



August 2006

Cutting red tape in planning

15 recommended actions for a better Victorian planning system

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Message from Elaine Carbines, MLC

Parliamentary Secretary for Environment

When Rob Hulls MP, Minister for Planning, asked me to lead a review to streamline planning processes, I saw it as an opportunity to make a difference by identifying ways to make further improvements.

There have been six years of positive reforms to the planning system under the Bracks Government and although much has been achieved there is always room for improvement.

In May this year, the Minister announced the removal of a number of permit requirements for minor matters such as shade sails and garden sheds. It is estimated that this will mean that the total number of planning applications lodged each year will be reduced by up to 4000.

However, it is not just a matter of removing planning controls; there are good reasons why many planning controls exist and, in some instances, the cost of not controlling matters is significant for the community. But whenever a permit is required, it is important that the planning process adds demonstrated value.

My emphasis has been on engaging with stakeholder groups and the community to identify what needs to change and how to make these changes. While the contribution of everyone involved has been invaluable, I commend local government not only for identifying opportunities to streamline processes, but also for demonstrating a commitment to implement those changes.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of members of my steering committee who have generously volunteered countless hours to assist me throughout the review process.

The recommendations of this report have also been influenced by the comments of a Roundtable – a sounding board of key industry and government players. I recommend that this Roundtable continue to assist the Government on an ongoing basis.

The report makes recommendations for a program of action over the short, medium and long term.

I believe the actions will free up resources for councils, reduce delays and costs for small business and the development industry and relieve some community concern about the paperwork and costs associated with minor matters. These actions are particularly important for councils so that they can concentrate their attention on the things that really matter – the bigger picture.

I commend the actions to the Minister for Planning and anticipate that he will act decisively and quickly to implement the best of the ideas.

Thank you to the numerous people and organisations for their contributions in the development of this report, and for their ongoing commitment to making our planning system work well. Although we have a good and inclusive planning system, continuous improvement is essential to maintain its focus and efficiency.

Elaine Carbines MLC

Parliamentary Secretary for Environment

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Recommended actions

There are 15 recommended actions:

Actions

Move forward

The planning system has generally worked well however users of the system have identified new challenges and opportunities such as adjustments to processes, fee structures and the application of new technological opportunities.

Action 1 Introduce a code assess track

For appropriate types of applications, compliance with pre-set criteria ensures approval within a shorter time.

- 1.1 Trial methods to implement the code assess track. Use the results to recommend an implementation method.

Action 2 Expand e-planning capacity

Electronic systems to streamline processes will reduce the administrative burden for councils and applicants.

- 2.1 Develop a framework for the future development of online planning systems in Victoria and establish an expert working group to guide investment.
- 2.2 Integrate DSE online systems to offer improved access to information and a range of online planning services.

Simplify processes

Efficient and streamlined processes are a central desire of all stakeholders and partners in the planning system.

Action 3 Refine referrals

Referrals will only be needed when essential. Agreements between councils and referral authorities will cover most other needs.

- 3.1 In consultation with referral authorities, examine options to:
 - review all referrals in planning schemes and decide whether a standard agreement can be put in place to reduce the need for some referrals in each case
 - introduce a deemed to consent provision if no response to a referral is received in 21 days
 - provide for prior consent from referral authorities before submission of an application for specified types of applications.

Action 4 Align notification and review with impact

Notification requirements will be based on the likely impact of the proposal and be set out clearly and consistently in planning schemes.

- 4.1 Examine legislation to clarify consideration of objections so that objections that do not relate to the purpose of the application can be disregarded.
- 4.2 Introduce a new class of notification, to give three classes of notification, and specify the class of notice to be given for all applications.
- 4.3 Prepare guidelines that set out best practice notification procedures.

Action 5 Promote efficient decision-making

Councillors lead policy making and provide for professional administration of development approval decisions.

- 5.1 Develop one or more model delegation instruments for councils to consider.
- 5.2 Encourage the regular review of delegation schedules as part of the review of planning schemes.
- 5.3 Develop a model for the wider use of 'expert' committees early in the application process to support councils in making significant decisions.
- 5.4 Provide planning skills support for councillors, including continuing to conduct councillor training programs for planning matters.

Action 6 Reduce amendment timeframes and documentation

Planning scheme amendments will be easier and quicker to process and decide.

