PIA has policy positions on a wide range of planning issues, but in NSW our current focus for 2009 - 2010 is in the following three areas: New Planning Acts for NSW, an Integrated Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney and improved Strategic Planning at the local level. A common thread is the emphasis on sound strategic planning.

Over recent years strategic planning has been neglected as governments and the development industry have focused on development assessment and approvals. The result has been a pre-occupation with the DA process and often ad-hoc decision making on a project by project basis. The political dimension of State and local decision-making has also contributed to frustrations with the so-called ‘planning system’.

Strategic planning involves the transparent process of consultation, research and options analysis in formulating the future of any given area. The result of this process is the strategic plan, and any statutory instrument needed to implement the outcomes identified. Once adopted the resultant local plan should provide the basis for decision-making on development proposals.

Plan-consistent development can then be processed in an efficient and timely manner. Getting the plans right is key to an efficient development assessment system, and thorough strategic planning is necessary to deliver this.

Integrated strategic planning requires:

- At the State level integrating ‘horizontally’, strategic planning functions across relevant state government departments and agencies that have responsibilities affecting land use or the delivery of infrastructure and utilities.
- Integrating ‘vertically’ the State Government spatial planning strategies, policies and plans with those of local government.

Integrated strategic planning also provides the opportunity of integrating State Plans with National policies and/or legislation that affect land use planning in NSW and draw upon any relevant COAG agreements. For example legislation or policies covering climate change, threatened species, water and energy, infrastructure, heritage, national competition policy, population and the proposed “Major Cities” policies.

PIA believes NSW needs new planning legislation to replace the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979. PIA’s recommendations on new planning legislation are detailed in its submission to the NSW Upper House Inquiry on Planning Reform (2008) available on our website. In summary PIA recommends new legislation in the form of two separate but inter-related Acts, reflective of their different functions.

1. A “Strategic and Integrated Planning Act” to cover strategic planning and plan making, and
2. A “Land Use Administration and Development Assessment” Act to cover development administration, assessment and decision-making.

The purpose of splitting the legislation is to give due weight and recognition to strategic planning and clearly separate it from development assessment. This new approach will also signal a complementary ‘cultural shift’ of how the planning system operates in NSW.
PIA’s policy is for a comprehensive, integrated strategic plan for the Sydney Metropolitan Area to accommodate growth over the next 30 years. The Integrated Metropolitan Strategy would bring together in the one document all those matters relevant to land use or spatial planning including those currently covered by the NSW State Plan, the City of Cities: A Plan for Sydney’s Future (the current Metropolitan Strategy), the Centres Policy, an integrated Transport Plan and an Infrastructure Plan (that includes financing and budget commitments).

The Integrated Metropolitan Strategy will then form the basis for all major land use zoning and infrastructure decision-making, and the more detailed planning (LEPs) undertaken by Councils at the local government level.

A new Metropolitan governance structure should be examined to create a single point of responsibility, to integrate planning horizontally across all government departments and agencies, and if necessary to deliver the infrastructure and key state government services.

Strategic Planning at the Local Level

PIA advocates a renewed emphasis on forward or strategic planning at the local level. This needs to be integrated with the ‘top down’ State and Regional Strategic Plans and the ‘bottom up’ planning responsibilities of councils under the recent “Integrated Planning and Reporting” requirements of the Department of Local Government.

Local land use planning studies require appropriate levels of research and data analysis, futures scenarios, options development and comprehensive triple bottom line analysis as the basis for deciding zoning schemes.

To obtain local support and remain politically sustainable strategic planning must involve full and proper community consultation and engagement at every step.

Good local strategic planning depends on a commitment of financial resources and skilled planning professionals to help communities plan their local areas. Up-skilling of planners and the dedication of more financial resources will be needed, and this needs to be recognised as a responsibility to be shared between State and local governments.

If you would like to know more about PIA policies visit our website www.planning.org.au/nsw or contact our policy officer on nswpolicy@planning.org.au.

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