



**REGIONAL
ARCHITECTURE
ASSOCIATION**

Submission to the
NSW Government
Regional Housing Taskforce

27th August 2021

Regional Architecture Association

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At no point in modern
Australian history has the
role of the regional architect
been as crucial as
it is today.

VIRGINIA WONG-SEE
RAA FOUNDING MEMBER

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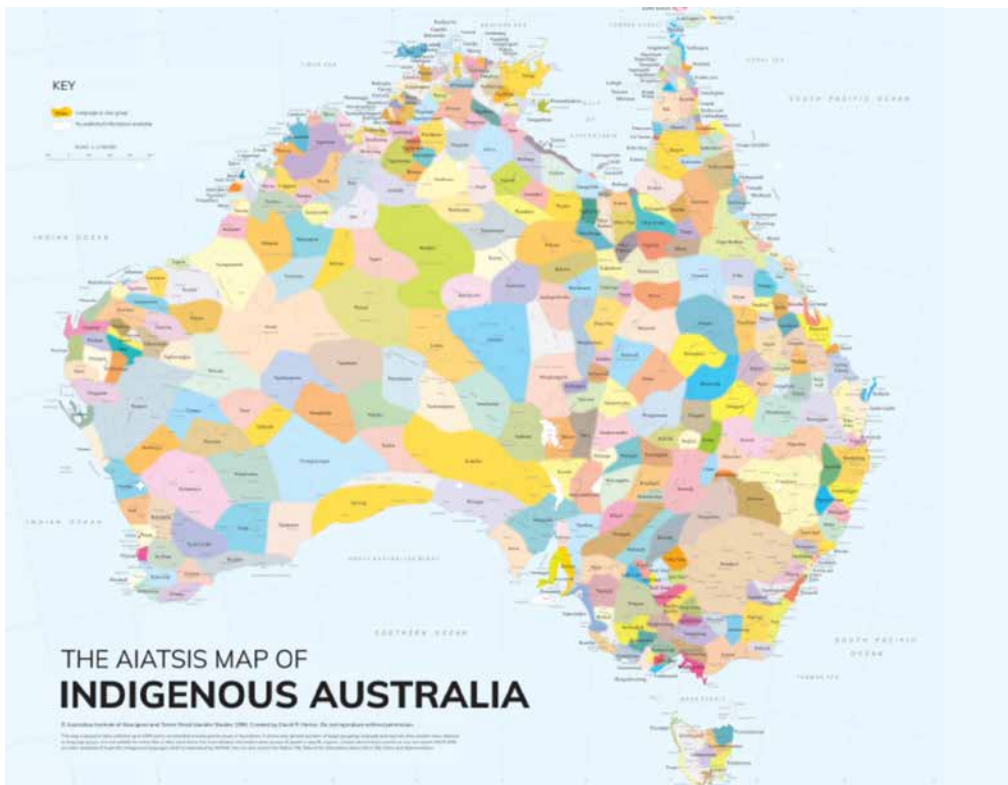
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The Regional Architecture Association acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Understanding our ancient landscape as a fine grained regional tapestry informs the need for nuanced regional thinking for the future - today.



On August 26th, after participating in NSW Government Taskforce roundtable meetings – the Regional Architecture Association held the Housing The Regions Symposium online.

Attended by over 60 architects from across the majority of Local Government Areas of NSW, our aim was to gather a collective opinion and contribution for the NSW Government Regional Housing Taskforce.

The following document contains our submission and invites you to engage us in your decision making process.

FOR THE ATTENTION OF

Mr Garry Fielding

Chair of the Regional Housing Taskforce

**Re: Submission to the NSW Government Regional Housing Taskforce
by the Regional Architecture Association**

Dear Mr Fielding,

This letter is written on behalf of the Founding Committee of the recently formed Regional Architecture Association (RAA). We thank you and the NSW Government for facilitating the recent roundtable discussions during a time of housing affordability crisis.

As a formation of regional architects, RAA welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards NSW Government's process in improving housing affordability. The roundtable discussions displayed diversity beyond geography and population throughout the communities of NSW, which cannot be placated through expediting the approval and construction process of new suburban homes.

"A Crisis only happens when you are not prepared."

Tony McBurney - Architect, Bathurst NSW

Due to this diversity, RAA questions whether implementation of state-wide planning controls of Planning NSW can meaningfully cater for all aspects and issues of regional housing affordability, distinct from stimulation of local construction industries.

Further questions for consideration:

- After engaging and consulting with individual communities, what is it our regional communities want?
- How do regional communities preserve independent character shaped by history, but stay relevant to future developments?
- Beyond the scope of our taskforce, what else contributes to positive or negative housing affordability?

As architects and related practitioners, we encounter on-the-ground effects of affordable housing on industry and town in daily life. We believe meaningful communication and education about the characteristics that make our towns and communities unique are key to taskforce success.