- 6.1 Publish performance targets for amendment processes.
- 6.2 Develop a protocol so that a panel can be pre-appointed, and the date for a directions hearing specified before exhibition when appropriate.
- 6.3 Review the *Strategic Assessment Guidelines* so that the level of strategic justification needed is proportional to the significance of the proposal.
- 6.4 Develop new simplified amendment documentation suitable for inclusion in electronic amendment systems.

Clean out and clean up

Reducing the number of matters that unnecessarily require planning approval or simplifying the level of assessment currently required will save scarce planning resources. These resources can be better utilised making State and local policy more effective.

Action 7 Remove unnecessary matters

Redundant provisions will be removed and planning schemes will be more responsive to changing circumstances.

- 7.1 Institute a procedure to fast track the removal or correction of redundant provisions in planning schemes.
- 7.2 Identify further matters that do not need planning approval.
- 7.3 Revise the *Strategic Assessment Guidelines* to improve the tests for new or expanded controls or referrals provisions.
- 7.4 Rewrite overlays so that only matters linked to the purpose of the control need planning approval.
- 7.5 Review the need for planning approval where there are duplicate processes, in consultation with relevant agencies.

Action 8 Review targeted VPP provisions

Provisions are applied in a clear, consistent manner in planning schemes.

- 8.1 Review the heritage, car parking and signage provisions in planning schemes and associated guideline documents.
- 8.2 Review the definitions in planning schemes.

Action 9 Make State policy more relevant to local decision-making

The State Planning Policy Framework must be clear, easy to navigate and relevant to decision-making.

- 9.1 Publish a discussion paper on the structure of the SPPF and its relationship to local policy.
- 9.2 Introduce a protocol about DSE attending VCAT and PPV hearings.
- 9.3 Audit the SPPF every four years to improve its effectiveness including how policies are best made relevant and effective for local decision-making.

Action 10 Make local planning policy stronger

The Local Planning Policy Framework must be clear, easy to navigate and relevant to decision-making.

- 10.1 Establish an expert team or teams to provide independent advice to councils about more effective expression of existing and new local planning policies to provide greater certainty and facilitate amendments to planning schemes arising from this process.
- 10.2 Publish a Ministerial Statement about the role of local policy in decision-making.
- 10.3 Ensure the preamble of the LPPF gives better instructions about the role and weight of local policy in planning decisions.
- 10.4 Review the VPP Practice Note *Writing Local Planning Policy* to supplement the expert teams and promote greater consistency in the expression of local planning policy and to clarify issues relating to certainty in language and expression.
- 10.5 Examine the legislative requirements associated with the three-year review of planning schemes.
- 10.6 Encourage new strategic studies to include proposed planning scheme provisions at the time of consultation so that they can be easily progressed through to planning scheme amendments.

Build resources

The shortage of planners is a nationwide issue requiring innovative responses. Local government presently uses a variety of means to address this issue that are worth promoting.

Action 11 Develop skills

On-the-job learning before graduation will help develop skilled planners. Information will be easier to access.

- 11.1 Establish a structured graduate training program within the planning industry.
- 11.2 Use the PLANET training and professional development program to provide training in areas of new need or gaps.
- 11.3 Create an online 'planning portal' through which information about the planning system can be easily accessed.

Action 12 Share resources

Scarce resources are combined to have a greater net effect.

- 12.1 Implement the MAV Planning Bank program.
- 12.2 Share information about strategic work amongst regions and promote combined projects between councils.
- 12.3 Promote the 'pooling' of resources for particular projects and functions.

Action 13 Improve enforcement capacity

Additional support and capacity building are provided for enforcement.

- 13.1 Publish an enforcement manual to assist councils with limited enforcement resources to undertake their enforcement function.
- 13.2 Develop ways to implement systematic compliance inspections for planning permits.

Looking ahead

Local government has commented that the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* came into operation almost 20 years ago.

Action 14 The Planning and Environment Act 1987

The Act continues to be relevant to the decision-making environment.

- 14.1 Examine the issues raised regarding the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and update the Act as necessary.

Action 15 Update planning fees

Planning fees to reflect the cost of providing planning assessment services.

- 15.1 Compile the data needed to support an examination of planning fees so that the system is fairer to all stakeholders.

