

Architecture for Quality and Sustainability in NSW

**NSW STATE
ELECTION 2023**

Climate change action and transitioning to a net zero emissions future

Addressing climate change, reducing emissions and providing for a sustainable built environment consistently rate as the number one issue for architects.

In our latest survey of members, it was the top-rated priority and is included in the top five issues by over 60% of members surveyed.

More than 70% of members surveyed believe the current NSW government is not doing enough or should be doing much more when it comes to climate change.

Architects have been strongly advocating for some time for design reform which ensures that buildings in Australia, and particularly NSW, are energy-efficient and designed to deal with the unique characteristics of the Australian environment. Increasingly Architects are concerned with the carbon footprint of the built sector, which internationally accounts for 40% of all CO₂ emissions.

There is much government can do to address the carbon intensity of buildings, including implementing new standards which require that all new government buildings are energy-efficient.

ASBEC's *Low Carbon, High Performance* Report states, "*Projected 2050*

emissions from buildings can be reduced using existing technology, including energy efficiency measures; switching non-electric equipment and appliances to electricity; and greater use of solar photovoltaic panels."

[\(https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/low-carbon-high-performance-report/\)](https://www.asbec.asn.au/research-items/low-carbon-high-performance-report/)

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) calls on the new government to place reducing the carbon intensity of buildings as a top priority.

Specifically, the Institute calls on the new government to:

- Commit to release a pathway to achieve a Net Zero building sector by 2050
- Set carbon performance goals in new build projects and developments across all typologies
- Undertake a quantitative analysis of government building energy performance and set a map to reduce energy consumption by government buildings by 50% by 2030
- Support the development and supply of low carbon and zero carbon building materials within NSW

Housing Affordability

Australians are in the midst of a serious housing affordability crisis throughout Australia, with NSW bearing the brunt of these pressures.

This crisis is not just one of the big cities either, with regional NSW facing shortages of affordable housing driven by sea-changers and tree-changers, loss of housing from natural disasters, the boom in short-stay accommodation and finally the long-term failure of governments to build sufficient social and affordable housing.

Second only to climate change, the housing crisis was designated as a critically important issue by our members. When asked if the NSW State government needs to do more to address Australia's housing crisis, including severe shortages of social and affordable housing, 90% of our members surveyed responded they agree or strongly agree.

Housing must be considered by government as a fundamental human right, and part of the most necessary infrastructure our communities require, ahead of being a wealth-creation vehicle. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), NSW has the highest rental housing costs in Australia.

The Institute along with ShelterNSW is calling on the new NSW government to commit to:

- Restore the social housing safety net to 5% of total housing stock by 2027, 10% by 2040. This ask includes:

- 5,000 additional social housing dwellings built or acquired each year for the next 10 years
- \$500 million invested in an expanded repairs and maintenance program for existing social housing stock. Include upgrades to inefficient fixtures (water, heating and cooling) to improve the thermal performance of existing social housing stock
- 3 new Youth Foyers in NSW (two regional, one Western Sydney) providing integrated housing, education and employment support to vulnerable young people otherwise at risk of homelessness

- 20% increased funding to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) to enable it to move beyond a crisis response and deal with the steadily increasing demand on its services (compounded by rolling climate-related disasters)
- Make the planning system systemically deliver more Affordable Rental Housing for lower income essential and key workers. 10-15% affordable housing target for all rezonings where there will be a housing uplift; minimum 30% social and affordable housing in residential developments on government land

https://shelternsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/221206_Shelter-NSW-2023-State-Election-platform.pdf

Regional NSW Infrastructure plan

The movement of people from big city centres to more regional areas has shone a light on to the glaring lack of investment in many regional parts of Australia. Recent natural disasters have further highlighted the poor state of regional infrastructure and the need for massive investment outside of Sydney and large regional towns. 75% of members surveyed believe the NSW State government needs to invest more in Australia's rural and regional communities following pandemic-driven shifts in population, and only 8% of members surveyed believe the current NSW State government has done enough in terms of risk mitigation following the recent natural disasters across NSW.

A regional infrastructure plan must be developed to ensure that regional residents of NSW can maintain a modern lifestyle and have access to adequate and affordable housing, schooling and medical facilities. In particular, rural councils require assistance to better map flood and fire prone areas, assist community members to relocate where necessary and to have sufficient resources to deal with future emergencies.

