

Personal submission on housing supply regulation

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Housing supply regulation inquiry. This submission asks the Commission to consider whose views are being treated as the community's views and whether the pursuit of a perfect development is preventing ordinary homes from being built. Community involvement has made these questions particularly important to me because keeping a town active depends on people being able to afford to live there and take part in it.

My involvement includes helping coordinate the Nambour Town Square Markets, volunteering at Montville Markets for more than three years, BushCare and involvement with Lions and the Sunshine Coast Agricultural Show as a Rural Ambassador. These activities involve regular contact with volunteers, stallholders, local businesses and people who come along to community events. This submission is made entirely in a personal capacity and does not represent the position of any of those organisations.

That experience provides a useful perspective on how community participation works but it does not make my own opinions representative of the whole community. The same distinction should apply when governments hear from an established association, a prominent businessperson or an important property owner. Experience and local contribution deserve respect while claims to speak for the wider community need to be tested.

Who gets heard in local planning

Many of the people who keep community activities going are older residents and homeowners who give an extraordinary amount of time to their towns. Working alongside them has made me appreciate how much would disappear without that effort. It has also made me conscious that the people able to attend meetings, serve on committees and maintain relationships with elected representatives are a particular part of the community. Their contribution does not mean their housing circumstances or priorities reflect those of people who rarely get into those rooms.

Being involved requires time, confidence and some knowledge of how the system works. Someone working irregular hours, raising children or dealing with an insecure rental situation can care deeply about their town while having very little capacity to attend another meeting or produce a carefully written submission. A person who has already moved away because they could not find suitable housing may disappear from local consultation altogether even though the planning decisions that follow remain very relevant to their life.

The concern is that governments can end up hearing repeatedly from the people with the greatest capacity to participate and then describe the result as what the community wants. A well-attended meeting establishes that its participants hold certain views. It does not establish that those views are shared by everyone affected. Equally, the absence of younger people or renters should not be treated as agreement with the people who attended or as evidence that those absent have no interest in their community.

Prominent property owners can offer valuable knowledge about local investment and the practical operation of a town centre. They also have their own interests and preferences, as everyone does. Owning a substantial amount of local property should not make someone's preferred future for a town carry more democratic weight than the needs of people who work there or hope to rent their first home there. Governments should be clear about whether they are receiving evidence from an owner, the position of an organisation or the results of consultation designed to reach a representative cross-section of residents.

The 2021 Census recorded a median age of 38 in Queensland, 43 in the Sunshine Coast local government area. These are figures for the whole resident population using the Census boundaries at that time. They do not establish the age of people attending community meetings but they do provide a reminder that the population is broader than any particular committee or consultation room. There should be actual information about who has participated before a process is described as representative!

My concern is about the way participation is organised and interpreted. Older residents do not all oppose housing and younger residents do not all support the same planning changes. The practical response is to reach a wider range of people and give their evidence proper consideration, including renters, people living with family because they cannot move out and people who work locally but cannot find a suitable home nearby. My own ability to write this submission also makes me more visible than many people whose circumstances deserve attention.

The community affected by housing decisions extends beyond the neighbours of a proposed building. It includes the people who might live in those homes and contribute to the town in years to come. An existing neighbour can identify a particular change to their street while the people who would benefit from homes that have not yet been built often have no obvious way to identify themselves. Planning decisions need to account for those benefits rather than relying on whoever can make the most immediate or persistent objection.

When the pursuit of perfection prevents housing

Too often the goal appears to be a development that satisfies every preference before anyone is allowed to build it. The building must look right to everyone, provide all the parking anyone might want and preserve the surroundings almost exactly as existing residents remember them. Each request can sound reasonable on its own yet the combined expectation can leave very little room for an ordinary project that people could actually afford to build and live in. The Commission should examine that cumulative effect rather than considering each requirement in isolation.

The appropriate standard must include safe construction, sound environmental protections and meaningful accessibility. Those requirements should have clear purposes and be delivered efficiently. Beyond them, governments need to distinguish a demonstrable harm from a preference about appearance or convenience and ask whether an additional requirement produces enough public benefit to justify its cost. A modest home can provide security and independence without being everybody's ideal home or everybody's preferred addition to the street.

