated the skills of local companies and trades people during the construction process. More broadly there is now an apparent acceptance of innovative architecture in the city and with that a continuing roll-out of exciting work, underpinned by good architectural design.

In short, investment in one project triggered many more projects. While most of these were unrelated to health services, combined with the hospital precinct, they have enabled Bendigo to become as a regional 'capital' serving a population of over 250,000 in North West Victoria and into Riverina NSW.

Master Planning can also be a catalyst for the use of "aggregated procurement" which can help to streamline the procurement process by combining efforts in sourcing suppliers, negotiating contracts and purchasing goods. Aggregated procurement is in essence a centralised purchasing model where two or more organisations (or a third party on behalf of those organisations) join together to combine their needs and leverage negotiating strength. Master Planning can assist this

process by identifying the range of stakeholders and services that will be provided to a community and available to purchase goods and services.

Aggregated procurement increases the negotiating power of each individual purchaser to allow them access to better prices, services and technologies that they might not otherwise be able to obtain alone. It also increases the efficiency of sourcing products. Aggregated procurement can be a powerful process to bring additional skills and capabilities into regional areas. Where a contract with one small local Council or business may not be of interest, an aggregated procurement process may deliver a wider range of options to regional entities looking to purchase goods and services.

For example, Local Government Procurement Pty Ltd (LGP)<sup>xxii</sup> is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Local Government NSW and provides a fully-integrated procurement service to councils and associated organisations in NSW. The aim is to enable aggregated and bulk supply arrangements that are a cost-effective solution to supply councils with the goods and services they need.

It should be noted however that aggregated purchasing can have limitations. For example, if a local government association sets up a prequalification panel for architectural services and then closes it for 12 months or more. This diminishes opportunities to source expertise from professionals outside the panel process and limits their work opportunities.

#### **Recommendations**

- The design and construction of community services and civic spaces can support regional development, particularly when the design closely aligns with existing regional construction and design competencies and efficiencies.
- Regional projects should be delivered wherever possible as a collaboration between local and regionally placed design and construction professionals.
- The use of Master Planning can heighten the cumulative impacts of multiple projects coming together. A Master Plan can also act as a powerful catalyst and aggregator of design and construction capability for the delivery of better community services and civic spaces.
- Master Planning can be used to coordinate the effective connection of regional areas to urban centres and their services.
- Master planning can enhance opportunities for aggregated procurement bringing additional skills and capabilities into regional areas.

#### **11. Good design responds to the physical environment and community needs, creating a sense of place**

Just like the design and construction of the East Pilbara Arts Centre responded innovatively to the harsh desert environment of Newman Western Australia, the Sorrento Visitor Centre<sup>xxiii</sup> in Mornington Peninsula Shire led by Workshop Architecture has been designed to last for as long as possible in an aggressive coastal environment while providing as much utility as it can within a limited footprint.

Located at the intersection of the Sorrento main street, Ocean Beach Road and the smaller George St, it forms part of a council led streetscape renewal project that extends along the town centre, and replaces an existing, aging public toilet facility and information kiosk. Winner of the Victorian 2018 Institute of Architects Kevin Borland Award for Small Project Architecture, the

project highlights how exceptional design can elevate even the most mundane of public spaces – even new public Exeloo toilet amenities.

The completed Visitor Centre is a combination of urban design, sculpture and architecture. With safety a priority, visual transparency from the street to the amenities at the rear is gained by reducing the building to an almost sculptural collection of elements; roof, counter, pre-fab toilets and pink-glass.

Great effort was made through design, documentation and construction to execute the transparency required to enhance public safety and amenity. Detail quality went far beyond what is normally seen in small public buildings. This combined with high quality material suitable for a coastal location and an automated toilet system, did increase the upfront cost of the building.

However, there was significant commitment shown to the original design by the client and investment made created an award winning a long term civic asset for residents and visitors alike. Even at a small scale well designed buildings that respond to their context create a sense of place and add to local character.

#### **Recommendations**

- Even small projects can benefit from architectural expertise and community engagement throughout the design phase.
- No project scope is too small (or large) for good design to make a significant contribution to ensure excellent outcomes.

## **12. The built environment has a significant role to play in addressing climate change and enhancing the resilience of regional communities**

Australia must enhance the resilience of our built environment to extreme weather events and predicted climate change impacts. Design plays a critical role in integrating systems, such as water and waste management, natural ecologies, culture, human health and well-being. Growth in our urban and rural cities means increasing pressures on our natural environment and the crucial ecosystem services they provide (e.g. clean air, cooler urban areas).

