



Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

# Architecture for Quality and Sustainability in Victoria

---

## VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION 2022

# Create a roadmap to zero-carbon buildings

The Institute acknowledges the Victorian Government's work over many years in support of the national Trajectory for Low Energy Buildings. The Victorian Government has been a leading influence in raising building standards via the National Construction Code, including the adoption of NatHERS 7-Stars for new Australian houses and apartments.

Now a Victorian roadmap for zero-carbon buildings, developed in collaboration with stakeholders from the building, construction and allied industries, is critical to help Victoria achieve its emission reduction targets and support the Paris Agreement. A practical plan is needed that reduces hurdles, promotes innovation, delivers economic returns and strengthens supply chains.

Four essential areas the roadmap needs to address are:

*Regulation* – Planning and building regulation must support sustainability. In addition to energy efficiency and electrification, urban heating, biodiversity and water systems must be addressed.

*Existing buildings* – Incentives for retrofitting and upgrading existing buildings are needed. This includes requiring a building's energy efficiency rating to be disclosed when rented or sold. The Victorian Residential Scorecard Rating Scheme can be used for Victorian housing.

*Local manufacture of sustainable building materials* – Local manufacturing should be supported, as much as possible, to protect Victorian supply chains and reduce carbon emissions

from transport miles. This will benefit Victorian consumers, workers and

the economy while ensuring manufacturing standards are high. Embodied carbon and environmental degradation associated with building materials must also be reduced.

*Investment in knowledge, innovation and consumer education* – Innovation never ceases. There is an ongoing need for investment in building sciences research, professional knowledge resources and training for designers, consultants and construction trades. Consumer education is also essential as their choices impact the performance and sustainability of buildings. Better-informed consumers can make better building choices for the environment and their own future economic benefit.

**The Australian Institute of Architects calls for the Victorian Government to develop a roadmap to quickly move our building stock to zero carbon. The roadmap should:**

- Undo regulatory roadblocks to sustainable design
- Create incentives for retrofitting and upgrading buildings
- Support local manufacture of sustainable building materials
- Invest in research, training, and consumer education

# Built environment that respects Country

Respecting Country is a design position that forms part of the 2021 National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA). It requires an ethical approach to design and respect for Country and the environment.

The NSCA requires that all Architects understand and/or can apply the principles of project planning considering implications for Country – the ethical and considered behaviour towards Country and those who are part of Country, including human and non-human. Minimum considerations involve the protection of existing cultural materials and then ensuring that projects do no further harm to culture and the environment. At its best, it is about celebrating Country through a project.

The NSCA notes that,

*Considering the implications for Country is an aspect of environmental sustainability and a precursor for activities relating to the health and wellbeing of Country. This requires architects do no further harm to Country, including waterways, soils, landscapes, flora, fauna, ecological communities, biodiversity, etc.*

It is not always required nor possible that all built environment projects engage with First Nations communities, Knowledge Holders or Traditional Custodians. However, we must ensure that the best efforts are made to demonstrate respect for Country. It is imperative that the Victorian Government leads on good practice in its own procurement of buildings and infrastructure.

Our state election priorities recommend establishing a single Victorian Government building and consultancy procurement framework to be developed in partnership with industry. Part of this framework needs to address implications for Country.

**We call on the Victorian Government to ensure building and infrastructure procurement processes that respect Country, is developed in partnership with Victorian First Nations communities.**

The Institute notes the leading contribution made by the 2021 National Standard of Competency for Architects as well as the Government Architect of NSW's draft of Connecting with Country. Connecting with Country is a draft framework for developing connections with Country to inform the planning, design and delivery of built environment projects in NSW.

Victoria does not have an equivalent resource to Connecting with Country that sets the expectations for the whole built environment sector, even though the NSCA establishes the professional practice requirement for all Architects. NSW's Connecting with Country helps to establish expectations, is highly informative and provides practical guidance.

**The Australian Institute of Architects recommends that the Victorian Government collaboratively develops a framework and guidelines to ensure that the planning, design and delivery of built environment projects in Victoria address the implications for Country.**

# Deliver building reforms and safeguards

The Australian Institute of Architects supports reforms that safeguard and improve the quality of all types and purposes of buildings such as residential, commercial, retail, healthcare, and community facilities.

