18 May, 2010

JOINT REGIONAL PLANNING PANELS HALVE DA TIMES

The NSW Government’s joint regional planning panels have delivered a speedy turnaround of assessment proposals in their first nine months, with overall decision times more than halved compared to the normal average.

Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly, today publicly released a review of the implementation of the regional panels, which examined their progress since July last year.

Regional panels include both NSW Government and local council appointees and provide greater expertise and independence in the assessment of regionally-significant development proposals.

Mr Kelly said the average total time for development applications (DAs) determined by the regional panels until the end of March was 114 days, far less than the 2008-09 Statewide average assessment time of 249 days for DAs valued more than $5 million.

Any comparison of regional panel determination times with average DA processing times across the State is invalid as, by their very nature, regional panels are generally dealing with large, regionally-significant projects which involve more complex issues and detailed assessment requirements.

“It is pleasing to see these panels have provided efficient and transparent decision-making on regionally significant proposals, based on merit and expertise, which assist jobs and investment flowing into the State’s regions,” the Minister said.

“However, we acknowledge some matters dealt with by regional panels during this period have been less controversial proposals, and a number of more significant proposals are still in the pipeline and being examined by council officers.

“Regional panel chairs will be contacting local councils regularly to find out when assessments will be finalised and sent to the panel secretariat.

“It’s important councils remain on top of their assessments, particularly for more complex DAs, and the Department of Planning will continue working with panel members and councils to ensure these good results continue.”

Mr Kelly said as a result of this review, planning powers would be returned to councils for a number of types of development applications currently determined by regional panels.

This includes allowing council staff (which have an existing delegation from their council) to determine proposals which do not have any objections, along with those in agreed areas and precincts where detailed planning has already occurred,” the Minister said.
“These returned powers, which local councils will be consulted on, will allow the regional panels to better focus on proposals where they are able to use their expertise and knowledge to deliver good planning outcomes.”

Other changes following feedback from panel members, councils and the public include:

- Additions to the code of conduct to include specific actions for managing conflicts of interest, including keeping a register of declarations of interests by panel members;
- Finalising a complaints handling policy following feedback from the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the NSW Ombudsman, outlining procedures when dealing with complaints about panel operations or panel members; and
- Requiring local councils to provide a status report on applications after 70 days has elapsed.

Regional breakdown: Average number of days for key stages (from 1 July 2009 to 31 March 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total No. of determinations</th>
<th>Council Initial Processing (lodgement to exhibition)</th>
<th>Public Exhibition Period</th>
<th>Council Assessment (start of exhibition to submission of report)</th>
<th>Panel Referral (Report received by Secretariat to Panel meeting)</th>
<th>Average Assessment Time (DA lodged at council to Panel determination)</th>
<th>Previous 2008-09 Average Assessment Times For DAs over $5 million</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunter &amp; Central Coast</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>121.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>141.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>91.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>112.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney East</td>
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<td>72.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney West</td>
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<td>23.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>134.8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTD AVERAGE</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>113.9</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of some of the important approvals by JRPPs include:

- $95 million worth of new projects at the University of Wollongong including new student accommodation;
- A multi-purpose indoor sports centre near Tamworth;
- The $38 million Leura Mall in the Blue Mountains;
- Redevelopment of the Newtown RSL in the Marrickville LGA;
- The $31 million Glenrose Shopping Centre in the Warringah LGA; and
- An $18 million retail complex and bus terminal at Port Macquarie;

Projects refused include:

- A stock and sales yard at South Goulburn;
- A 400-site caravan park on the Hastings River at Riverside near Port Macquarie; and
- A master plan for a 158-unit retirement village at Berkeley near Wollongong.

More information on JRPPs can be found at [www.jrpp.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.jrpp.nsw.gov.au/)