MEDIA RELEASE
UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 7 NOVEMBER 2008

Australia’s planning system – How does it rate?

Australia is managing growth in urban centres reasonably well, and moves to streamline planning assessment processes and increase public participation in planning are having a positive impact, according to the latest results of a national survey of planning professionals.

The Planning Report Card 2008, released by Australia’s peak industry body, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), found that planners were satisfied with attempts by all jurisdictions to develop plans for managing urban growth.

“Australia has performed particularly well against four of the 12 key criteria in our online survey, including growth management, governance structures, public participation and streamlined assessment. These results show that there are positive changes being made in the planning industry across the country,” Neil Savery, National President of the PIA, said.

Asking participants to rank each area from A to E, the Planning Report Card 2008 provides constructive feedback and ideas on how to create better cities, neighbourhoods and streets.

“The Report Card is an opinion poll prepared by the people who work hard with governments, industry and communities to create the most interesting, sustainable and liveable environments possible,” Mr Savery said.

“Planning professionals work at every level of government, the development industry and the private consulting sector to create new, and enhance existing places. The participants in this Report Card are able to give first hand feedback on how we are moving forward as a nation.”

Growth management was awarded a ‘C’ by participants, who were asked to rate how the nation is performing in developing and approving regional growth management plans that integrate social, economic, environmental and transport issues.

“Some states have performed well in this area, including the ACT and Queensland and the national result was strong and steady on last year’s survey findings,” Mr Savery said.

“Meaningful public participation is another integral part of good planning practice, ensuring broad public ownership of spatial plans prior to projects going ahead.” Mr Savery said. “The importance placed on public participation has been sound and recognised by planners, with the category performing solidly at a national level again this year.”

Australian planners were also largely satisfied with both governance and streamlined assessment in the planning industry.

“This reflects the significant reform processes underway at all levels of government across Australia to reform and improve planning industry systems and outcomes,” Mr Savery said.

The Report Card indicates a National score of ‘C minus’ across all categories, but according to Mr Savery, we can expect this grade to improve in future years.

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“Australia is undergoing a significant period of legislative change and infrastructure development, with investment planned to support growth.

“Strong reform agendas and strategic plans, such as Melbourne 2030, the SEQ plan and the SA Review, are keeping planning high on the public agenda. These reforms will mean there is the opportunity for this grade to improve in 2009,” said Mr Savery.

“Comments made by survey respondents highlighted the significant achievements and new directions and greater emphasis being placed on planning across Australia. Investment in improved urban outcomes is at an all time high.

“However, we are not moving quickly enough on investment in public transport infrastructure. As a nation, Australia’s transport score reflects public concern and the current importance of national debate about where to invest and why. It also affirms the need for Infrastructure Australia and the Building Australia Fund,” said Mr Savery.

Survey respondents also indicated that demographic change, relating to the way Australia manages and addresses the ‘tree change’ and ‘sea change’ phenomena, was an area in need of more attention.

“There are many participants that impact urban form and structure including urban and regional planners, the three spheres of government, the development industry, architects, engineers, and the broader community.

“The PIA welcomes such initiatives as the Major Cities Unit and innovative state governance mechanisms aimed at producing better cross-sectoral urban outcomes,” said Mr Savery.

“The Planning Report Card 2008 is a statement about the broad endeavour of creating the communities, spaces and places in which we live and work more liveable and sustainable,” said Mr Savery.

The Planning Report Card 2008 had 814 participants.

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