The Victorian Government has commissioned an Expert Panel to oversee Building Reform in Victoria.

The Expert Panel's timetable for the reform process has not been met by government. The critical Stage 1 report due for release in July 2021 has stalled. Three reforms and safeguards that the Victorian Government needs to address are:

*Scope of practice for design practitioners.* Critical design decisions impact building safety, longevity, occupants' health, energy efficiency and carbon footprint, and ongoing maintenance and upgrade costs. Design decisions also impact owners and occupants of adjacent buildings and neighbourhoods for many decades. The best way to manage these impacts is to ensure that a high level of training and skill is brought to all phases of the design process.

Architects must hold a master's degree, and then undertake several years of supervised practice before sitting exams with the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. They are trained and credentialled through a longer and more rigorous nationally governed process than building designers (draftspersons).

**The Institute recommends that the Victorian Government regulates that only an architect can prepare or oversight the design for complex and larger buildings.**

*Design and construction declarations.* Victoria needs a more rigorous system to oversight the design and construction of buildings. This would strengthen the accountability of all parties, who design and construct buildings, to current and future owners and occupants. NSW has introduced design declarations for five critical aspects of the design for multi-rise apartments. The aim is to improve the quality of their apartments to reduce defects and prevent situations of catastrophic failures.

In NSW critical areas of design such as structural integrity, waterproofing, water-shedding and fire safety need to be fully designed before construction commences. Any variations require re-certification. Most importantly, the builder must certify that the building has been constructed to the specifications of the design. The NSW Government will soon extend these provisions to other types of buildings.

**The Institute recommends that the Victorian Government introduces design and construction declarations and certifications for different types of buildings.**

*Industry code of practice for novation.* Novated design and construct procurement is commonly used in large commercial and government procurement in Victoria. It creates financial benefits for developers. However, it also can prevent the architect or other consultants from reporting any concerns that a building is deviating from its original design. Institute research has shown that once novated many architects find that they may only communicate with the builder and can be prevented from reporting to the owner or developer.

A builder may order cost-cutting design changes that result in a building being constructed differently with different materials and performance outcomes to the way it was originally designed.

The Australian Institute of Architects' Code of Novation provides a critical safeguard when a novated design and construct procurement model is used. The Code, for example, ensures that architects and other consultants may still communicate with the owner or developer after the novation of their contract to the builder. The government can lead on best practice by adopting the code into use for the benefit of all consumers.

**The Institute recommends that the Victorian Government adopts the Australian Institute of Architects Code of Novation as a safeguard for all state government building projects where novated design and construct procurement is selected to help ensure buildings are built according to their intended standard.**



Grampians Peaks Trail Stage 2 | Noxon Giffen Architects with McGregor Coxall | Photographer: Shannon McGrath

# Raise apartment design standards and quality

In August this year, the Legislative Assembly's Planning and Environment Committee tabled the report of its inquiry into apartment design standards. The Committee made 35 recommendations from its 66 key findings.

The high-quality design of apartments as individual buildings, in any location context, is a critical success factor for good social, economic, lifestyle, health and sustainability outcomes.

The Australian Institute of Architects supports better apartment standards recognising that apartments will increasingly become a mainstream housing choice for many people. The apartments built today will be in use for many decades to come.

Apartment design decisions made today will impact at least the next two to three generations. This gains greater relevance as government policy looks to apartments as a solution to reduce urban sprawl.

Apartments may also provide a more affordable housing option in many circumstances and housing markets. A major government policy commitment needs to be made that rigorously pursues much higher design standards and quality of the apartments we build in Victoria.

**To ensure sound processes for good design, the Institute calls for three key recommendations of the Apartment Design Standard Inquiry report to be implemented as follows:**

- all apartment designs are to be verified by an architect
- a state-wide framework is established for local design review panels

- mandated settings for design review are legislated

Our recommendation pursues the recommendations of Victoria's recent Parliamentary Apartment Design Standard Inquiry report, namely:

*Recommendation 26: The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning work with local councils to consider the benefits of design verification by registered architects in the Better Apartments Design Standards.*

*Recommendation 27: The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning investigates the development of a state-wide framework for local councils to administer design review panels, including guidance on what triggers a design review to take place, the composition of panels, and panel operation, conduct and costs.*

*Recommendation 28: The Victorian Government implement legislative approaches to mandate the referral of apartment designs to design review panels to ensure that advice given by panels holds legal weight for enforcement.*

The Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA) will have an important role to help implement Recommendations 27 and 28, leveraging its own expertise in design review and its Victorian Design Review Panel. However, the OVGA experienced a dramatic cut to its long-term core funding from \$1.3 million per annum to \$700,000 per annum in this year's Victorian State Budget.