Climate change is expected to exacerbate these pressures. We must create a sustainable built environment that fosters connectivity and integrates essential resources and functions to mitigate against adverse impacts from climate change. As a signatory to the Paris Climate Change Agreement, Australia has committed to reaching net zero emissions by around 2050. Australia's built environment contributes almost a quarter of Australia's emissions, offering a significant opportunity for emissions reduction.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Setting strong energy standards for new buildings between now and 2050 could reduce energy bills by up to \$27 billion, cut energy network costs by up to \$12.6 billion and deliver at least 78 million tonnes of cumulative emissions savings.<sup>xxv</sup>

Improved energy performance of buildings reduces stress on the electricity network, offers bill savings, supports a least-cost pathway to a zero-carbon built environment, and improves health and resilience outcomes for households and businesses. This is true for households in urban, regional and rural locations.

### Recommendations

- The Australian Government should establish a national plan towards zero carbon buildings by 2040 that can be supported and led where appropriate by state and local government.
- Strong mandatory minimum standards must be set for the energy performance of buildings and appliances and energy efficiency programs must be adapted for existing and new buildings.
- Incentives for the private sector to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the built environment must be considered and implemented.
- Government at all levels must ensure that they only purchase architectural design services that deliver the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the built environment.

### 13. Housing a diverse and inclusive community

Australia is faced with a major housing problem in terms of availability, affordability and accessibility. There is a major shortfall of social housing available for those on low incomes who need housing, especially those who have recently experienced homelessness, family violence or have other special needs. Affordability affects our overall productivity as a nation and the ability of all citizens to participate effectively in the economy.

Accessibility is also another major issue for Australia's ageing population and people with a disability. These pressures are present equally in both urban and regional centres, however longer distances and the ability to access services becomes a more significant hurdle to overcome in regional Australia.

For regional Australia the requirement for culturally appropriate housing for Indigenous communities is keenly important to creating healthier, more stable, secure and socially cohesive communities. All Australian governments will need to coordinate approaches to support housing diversity because:

- Australia will need to build more than one million social and affordable houses over the next 20 years to combat the housing affordability crisis, many of these will need to be located in regional Australia.
- By 2036, Australia will need 728,600 social housing properties for those on social security, and 295,000 affordable rental homes for low income earners.
- Mortgage stress, rental stress and homelessness are all on the rise. Private renters in the lowest two income quartiles spend 29-47 percent of their disposable income on housing.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Again, good design and the involvement of architects from the early planning stages can have a positive impact on project outcomes and in the purpose designed and constructed delivery of diverse and inclusive community housing.

A project that could be replicated in regional Australia is the Common Ground Canberra (CGC)<sup>xxvii</sup> project by Collins Caddaye Architecture.<sup>xxviii</sup> CGC was established to provide long term, high quality housing options for people on low incomes; and as a solution for people who experience chronic homelessness. It does this through purpose-built accommodation which mixes people who

have experienced homelessness (20 units) with people who are on low incomes who require affordable housing (20 units).

CGC strives to create a strong, vibrant community through a commitment to social inclusion that is provided in a safe and supportive, diverse, harmonious and inclusive community. CGC is an assertive intervention model which addresses homelessness by providing safe, secure accommodation and associated support services for marginalised people. CGC is an investment in finding permanent solutions to end homelessness – it is a community asset with the aim of providing improved outcomes for people who are homeless using on-site support

Common Ground started in New York, USA and is now a template used throughout the world including in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart.

#### **Recommendations**

- Local Indigenous people and organisations must be supported to deliver and manage their housing services.
- New, appropriate housing must be invested in and existing homes must be upgraded.
- Government programs must look to support the purpose designed and constructed delivery of diverse and inclusive community housing, like Common Ground.
- Federally owned land must be released in relevant locations. The development sector must become partners to provide new social and affordable housing.
- Clear targets for social and affordable housing must be developed and include more flexible housing types and multi-generational occupancy.

### Good Design Case Studies

Annually the Australian Institute of Architects celebrates excellence in architecture through the Australian Architecture National Awards, and associated Chapter and regional awards processes.

The awards seek to highlight the creativity, integrity and accomplishments of Australian architects and to celebrate a wide range of outcomes including projects that deliver worthy outcomes with little means, projects that demonstrate the value of architecture through public benefit and projects with clear commitments to social and environmental sustainability. The awards celebrate the significant contributions that these projects have made to both urban and regional Australia.