The comparison also needs to include what happens when a project does not proceed. Someone waiting for a home does not automatically receive a better one because a proposal was delayed or

abandoned. They may remain in an unsuitable living arrangement or have to look further away from work, family and services. These are consequences that the assessment process should examine alongside the effects of construction. Refusing or delaying housing is a decision with consequences too.

This matters for the sort of community work that happens in Nambour. Markets and local events need people who can turn up regularly, spend a little money with local businesses and contribute their time. Preserving the appearance of a town while making it harder for people to establish a life there can undermine the community that planning is supposed to protect. A town's character includes the people able to live in it and the everyday activities they sustain.

Support for practical housing reform should therefore include accepting that different households make different choices. Some people value a smaller home near shops and transport more than a large block or several parking spaces. A planning system should allow those choices where the essential standards and infrastructure requirements can be met. Requiring every home to suit the same assumed household risks excluding people who would willingly choose something simpler.

Making ordinary housing easier to deliver

The Commission's interim report identifies broad changes to land-use controls for further consideration, including allowing three-storey development on most residential land in cities and more housing in well-serviced locations. These are reform directions being consulted on rather than final recommendations. Support for that direction should translate into straightforward opportunities for modest housing in suitable places such as Nambour, with clear rules that people can understand before committing substantial time and money.

One particular concern is whether the approvals system is usable by a local builder or smaller investor trying to provide a few homes. A fixed requirement for another report or another round of redesign may be much harder to absorb across a small project. The Commission should examine that burden explicitly and recommend proportionate documentation, consistent requirements between councils where possible and a clear point at which a compliant proposal can proceed. The ability to navigate paperwork should not become the main qualification for providing housing.

Community input is most useful when it helps establish sensible rules and identifies material problems that those rules have missed. Once clear standards have been set through a properly inclusive process, a proposal that meets them should have a predictable path to approval. Repeatedly reopening the same questions creates uncertainty for the people financing and building homes without necessarily improving the outcome for the people who will live in them.

Transport and housing also need to be considered together. As someone who relies on public transport and lifts, being near a useful service has a practical meaning beyond having a bus stop on a map. More homes near town centres should be accompanied by services that allow people to reach work and everyday activities. Parking requirements should reflect the location and available alternatives while councils manage street parking directly. Poor transport should prompt improvements to the network rather than become a permanent reason to prevent more people living near existing services.

A more open approach would allow a wider range of people to provide housing under clear and proportionate rules. It would also judge social and community housing by the same relevant questions

about safety, suitability and impact rather than treating the identity or income of prospective residents as a reason to oppose it. Success should be measured through homes completed and occupied, the time taken to deliver them and whether people have more realistic housing choices.

Changes requested

1. Require planning consultation reports to explain who participated and how they were recruited, using voluntary information about age, housing tenure and location where practical. Compare participation with the relevant population and acknowledge gaps instead of treating the number of submissions as a representative vote.
2. Actively seek input from people less likely to participate through established organisations and record the interests of prospective residents and people priced out of the area. Offer accessible ways to contribute outside formal meetings and make clear whose views an organisation has actually sought before it claims to represent them.
3. Make modest housing that meets clear standards easier to approve in suitable locations. Establish the main rules through inclusive strategic planning and limit further discretionary demands to material issues that need to be resolved for the particular proposal.
4. Assess the combined cost and delay created by requirements, including the risk that homes will not be built. Explain the public benefit of additional conditions and distinguish essential protections from preferences that may not justify preventing a project.
5. Simplify the process for small developments through proportionate reports, consistent documentation where possible and clear responsibility for decisions. Publish delivery outcomes so reform can be judged by what people can actually build and occupy.

Community organisations have a great deal to contribute to this work and so do the people who never join one. The purpose of consultation should be to help governments make informed decisions for the whole community, including its future residents. The purpose of planning should be to enable enough safe and suitable homes to be built where people need them, with a realistic understanding of the compromises involved. Building a few ordinary homes needs to become an ordinary thing again.