**The Institute calls upon the next Victorian Government to immediately restore the long-term core funding of the OVGA to ensure it is able to help establish DRPs across the state.**

# Make the business of building Victoria easier

Publicly owned buildings are nowadays designed and built by the private sector. There are multiple and vastly differing approaches to procurement and procurement requirements for buildings across various Victorian government departments and agencies. This includes some departments or agencies specifying that consultants must provide design documentation in the format of the department's preferred specified proprietary software.

This leads to a loss of economic benefit for the Victorian Government and the taxpayer as businesses pass on, as a cost of doing business, the administration overheads required to accommodate the widely different procurement models and practices.

*A single government building procurement framework.*

Greater taxpayer value could be gained if there was one set of rules for all government departments and agencies. The rules would specify procurement models and practices according to the project type and scale. This would bring greater predictability about expectations to the market. Consultants and contractors can then streamline their administration and business practices and deliver efficiency savings back to government.

**The Australian Institute of Architects calls for a single Victorian Government building and consultancy procurement framework to be developed in partnership with industry.**

*Fair, sensible, and insurable procurement contracts.*

Government departments and agencies are increasingly aiming to transfer all project risks to the suppliers. Contract terms governing apportionment of liability, uncapped liability, and specified insurance amounts are often disproportionate to project risks. This, in turn, can make it costly or unviable to ensure practitioners or projects.

Insurances, as a cost of doing business, are passed on to the department or government agency that is procuring a project or consultancy services. This leads to a further loss of value for the government and taxpayers.

**The Institute calls for a major review of risk mitigation including contract terms and insurance requirements to be included as part of single building and consultancy procurement framework.**

# Strengthen heritage and sustainability together

The vast majority of heritage buildings are owned and managed by private and community interests. Capital outlays often mean it is cheaper to demolish and rebuild rather than preserve, upgrade or adaptively re-use places that have important heritage value for communities. Incentives for the preservation of heritage places in the form of tax or sustainability credits could put “preservation”, “conservation” and “sustainability” in the front of the private and community sectors’ minds and be a key design driver, rather than being seen as a design inhibitor. Similar schemes are being adopted in Canada, California (USA) and the European Union.

**Establish a tax incentive framework for heritage preservation and adaptive reuse of privately owned buildings, structures and sites. Include such measures as payroll and land tax relief and rebates for stamp duty paid on-site acquisitions.**

The current listing and overlays for heritage places are grossly underrepresented, with many heritage places of 20th Century significance falling under the demolition hammer.

The preservation of heritage places, both indigenous and cultural, is a key driver of Australia’s cultural heritage. It tells the stories of our past and provides the rich diverse tapestry of our predecessors’ lives and the way we lived. It enhances our cities and landscapes providing a rich ground of history, appreciation and a sense of identity. Heritage is increasingly under stress due to globalisation, environment changes and development pressures.

The UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development directly links the role of cultural heritage and creativity as an enabler of sustainable development. Existing buildings have a high level of embodied energy which is lost if they are destroyed. The preservation and the adaptive re-use of heritage places reduces CO2 emissions, landfill waste, energy used for demolition and new construction and materials. There is a symbiotic relationship between “recycling and reducing waste” and “preservation and conservation of place”.

Additional funding for Heritage Victoria would enable more heritage places to be assessed on a timely basis. Funding could be used to promote heritage through public education and to provide subsidies through Heritage Victoria’s Living Heritage Grants program to private individuals and community groups which gain no benefit from state tax incentives or credits.

**Allocate \$50M for Heritage Victoria to ensure that places of significance are efficiently assessed and listed on the state’s heritage register and to strengthen the Living Heritage Grants Program.**





Australian  
Institute of  
Architects

## Contact Us

Paul Zanatta  
National Manager, Policy and Advocacy  
e: [paul.zanatta@architecture.com.au](mailto:paul.zanatta@architecture.com.au)  
p: 03 8620 3847