Annual report highlights improved transparency and local decision making

Improved transparency and stakeholder engagement, returning powers to local government and key employment, housing and infrastructure outcomes are outlined in the Department of Planning and Infrastructure’s 2010-11 annual report.

Director-General Sam Haddad said the report outlines the significant achievements made by the department over the past year.

“The department has an important role in delivering sound planning outcomes and this report illustrates how we have gone about our work,” Mr Haddad said.

“There remain many ongoing challenges before us, including housing supply and affordability, integration of infrastructure, land-use and building community confidence in the planning process.”

Some of the improved transparency highlights include:
- Updating and strengthening the lobbyist contact protocol with a central online register of contacts and a requirement for meeting requests to be lodged electronically;
- Conducting more than 50 events for stakeholders and eight forums for local government planning professionals; and
- Publishing submissions on major projects online.

Some key measures to return planning powers to local government include:
- Creating a new assessment system to replace the Part 3A system and to assess projects of genuine state significance;
- Increasing thresholds for projects determined by Joint Regional Planning Panels (JRPPs);
- Establishing a flying squad of technical experts to assist councils finalise local plans; and
- Amending the Affordable Rental Housing State Environmental Planning Policy to encourage new affordable rental properties compatible with their surroundings.

Some of the employment, housing and infrastructure highlights include:
- Accelerating the release and rezoning of land in Sydney to provide additional greenfield land for housing;
- Increasing the amount of zoned and undeveloped industrial land in Sydney to 4,500 hectares, following the Marsden Park Industrial Precinct zoning;
- Assessing and determining 410 major developments and infrastructure projects worth $16.5 billion with the potential to create 80,000 jobs;
- Launching the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 and continuing implementation of regional strategies; and
- Overseeing land acquisition for the North West and South West rail links.
The department has also begun to publish its assessment reports online, enabling public examination prior to an application being determined by the Planning Assessment Commission.

Additionally, the department opened an Upper Hunter office to investigate planning condition compliance issues with coal mines, and conducted compliance and enforcement activities across NSW.

It also released a five-year, post-implementation review of the BASIX program, which for the first time reported on water and energy savings from multi-unit dwellings.

The report found that, in the three years to June 30, 2009, residents of such homes saved 6.5 billion litres of water and cut greenhouse gas emission production by 203,000 tonnes.

The report includes regional tables on Joint Regional Planning Panel approvals and local environmental plan decisions, along with a breakdown of LEP grants.

“I am particularly grateful to our executive team and all staff within the department for their commitment, hard work and achievements,” Mr Haddad said.

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