



19 October 2022

An open letter to:

The Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MP
Minister for Planning

and

The Hon. Ryan Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Planning

Dear Minister and Shadow Minister

Transparency of the Victorian planning system

I am writing to express the disappointment of the Urban Development Institute of Australia, Victoria (UDIA Victoria) in relation to the recent decision to identify protected settlement boundaries in the final draft Statement of Planning Policy for the Bellarine Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) Program, and to call for greater transparency in Victoria's planning system.

The Bellarine Peninsula DAL decision, like the Surf Coast DAL decision before it, disregards the Standing Advisory Committee's recommendations. It places politics over proper planning process.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Report, *Managing Victoria's Planning System for Land Use and Development* (March 2017), stresses that assessments planning decisions must be "transparent, based on all evidence, and address all relevant planning matters... to help ensure the community's confidence and trust in the planning system to deliver sustainable outcomes".

We note that the Panel report for the proposed Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C395 recommended that any process surrounding defining the permanence of boundaries on the Bellarine Peninsula be transparent and evidence-based in its approach.

Further, the Standing Advisory Committee's recommendation to not implement the protected boundaries was due to the need for a holistic understanding of their ramifications. The evidence provided by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) was repeatedly challenged by the Standing Advisory Committee due to a lack of accuracy, detail, and depth, which lead to the Standing Advisory Committee's decision to oppose this measure.

Transparency is a central tenant in the integrity of the planning system. It is equally as important in the context of "pro-development" decisions as it is in "anti-development" decisions. The decisions of the Bellarine Peninsula DAL and the Surf Coast DAL appear to be infected by local politics. Both ignore independent and expert advice, and the decisions – somewhat coincidentally – align with previous public statements made by the Premier and local candidates.

Through both DALs, interested parties (whether UDIA Victoria members or not) have invested significant sums to participate in the Standing Advisory Committee processes, while the Standing Advisory Committee itself comes at a significant cost to taxpayers. That investment, not to mention



the time associated with preparing submissions and making representations, has been wasted given that the decisions appear to have pre-determined.

Our members are not naïve. They understand that planning debates attract community and political interest. There is undoubtedly a role for politics at the rule-setting stage, but once those rules have been set, they are right to expect that proper planning processes are followed, and the rules adhered to.

Following the State election, no matter which individual holds the role of Minister for Planning, it is imperative that our planning system returns to one in which everyone – community member, environmental group or property developer – can rely on a clear and transparent system in which decisions are made based on evidence, not votes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Matthew Kandelaars'.

Matthew Kandelaars
Chief Executive Officer
UDIA Victoria