Changes proposed which alter the physical character of our regional towns and communities, catering for population growth needs to consider existing and required infrastructure.

“One of the nice things about a country town... is the town”

Tim Lee - Architect, Goulburn NSW

On the 26th of August 2021, RAA held an online Symposium titled “Housing the Regions”. This arose from the NSW Government Roundtables, engaging 75 regional design and architecture related practitioners at short notice. Two representatives from the NSW Government Architects Office attended and contributed positively to the conversation. The 2-hour discussion involved representation from all corners of regional NSW, forming the basis of this submission. We, as association and member body, encourage further inclusion to shape Government intervention surrounding Regional Housing Affordability. We have a member body of broad knowledge, reach, and connection, and welcome the opportunity shape the future of regional housing through collaboration to achieve tangible outcomes.

Key points in relation to our submission are:**01 - PLACE**

RAA believes a critical understanding of “place” is central to any discussion of fast tracking and simplifying future development. Unfortunately it is becoming visible that, speed driven development occurs at the cost of place and character, potentially harming the appeal of regional communities in the long run.

History, People, Commerce, Civic character and Neighbourhood Character create the physical and cultural identity of our regional and rural towns. The built environment generally suffers when rushed, poorly executed suburban development occurs – placing immediate profit ahead of long-term benefit in our regional towns and communities.

02 - PROVISION

One of the dangers with fast tracking suburban development is the creation of housing estates with poor amenity and sustainability outcomes.

When those within Government, construction and development collaborate to develop and deliver meaningful design outcomes, housing diversity and “provision” cater for the varying needs of our communities. This collaboration throughout planning and delivery process could be extended to State and Local Government, Development, Construction and Community. Better education and promotion about positive examples of regional housing development can assist in mitigating negative responses to newness or change. This is something the RAA and Government can do together.

“You don’t build affordability by devaluing a market”

Tony McBurney - Architect, Bathurst NSW

03 - PURPOSE

In questioning why individual communities exist and what can they be in the future, it begs questions such as: Where have our towns been? What can be in the future? How can our communities be involved in this journey and discussion? Querying the intention and purpose of our built environment can avoid the potentially harmful effects of fast tracked planning, and, contribute to the existing richness of individual town and community.

04 - PREPARATION

As rapid and significant change occurs, communities need to be prepared. Through open and inclusive dialogue and working relationships, Government, Development, Construction and Community can work more collaboratively together. No one group can cohesively, or, sensitively, address "Housing the Regions" alone. We benefit from the skill and expertise of one another. Individual, comprehensive understandings of a town's existing housing supply, demographics and appropriate development opportunities are required. State Government, the RAA and its' membership are well equipped to assist under resourced local Councils and investigate this further.

RESPONSE TO TASKFORCE GENERALLY

Key taskforce points RAA wishes too expand on: The Honourable Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Rob Stokes claimed that this Taskforce, via Mr Fielding will:

"Consult with the public and key stakeholders to identify the constraints to housing supply, diversity and affordability in the regions and deliver his report to government in September."

It was further stated through the Government website the round table process succeeded because:

"Throughout August 2021 the taskforce conducted a major listening exercise with a series of 11 virtual roundtable events to hear from councils and representatives from community groups, the housing, not-for-profit and development sectors, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, business groups and members of the public to identify barriers in the planning system to housing supply and affordability. The taskforce is grateful for the more than 500 people from all over the state that participated in the roundtable sessions to share the experiences and challenges they are facing in their region and the invaluable insights and potential solutions offered."

This form of consultation is welcomed and valuable, however our feedback unfortunately indicated the roundtables were not widely published and promoted throughout where they hold value most: our regional communities. It seems the promotion largely ignored the general public. The voices were local government and development, not the public as initially stated.

The 500 people consulted and claimed as a successful public engagement and consultation process represent only 0.018% of the regional population in NSW (NSW has a population of approx. 7.95 million residents, approx. 64.5% of that population lives in Greater Sydney leaving approx. 2.8 million people living outside greater Sydney, a number that is growing quickly). RAA would welcome an inclusive approach with increased, meaningful public consultation on this complex issue - something the association can assist the NSW Government with via our network.

Key points from RAA Event “Housing the Regions Symposium” include:

