PLANNING DECISION MAKING TIMES DOWN

Work undertaken by the Department of Planning has slashed overall determination times for key planning decisions across NSW, the Department’s 2009-10 annual report reveals.

The annual report contains new statistics about the operation of the ‘gateway’ local environmental plan (LEP) system and joint regional planning panels, which both began in July 2009.

The ‘gateway’ system for the first time required LEPs to be completed within set timeframes, along with encouraging key issues to be resolved earlier in the assessment process.

The report shows, on average, it took 107 days to finalise ‘gateway’ determined LEPs compared to a previous survey in 2006-07, which found even the simplest LEP took 196 days to make.

It also shows the Department made decisions on whether LEPs could proceed to public exhibition – known as the ‘gateway’ decision – in an average of 24 days, below the 30-day benchmark.

The report shows the introduction of six joint regional planning panels (JRPPs) – which provide independent, merit-based decision-making - determined around $1 billion worth of projects in 2009-10.

The JRPPs determined 102 projects in an average assessment time of 134 days, compared to the 2008-09 State-wide average for development applications valued over $5 million of 249 days.

Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly, said many of the planning initiatives introduced in previous years are now beginning to provide substantial results including making the system far more efficient.

“This has been confirmed by the recent Office of Better Regulation’s 2009-10 annual update which found planning had contributed the majority of $400 million in red tape savings,” the Minister said.

“Furthermore, the Department during 2009-10 strengthened its work planning for the long-term future of the State, including launching a review of the Metropolitan Strategy and a draft strategy for the Murray region.”

Outcomes achieved during the year include:

- The establishment of six joint regional planning panels, which have delivered consistent and independent, merit-based decision-making for regionally-significant proposals and helped drive down determination times;
- Continued delivery of highly credible and rigorous assessments of major development proposals with significant economic benefits. A total of $19 billion worth of projects creating 62,446 jobs;
- Launch of the NSW Industrial and Commercial Code to support 10-day approvals for small-scale, low-impact retail and industrial proposals and the undertaking of a 12-month review of the NSW Housing Code;
- Approval for 12 new council-wide local environmental plans using the standard template framework to meet future housing and employment growth;
• Creation of a single system for the accreditation of building certifiers;
• Approval of plans to drive housing, jobs and good urban outcomes in key centres including Burwood, Bondi Junction and Gladesville and release of draft plans for Coffs Harbour and Tweed;
• Delivery of a $179 million local infrastructure fund to construct road and stormwater projects to support housing and jobs growth;
• Release of the latest Metropolitan Development Program report, which found record levels of zoned housing land on Sydney’s fringe and more than 125,000 homes in the planning and construction stage in existing suburbs;
• Influence of the design and construction of more than 30,000 new homes and in excess of 8,500 additions and alterations under the BASIX program;
• Rezoning approvals for the Riverstone West, Riverstone and Alex Avenue precincts in the North West Growth Centre, supporting 12,000 jobs and 15,500 dwellings;
• Release of a State planning policy to boost the supply of affordable rental housing – this policy processed the majority of stimulus-funded social housing;
• Progression of blueprints for six State significant sites, generating capacity for 43,000 jobs and 12,000 dwellings; and
• Addition of 26 items to the State Heritage Register – the highest number in five years.

The report is available at www.planning.nsw.gov.au