Each year many of the shortlisted, and awarded projects are located outside a capital city, highlighting the breadth of great architecture across Australia. A small sample of these projects are outlined below and include:

- Maitland Riverlink Building, Maitland NSW 2320
- Port of Sale, Sale VIC 3850
- Cobram Library and Learning Centre, Cobram VIC 3644
- East Pilbara Arts Centre, Newman WA 6753
- Bendigo Hospital Project, Bendigo, VIC 3550
- Sorrento Visitor Centre, Sorrento VIC 3943
- Common Ground Canberra, Gungahlin ACT 2912

Each project demonstrates that good design can empower and revitalise communities, regardless of their size or the size of the project.



## Maitland Riverlink Building – CHROFI with McGregor Coxall

***Project address: 396 – 400 High Street, Maitland, NSW, 2320***

Maitland Riverlink is a public project that crystallises new value for the regional centre Maitland, both in terms of its identity and its assets. The project has supported a revitalisation of the central business precinct, extending it beyond the main street to the river. The space acts as a kind of ‘public living room’ for the community, reactivating an unused part of town and drawing locals back to the river that is a fundamental part of Maitland’s heritage, whilst bringing tourists and visitors to the town.



## Port of Sale: Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp (fmjt)

***Project address: 70 Foster St Sale VIC 3850***

Welling Shire Council engaged fmjt to revitalise the historic precinct known as the Port of Sale into a multi-use cultural hub. The project encompassed the addition and refurbishment of the existing shire offices and gallery building to provide shared space and revitalise links to the local Port, in a country town that previously lacked both a civic and cultural focus.

Extensive consultation enabled the design team to understand patterns of use of the existing civic and cultural facilities, and to use the design to encourage broader use of the library, gallery, meeting places and shared space. Local artists were also consulted to enable the creation of a permanent gallery space for their works. The increased gallery spaces have also allowed for diverse exhibitions, with the gallery now able to offer itself as a viable competitor amongst other regional galleries. The result has been a sensitive transformation that has provided for a dignified public realm, flexible and durable to enable future generations to benefit.





## Cobram Library and Learning Centre: Cohen Leigh Architects

***Project address: 14 Punt Rd, Cobram VIC 3644***

Located on the site of the existing Civic Centre, the project encompasses library, community and technology spaces. Conscious of its place and identity, it embodies and celebrates the idea of a 'local' library, with a unique design and language that is evocative of popular Murray landscapes.

Everyone involved in the project wanted the design to be 'distinctively local' in its appearance and to ensure that it would physically 'connect' with the township. These were key factors in generating both community ownership of the project and this also helped to drive fundraising initiatives.

Throughout the life of the project there was continuous engagement and dialogue between the architectural team and the community which is evident in small and large design gestures across the project. Combining to create a warm and important civic piece of architecture that celebrates community and a sense of place.



## East Pilbara Arts Centre: Officer Woods Architects

***Project address: Newman Drive, Newman WA 6753***

The East Pilbara Arts Centre (EPAC) is a contemporary gallery and working space for Martumili Artists, an organisation representing self-employed artists spread across seven Aboriginal communities in the eastern Pilbara. EPAC is a purpose-built creative facility for cultural expression, education, public exhibitions and sales of work.

This is a transformational building for Newman; a powerful demonstration of commitment to social, cultural and creative excellence and inclusion. The design exceeds the scale of the initial brief, allowing for future flexibility and anticipating further uses.

EPAC is a large-span steel framed shed with thermally de-coupled insulated gallery/support areas deep inside. The shed is both an efficient construction and a durable, hard-working casing around the gentle activities and accommodation related to the making, celebration and support of art and artists.





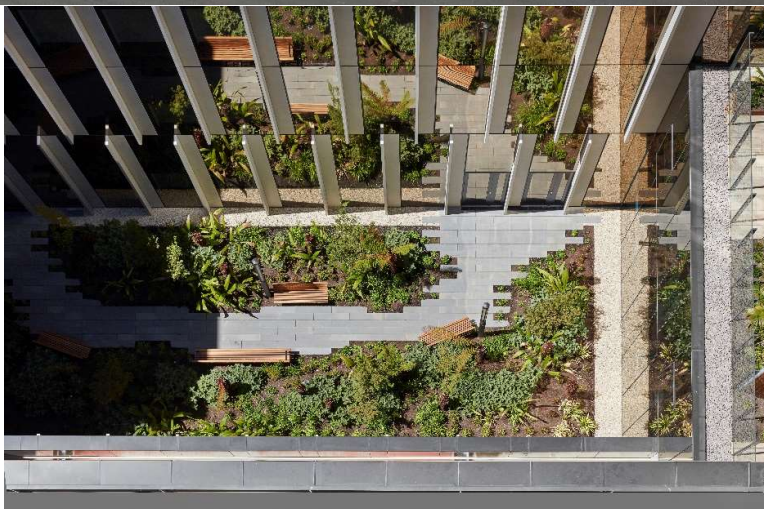
## **Bendigo Hospital Project: Silver Thomas Hanley with Bates Smart**

***Project address: 100 Barnard Street, Bendigo, VIC 3550***

The new Bendigo Hospital is the largest regional hospital development in Victoria. The \$AUD 630 million Victorian Government project delivers world-class healthcare facilities and aims to provide a welcoming, holistic and positive environment that promotes wellbeing.