Glossary

DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
LG	Local government
LPPF	Local Planning Policy Framework
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
Melbourne 2030	The State Government's planning policy for the metropolitan area released in 2002
MSS	Municipal Strategic Statement
PLANET	The DSE professional development and training program for planning
PPAR	The annual <i>Planning Permit Activity Report</i> published by DSE
SPPF	State Planning Policy Framework
VCAT	Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association
VPP	Victoria Planning Provisions

Introduction

Why cut red tape in planning?

The Victorian planning system has strong and equitable foundations. The Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) provide a common planning scheme structure, a set of core provisions and the *State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF)* that sets out State land use and development policy expectations. Local priorities are built in through the *Local Planning Policy Framework* and the application of zones and overlays. A partnership between State and local government is critical to the effective management of the planning system.

Local government has prompted this review to examine how both State and local government can better operate the planning system. Although the strategic basis for good decision-making is set, constant improvement to both the strategic content and the mechanisms through which the system operates must be an ongoing commitment.

The review builds on the outcomes of the *Whitney Committee (2002)* and the *Better Decisions Faster (2002–2005)* project. The review process is set out at the end of the report.

What did the review include?

The review identified opportunities to streamline the planning system by working with stakeholder groups and the community to identify what needs to change and how to make these changes. The opportunities focus on:

- setting the scene for future change
- simplifying processes so they are as efficient as possible, and clear and unambiguous in interpretation
- reducing the number of unnecessary planning permits, and refining planning policy and provisions so that they achieve clear outcomes
- building resources so that response times can be improved.

The recommended actions detailed in the report respond to issues identified during consultation. Some are highlighted for immediate implementation, others have longer lead times.

What are the issues?

The issues raised during workshops and in written submissions to the review are summarised in the CDROM included with this report or at www.dse.vic.gov.au/planning.

In addition to many specific issues, several recurrent themes emerged:

- a desire for greater prescription in planning schemes
- the current shortage of planners and its implications
- the issues and needs facing provincial Victoria.

Many submissions also raised improvement suggestions for individual provisions. It is recommended that these be reviewed and prioritised as part of a program of ongoing continuous improvement.

Where are we now?

Snapshot for 2005/2006

Planning applications received	53,270
Average processing time (approximate based on the Planning Permit Activity Report)	100 days
Proportion of applications notified (approximate)	48%
Proportion of applications determined under delegation (median)	96%
Proportion of all applications reviewed by VCAT	7%
Planning scheme amendments processed	370

Continuous improvement from State Government

There has been an ongoing program of planning reform by the State Government.

In 2002, the State Government established the Reference Group on Decision-Making Processes (the *Whitney Committee*), a stakeholder committee to make recommendations on local policy, amended plans and enforcement methods. The Reference Group affirmed its support for the policy based planning system but made a number of recommendations for improvement.

The Committee also suggested that:

...the volume of permits required under the VPP based planning system is such that the workloads for both councils and VCAT will become unsustainable without significant system review to simplify and refine processes and requirements.

The *Better Decisions Faster* report responded to this advice and sought to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of planning permit processes. The initiatives were well received and 26 of the 30 initiatives have now been completed. The four remaining initiatives have been incorporated into the recommended actions of this review.

The State Government is conscious of the resource demands that face local government for strategic planning and the development and administration of planning schemes.

Funding has been provided to local government for a range of key strategic projects including:

- *Provincial Victoria Statement* (\$13.5 million for strategic planning including \$2.0 million to assist the implementation of the Coastal Spaces report recommendations)
- *Melbourne 2030* (\$5.6 million for planning work associated with the implementation of Melbourne 2030)
- *Rural zones review* (\$150,000 to assist in developing a framework for rural studies).

In addition, the Government has:

- introduced the Priority Development Panel and the Priority Development Zone to facilitate development in key locations
- funded the introduction of new electronic systems to introduce electronic conveyancing and statewide planning permit activity reporting.

Improvement initiatives from local government

The pivotal role that local government plays in administering the planning system means that business practices must be as efficient as possible. During the review, many councils' innovative work practices were highlighted.