Natural disasters have devastated regional infrastructure such as roads, bridges and telecommunications, along with housing. Rebuilding must be addressed as a priority. Addressing such needs must also be done in a way that takes account of the unique climate and environment, with infrastructure that needs to be flood and fire resilient, and

careful planning ensuring new housing is not built on flood plains.

The Institute calls on the new NSW government to:

- Announce a Statewide review of the infrastructure needs in regional NSW
- Fund shared modelling and mapping tools to support Councils delivering a risk-based approach to flood hazard planning
- Upgrade bushfire hazard management guidance at a landscape scale – as recommended by the NSW Black Summer Bushfire Inquiry
- Set up a permanent fund to provide emergency infrastructure funding after fires, floods and other natural disasters
- Work with the Federal government to provide funding to assist low-income families relocate away from flood prone areas
- Work with councils to ensure smart development in regions that looks to densify urban centres and invest in maximising existing infrastructure and preserving quality grazing/agricultural land for food certainty

NCC sustainability and accessibility

Many states have already begun the implementation of the National Construction Code (NCC) amendments in relation to sustainability and accessibility.

70% of members surveyed support the need for the NSW government to quickly adopt the NCC 2022 reforms. If NSW does not quickly adopt these measures, NSW building codes will lag behind other States and create unnecessary complexity for the building industry.

The Institute calls on the new NSW government to:

- Commit to the adoption of NCC 2022 as relates to Sustainability and Accessibility
- Avoid unnecessary complications through exclusions to the new requirements
- Work with Australian Standards to update standards for waterproofing to the recommendations of the NSW Building reforms as a part of the building commissioner's work into failure of class 2 buildings to adequately shed water. The current AS is vastly under-designed and does not take into account the increased storm events as a result of climate change

Design-centred Planning Policy

Almost two-thirds of members surveyed have concerns with the way the current NSW State government is performing in terms of planning application timeframes, how policies are developed, and the absence of design-centered planning policy.

The Institute strongly supports:

- provision of well-researched planning controls that protect the core amenities for residents such as solar-access, cross-ventilation, privacy and access to open space
- a clear and consistent demonstration of design principles and objectives prescribed as part of the application requirements for a development application
- strengthening the role of BASIX and increasing sustainability targets
- learning to connect with Country at the earliest opportunity and embedding this knowledge throughout our approach to planning
- an Urban Design Guide which puts quality place-based design at the forefront of strategic planning

We advocate that the creation of well-designed places be the central emphasis that guides policy and decision-making. We support planning policy which enables community input in shaping the future of places, delivers certainty for

investors and the resulting confidence in the system.

Planning policy needs to support a design-thinking process which can address emerging strategic planning while demonstrating awareness of the development controls that apply to individual sites and the assessment of these proposals.

We believe this will be vital into the future as we continue to face complex challenges, such as climate change. The Institute supports a rational, linear, design-based planning system, where good strategic planning underpins development controls that can lead to predictable outcomes for development assessment.

Stop short-changing architects

Architects have long taken on government work at a lower rate than they would other projects, in large part because of the community focus and commitment and their appreciation of the limits on government budgets.

However, increasingly governments have pushed the rates for such work to an unsustainable level. This is placing pressure on architects, who like all businesses are facing increased costs and reduced work volume.

Architecturally designed government projects deliver some of the most important public spaces in NSW. These spaces rely on the competitive market to deliver quality architectural outcomes.

Should the rates for government projects be far lower than in the private sector, outcomes risk being compromised. Additionally, for many of the most experienced, national firms, government projects will be more feasible interstate.

Given the current skills shortage, this could leave NSW vulnerable to facing difficulty securing architects with the experience required to deliver large projects.

Two-thirds of surveyed members consider the current NSW Treasury push for the fixing of daily rates for architects regardless of project type on all NSW State government projects to be either somewhat unfair and

unreasonable or very unfair and unreasonable.

Architects' and other built environment professionals' fees are subject to the requirements of each specific project, program and design. Particular technical expertise or sector experience will be called on dependent on the building typology.

While a one-size-fits-all capped daily rate may work in industries such as IT services, it is a problematic approach in the complex built environment sector.

The Institute calls upon the new government to:

- commit to meet with the architecture profession to discuss appropriate work rates taking into account the cost pressures on architects and the need to ensure quality design of public buildings and infrastructure



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