- Planning needs to consider Place, whereby understanding, protecting, and improving the character of our regional towns and communities enables appropriate change and development occurring.
- Orange Council made good points about how the same accommodation can be used for tourism and mining by better coordination of significant events so that they don't overlap and stretch housing supply. This is quite a sustainable use of resources and existing infrastructure. Understanding existing metrics of current and previous housing supply is important.
- Further emphasis and education surrounding well-planned suburban development can assist this. Scepticism towards suburban residential development is valid when it is poorly planned, fast tracked and without innovation. i.e., the surveyor or civil engineer masterplan plan that just maximises land use density over quality or longevity.
- How we provide housing and utilisation of infrastructure, assets, and land needs to consider longer term sustainable issues such as climate change.
- Rapidly rising construction costs and labour shortages leading to inflated construction prices and slow lead times to procuring residential housing. A fast CDC process regionally is useless without a labour force with appropriate capacity. New infrastructure projections to service housing expansion will be compromised or further exasperate the affordability issue if the temporary work force can't be accommodated.
- On the back of the point above, construction quality can suffer because of fast tracked and under resourced residential development.
- There is concern regionally in the wake of booming DA submissions that there isn't the appropriate regulation labour force to adequately oversee and monitor construction quality. Local Governments all over the state are stretched and under resourced. Class 2 apartment building issues in the metro markets of NSW exemplify how: fast tracking without appropriately resourced regulation, or the devaluing of traditional oversight roles can lead to longer term financial loss and hardship.
- The restrictive application of DCP's that don't favour innovation and therefore lead to poor suburban design responses.
- Historically, the lack of tourism accommodation regulation continues to impact on housing speculation, creating displacement of transient population percentages - key regional workforce, or, issues with housing resultant on towns dependant upon tourism.
- Heritage is an asset of great assistance when utilised. Perhaps greater support is required to incentivise and make more flexible. Architects partnering with associated disciplines could potentially use heritage to inform the narrative of how a town innovates and adapts. Regional CBDs are worthwhile investigating according to density increase, preserving heritage, but not necessarily creating a dramatic increase in the sprawl of a town. Planning considerations here can be balanced, with innovation in relation to BCA and accessibility issues.
- Understanding complex growth scenarios achieve a balance between growth, permanent population, temporary populations, and tourism etc. Perhaps regional towns need to be very prescriptive about quantity and rate of growth they: want, need, and most importantly, can manage.

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- Limitations placed on development by cars in planning instruments can be a roadblock to development.
 - Homebuilder's stimulation of the construction industry has distorted conditions and increased prices quickly, removing valuable construction labour from the general market.
 - Regional towns that depend on mining industry have short future, shown through gold and coal towns over the past 100 years. This short-sighted dependence has implications on housing and housing speculation. RAA believes a detailed demographic analysis and projections will assist this discussion.
 - Holistic and quality social housing exists in major shortage. Government intervention to provide social and affordable housing which includes lower income and key worker housing is highly needed, exemplified in communities like Byron Bay. Local Governments appear to be relying on marginal development conditions for this, however State and federal could pave the way.
 - Communities such as Corowa require government assistance and design quality intervention to assist in addressing inappropriate suburban development proposals. There are examples of this all over the state.
 - Innovation - What is the next layer of innovation in this space?
 - The advantage of cross disciplinary collaboration: Disciplines within construction, development, local government, and community have the potential to collaborate and achieve fantastic outcomes.
 - Partnering with Government to explore positive design outcomes for regional housing.

The engagement and timing of an investigation about the current issues and future improvements of regional housing affordability is welcomed and encouraged by the Regional Architecture Association. RAA urges all involved to consider the underlying complexity of this coming crisis and consider extending the terms of reference.

Regards

Cameron Anderson

Chair – Regional Architecture Association
Registered Architect 8560

On Behalf of the Regional Architecture Association Committee

As committed regionalists we understand that whilst change in the built environment is inevitable, it should occur in a way that celebrates the uniqueness of each place, is considerate of and caters for the true diversity of community life.

The key offerings architects and our associates provide within our communities are:

- A critical understanding of the importance of housing in the regions – past, present and future – for cultural, community, commercial and environmental benefit.
- Engagement with design review panels across regional NSW.
- The shared and collegiate relationship of regional architects across NSW is invaluable to government in offering on-the-ground knowledge, experience and solutions.
- Inherent understanding of the value of Heritage and its commercial and cultural implication on Place – communicated to all stakeholders from Government, Council and community.
- Potential, through our growing membership and network, to establish design, heritage and subdivision advisory committees with local understanding and respect.
- Early design intervention providing practical solutions, fit for place and purpose, that ensure positive outcomes for all stakeholders, including residents.
- The ability to connect and collaborate with others within the profession be they regional or elsewhere on the planet – providing a global perspective through our thorough education in and understanding of place making.
- The ability to source and provide examples of proven solutions through our Global and local lens.
- Resident contributors to community.

The Regional Architecture Association (RAA) was founded by:

Sarah Aldridge	Byron Bay
Cameron Anderson	Mudgee
Scott Carpenter	Casuarina Beach
Brent Dunn	Thirroul + Moruya
Tricia Helyar	Bellingen
Katharina Hendel	Thirroul + Moruya
Chris Jenkins	Port Macquarie
Stephen Johansson	Shoalhaven
Marcus Piper	Moruya
Virginia Wong-See	Armidale + Sydney

On behalf of the Regional Architecture Association,
thank you for accepting our submission.

We look forward to future engagement.

Regional Architecture Association

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