Some of these are outlined in the table below:

Pre-application	Process	Approval	Information
Formal pre-certification process.	Electronic tracking systems with lodgement of documents, workload management and status tracking.	Fast track systems for standardised applications (25–30%) with permits issued in 5 to 10 days.	Online advisory services about plan information requirements, processes and likely outcomes.
Expert panel to advise on application development and final decision	Internet based objection form that can be completed and submitted online.	Onsite electronic approval of tree removal applications.	Guidelines for commenting or objecting to a planning application.
	Online 'self assessment' process.	Priority Paid, 'fast track' approval system for industrial and commercial applications.	

A partnered approach to continuous improvement

The Victorian planning system has a long history of continuous improvement. The introduction of new format planning schemes enabled greater consistency and transparency in planning decision-making, and set up ongoing monitoring and regular review of planning schemes. Projects like the *Whitney Committee, Better Decisions Faster* and VCAT's *Operation Jaguar* have focussed on improving the process elements of the planning system.

Local government has also implemented a wide range of improvements from electronic systems to high levels of delegation of decision-making.

This current review proposes a continuous improvement model based on additional monitoring and specific organisational arrangements to fill identified gaps in current improvement practices.

Monitoring

The introduction of the *Planning Permit Activity Report (PPAR)* has allowed easier monitoring of the planning permit system. The PPAR identifies the primary matters that require planning approval, differences between metropolitan and rural areas, and permit workload volumes.

The introduction of a computerised system in mid 2007 will enhance the capacity to provide information on:

- further information requests
- notification
- referral
- timeframes for decision-making.

Proposed enhancements to DSE's Amendment Tracking System will give improved information about:

- the number of planning scheme amendments
- timeframes for component parts of the amendment process
- types of amendments.

Organisational arrangements

The partnership approach developed between the State Government and stakeholders during the review process has been of enormous value and has directly influenced the recommended actions contained in this report. Industry stakeholders affected by the planning system are well placed to assist the State Government deliver its commitment to ongoing improvement.

I recommend that the following ongoing organisational arrangements be put in place:

- the Roundtable representing relevant peak bodies established as part of the review be given an ongoing role which amongst other things, considers proposals for future improvements to the planning system as they are put forward by industry stakeholders. The Roundtable should have the opportunity to report its deliberations directly to the Minister for Planning.
- a technical working group be established to tap into technical expertise. The purpose would be to assist DSE in data collection, concept development, road testing and implementation.

An ongoing continuous improvement model

The components of an ongoing continuous improvement model are outlined in the table below:

What	Mechanism	How often	In place
System monitoring			
Planning permits	PPAR	Published annually	Yes
Planning scheme amendments	Amendment tracking system	Monthly	Yes
Issue identification	Guideline judgements (VCAT)	As required	Yes
	Findings reports (PPV)	As required	Proposed
VPPs			
SPPF	Regular audit by DSE	Every 4 years	Proposed
Other provisions	Regular audit by DSE	As required	Yes
Responding to expert comments by PPV and VCAT	VCAT & PPV to make improvement suggestions to DSE	As required	Partly
Planning schemes			
LPPF	Regular review by council	Every 3 years (proposed every 4)	Yes
	Policy enhancement project	As requested	Proposed
Other provisions	Regular review by council	Every 3 years (proposed every 4)	Yes
Responding to expert comments by PPV and VCAT	VCAT & PPV provide improvement suggestions to council, where identified	As required	Yes
Access to information	A web based planning portal that includes links to planning system information such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Victoria's Planning System Practice and advisory notes PLANET training courses Other useful tools DSE e-bulletin 	Ongoing	Improvement proposed
The implementation of this review	A web page that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates the progress on each initiative. Documents and promotes local government innovations. Creates a chat room to allow for best practice discussions. Establishes an email link for improvement suggestions. 	Ongoing	Proposed
	Roundtable	Ongoing	Yes
	Road testing with technical working group	Ongoing	Proposed
Evaluate new ideas	Planning Systems, DSE	Ongoing	Yes
	Roundtable	Ongoing	Yes
	Road testing with technical working group	Ongoing	Proposed

Move forward

The Victorian planning system is strongly underpinned by policy to inform decision-making and promote good strategic outcomes.

The system has generally worked well but there are aspects that councils, the development industry and the community consider could be improved. It is also timely to consider whether the application of new technological opportunities, would be assisted by new or enhanced provisions.

This section recommends:

- the introduction of a new assessment track for straightforward applications (Action 1 – the code assess track)
- further investment in technology (Action 2).

