



The Hon. Elise Archer MP

Minister for Justice
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Building and Construction
Minister for the Arts
Minister for Heritage

Level 10, 15 Murray Street
Hobart TAS 7000

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By email to: Minister.Archer@dpac.tas.gov.au, cc: Lara.Reason@dpac.tas.gov.au & Patrick.Clancy@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear Minister Archer,

On behalf of the Tasmanian Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute), thank you for speaking at the 2020 Tasmanian Architecture Awards. We hope you enjoyed the event and thank you for continuing to promote and champion the work of architects in Tasmania.

Thank you for forwarding through the details of the Tasmanian Government's COVID-19 Response – Rebuilding Tasmanian Infrastructure Investment package. We commend the Government for its commitment to the projects announced and welcome this money being spent in the state. The projects announced are all beneficial to the community, and we believe they will benefit the building and construction sector.

We understand that many of the projects included in the funding package were already in the pipeline and have already been awarded to architecture firms. For the firms involved, the certainty that these projects will now be continuing has been cause for relief. However, we do note that without new projects being announced now, not only will architects suffer immediately, but there will be a gap in projects ready for construction in the future. A member from a larger architecture firm in Hobart has informed us that there hasn't been a tender advertised for architectural services on the government website for many months. This is worrying for firms as JobKeeper comes closer to finishing.

We would like to reiterate that the Institute believes that any stimulus should be for the benefit of everyone as equally as it can be. This should include focusing on projects that are spread across the state and that differ in size so that they are suitable for both small, medium and large practitioners across the design and construction process. Architects have the unique design ability to be able to add value to all projects, be this a toilet block or a large-scale health project.

For all projects, in order to ensure a quality-built outcome, it is critical to have thorough client briefing, realistic budgeting and community consultation.

While time is of the essence, it is critical to acknowledge that while design work can be fast-tracked to a degree, it still takes time to design a building properly to ensure the best quality outcome, which results in the process taking at least between four to six months, depending on the size and complexity of the project. Architects can provide cost effective designs, from the layout of the building through to detailing and material selection, and quality for budget that considers not only the built cost, but the usage and maintenance costs of the building (whole-of-life cost) after it has been built. It is important that design is undertaken prior to any construction commencing to ensure that delays don't occur further down the track.

We would also like to highlight that master planning is critical for high-quality outcomes that are well-thought out and provide long-term solutions.

In all projects, large or small, energy efficiency and sustainable design need to be a priority and should focus on the integration of both renewable energy sources and passive and active energy systems. The best energy efficient outcomes are a result of good design. Many people are unable to employ an expert to give them a long lasting, energy efficient home. If these professional fees were tax deductible, there would be an uptake in design services that would result in better living conditions for a larger proportion of the community.

We would also highlight that all projects, whether new or upgrades, need to have a focus on equitable and accessible design.

Housing

The social and affordable housing announcements are welcomed and clearly needed for our state. We would stress that well-designed buildings by architects are imperative for these types of projects to get quality, long-lasting, energy efficient outcomes. It is also critical that these types of projects are integrated to work with existing infrastructure such as public transport, schools and work, and aren't located on the periphery of our cities.

We encourage the Tasmanian Government to expand the HomeBuilder Grant to include home renovations. While we understand that the Commonwealth HomeBuilder Grant caters for both new builds and renovations, when combined with the Tasmanian Government Grant, new builds allow a larger amount of funding for people looking to take these up. Tasmania has a large housing stock, much of which can be reimaged, with the help of a skilled professional (an architect) to provide a home that is suited to the requirements of the occupant, improves the energy efficiency of the building, and is sustainable for cities such as Hobart where there are beginning to be issues relating to urban sprawl.

The timeline associated with the HomeBuilder Grants is unrealistic for many architect-designed projects. A client seeking to engage an architect to design a building will first need to seek to engage an architect and agree on a fee and the scope of works (this would typically take 20-30 days), allow for initial sketch design & design development (at least 20-30 days), get a DA approval (min. 42 days), allow for construction documentation (at least 30-40 days), and get a BA approval. This time-line indicates a

best-case scenario, and there are many aspects of this that could be stretched out because of consultants (who anecdotally seem to still be busy at the moment) and requests from council etc. Historically, Christmas deadlines are often met with disappointment.

Rather than assisting architects, these grants are more suitable for 'off the shelf' homes that are pre-designed and are typically built on the fringes of the city and on flat sites, adding to the urban sprawl. These areas typically aren't supported by adequate facilities, including public transport, schools, amenities or nearby access to employment.

We have heard from Master Builders Tasmania that prior to the stimulus being announced, it was estimated (by speaking to their members) that 800 homes would no longer be built over the 12 months due to the pandemic. They have reported that since the announcement of the stimulus packages, there have been over 1000 inquiries into the Federal and State grants. This has resulted in several builders selling out of house and land packages, and builders reporting that they have been inundated with enquiries and it would be difficult to fit all the work in prior to the deadlines outlined.

This indicates that one section of the construction market – namely the project home builders – is benefitting from the stimulus packages, above and beyond their usual business, however we aren't aware if this benefit is extending to other builders, including bespoke residential builders and commercial builders. We encourage measures that will increase the spread of the benefit of these stimulus packages.

We suggest that an extension to June 30, 2021 would assist in alleviating the problems associated with the time-line, or potentially March 30, 2021, to ensure those who start this process don't miss out. Alternatively, a registration process that allowed those interested to sign up by September 30, 2020 may be a better process. This would allow government to ascertain the potential uptake and associated cost early, while allowing people a few months to assess whether their project is viable.

We also suggest that the extension of the renovation grant to include smaller renovations with a proportionate level of grant support would benefit a wider range of people.

Anecdotally, however, we have heard from a few smaller architecture firms who had obtained a couple of jobs as a result of this stimulus package, which is pleasing, and we hope that they are able to progress through the design process in order to meet the current timeframes required to be eligible for the stimulus packages.

Tourism & Hospitality

Some of the industries impacted first and directly by COVID-19 in Tasmania were the hospitality, tourism and retail industries. We have heard from many members who have had projects in these industries suspended. We believe that stimulus measures to support these industries and their ongoing development and improvement and build on 'Brand Tasmania' to entice visitors back to Tasmania when this is practical, is imperative. Now is a great time to be getting projects designed and procured during the downtime, ready to open when the state does.

The Tasmanian Government has done an excellent job at supporting small business through many hardship grants targeted to these industry – so would be good to see this

stretched further and support future projects getting off the ground that are on hold due to COVID-19.

Additional projects that we believe would be beneficial to the community include projects focused on the public realm, such as public infrastructure, interconnected bikeways, light rail, ferry terminals, amenities at a local government level, civic improvement and other community-based projects. These projects promote holistic employment across the entire design, engineering and construction sectors. These projects should be innovative and sustainable in the long-term.

We thank you for your support of the building and construction industry, and the commitment that has been shown by the Tasmanian Government in keeping this industry running throughout this period of uncertainty. We hope that this can continue despite what may happen with the pandemic. We look forward to working together to ensure that the industry can stay afloat during the months ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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Tasmanian President
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