The hospital is a significant civic building that integrates a holistic framework considering the needs of patients, staff and the community and offering a tranquil and caring environment through the integration of architecture, landscaping, health planning and evidence-based design.

The power of nature in a healing environment has been well studied and is an integral part of the design approach. Landscaped courtyards, green roofs, indigenous gardens, and views towards the landscape characterise the design.



## Sorrento Visitor Centre: Workshop Architecture

*Project address: Corner Ocean Beach Road and George Street, Sorrento, VIC 3943*

The completed Sorrento Visitor Centre is a combination of urban design, sculpture and architecture. As part of the renewal of Sorrento's main street, the project was to provide an automated toilet facility and information kiosk and create new spaces for the public life of the town. With safety a priority, visual transparency from the street to the amenities at the rear is gained by reducing the building to an almost sculptural collection of elements; roof, counter, pre-fab toilets and pink-glass. The surfaces and shapes of this assembly use imagery from Sorrento's history and coastal environment as both applied graphic and formal language. This brings qualities of civic architecture to a small footprint of few things.





## Common Ground Canberra: Collins Caddaye Architecture

*Project address: 130 The Valley Avenue, Gungahlin ACT 2912*

Common Ground Canberra (CGC) has been established to provide long term, high quality housing options for people on low incomes; and as a solution for people who experience chronic homelessness. It does this through purpose-built accommodation which mixes people who have experienced homelessness (20 units) with people who are on low incomes who require affordable housing (20 units).

CGC strives to create a strong, vibrant community through a commitment to social inclusion that is provided in a safe and supportive, diverse, harmonious and inclusive community. CGC is an assertive intervention model which addresses homelessness by providing safe, secure accommodation and associated support services for marginalised people.

Common Ground started in New York, USA and is now a template used throughout the world including in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart. Common Ground aims to create a community with good role models for all residents, rather than a concentrated pocket of disadvantage.



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- <sup>i</sup> *The Benefit of Design*, prepared for Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, Galaxy Research, June 2015
- <sup>ii</sup> *Industry Profile: Architectural Services in Australia*, IBISWorld April 2019
- <sup>iii</sup> *Good Design and Local Government*, The Office of the Victorian Architect, [www.ovga.vic.gov.au/](http://www.ovga.vic.gov.au/)
- <sup>iv</sup> South Australian Office for Design and Architecture, [www.odasa.sa.gov.au/resources](http://www.odasa.sa.gov.au/resources)
- <sup>v</sup> *Good Design and Local Government*, The Office of the Victorian Architect.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Good Design for Great Neighbourhoods and Places*, Office for Design and Architecture, Government of South Australia.
- <sup>vii</sup> *Industry Profile: The Profession of Architecture in Australia*, AACA, February 2018.
- <sup>viii</sup> *How do you value an Icon?*, The Sydney Opera House Economic, Cultural and Digital Value, Deloitte, 2013
- <sup>x</sup> *The Benefit of Design*, prepared for Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, Galaxy Research, June 2015
- <sup>xi</sup> <http://www.chrofi.com/project/maitland-riverlink>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/my-council/planning-and-reporting/publications-plans-and-strategies/planning-strategies/central-maitland-structure-plan>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/news/final-link-completed-in-the-levee-development>
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://fjmtstudio.com/projects/port-of-sale/>
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://www.cohenleigh.com/projects/cobram-library>
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- <sup>xxi</sup> <https://www.bates-smart.com/bates-smart/projects/sectors/health/bendigo-hospital/>
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- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://paolismith.com.au/portfolio/sorrento-visitor-centre/> [www.workshoparch.com.au/portfolio/sorrento-visitor-centre/](http://www.workshoparch.com.au/portfolio/sorrento-visitor-centre/)
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Built to Perform: An Industry Led Pathway to a Zero Carbon Ready Building Code*. Australian Built Environment Sustainability Council and Climate Works, July 2018
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Built to Perform: An Industry Led Pathway to a Zero Carbon Ready Building Code*.
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- <sup>xxvii</sup> <https://www.commongroundcanberra.org.au/>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> <http://collinscaddaye.com.au/portfolio/common-ground/>