Action 1 Introduce a code assess track

Many submissions raised concern that the standards to be met are not clearly set out in planning schemes, and because of this, the planning approval process is unnecessarily delayed. They suggest that more prescriptive standards would bring greater certainty to planning schemes.

Balancing a range of competing policies is not required for all types of use and development. In some circumstances, the desired outcomes are clear and the particular standards either exist or can be developed.

The DAF *Leading Practice Model* (see www.daf.gov.au) suggests that a code assess track can be used for development assessed against standard criteria where it is appropriate that the development can always proceed if the criteria are met.

The features of a code assess track would include:

- the required objective standards for a particular issue or type of use or development. Provided an application meets the criteria, a standard consent would be given
- non-compliance would mean either the proposal is refused or it defaults, depending on the process adopted, to a merit assessment (the current permit process)
- the applicant could seek a review of the decision; however, there would be no third-party notice or right to review.

For a code assess track to operate successfully it must be clear that it applies before an application is submitted; otherwise, there is confusion as to whether the standard can be varied and whether notification is required.

The criteria must be able to be clearly assessable against prescriptive or performance standards. Any debate about compliance would undermine any potential benefits associated with the code assess track.

It is essential that the criteria are developed in consultation with the community so they are transparent for all parties and applications do not have to be notified individually.

There is significant potential for improvement in assessment timeframes with a code assess track because assessment is against objective standards. The Australian Capital Territory has applied 20 working days as the timeframe for a decision.

It is recommended that the code assess track be evaluated with pilot programs for buildings and works applications in industrial or commercial zones, and residential extensions captured by the small lot control in residential zones.

The pilot programs could examine:

- whether timeframes for decision-making were reduced and the average timeframes for decisions
- the appropriateness of the standards
- the most effective process methodology.

Recommended action	Key Milestone	Responsibility
1.1 Trial methods to implement the code assess track. Use the results to recommend an implementation method.	Feb 07 Trials complete	DSE, LG, Roundtable & Technical Working Group

Action 2 Expand e-planning capability

Computerised systems for tracking and administering planning applications have the potential to make a significant contribution to streamlined planning processes.

Sixty Victorian councils have some form of computerised planning application system. The remaining 19 councils either have no system or utilise in-house systems based on standard office software such as MS Excel.

The Federal Government through its *Red Tape Reduction Incentive Fund* has made \$15 million in funding available to various electronic projects related to planning including:

- National Electronic Development Assessment (*NeDA*)
- *EasyBiz* (an online interface for local government regulatory processes)
- *Pathway to eBusiness* (online planning services for 16 Victorian councils)

These initiatives supplement the various recent Victorian Government e-planning projects, such as:

- *Planning Permit Activity Reporting* (PPAR) – captures data and reports on planning permit activity in the State for monitoring purposes
- *SPEAR* – lodgement, referral, tracking and approval online of subdivision applications
- *ZAPP* – content management system for all Victorian planning schemes, designed to support and simplify the planning scheme amendment process
- *Amendment Tracking System* – tracking of planning scheme amendments and associated documentation
- *Planning Schemes Online* – access to planning schemes (including maps) via the DSE website.
- *Planning Certificates Online* – delivery of planning certificates online.

The significant investment in technology and likely further investment necessitates a coordinated approach to online service delivery. The issues that need to be resolved are:

- the lack of a shared, strategic view about how systems should integrate or co-exist in the long term. There is a high risk of duplication of effort
- the high costs associated with system and project development necessitate a sustainable funding model to support further development of systems
- the need for new systems to conform to an agreed industry standard that enables data to be transferred between existing and developing State and local government systems (such as the NeDA standard).
- the need for all councils to have access to e-planning systems to ensure the community is not disadvantaged in particular areas.

Some options for integrating existing and emerging capabilities

e-Planning services	e-Planning objectives	System source
Online lodgement of development applications	<p>Enable applicants to lodge planning applications online to reduce delays associated with application lodgement.</p> <p>Remove need to convert application documents from electronic files into paper applications.</p>	<p>Extend SPEAR to support online lodgement of planning applications for all Victorian councils.</p> <p>Ensure SPEAR co-exists with existing systems and offers add on functions (for example referrals).</p>

e-Planning services	e-Planning objectives	System source
Online tracking of applications	Enable stakeholders to enquire about application progress anytime, anywhere over the internet. Reduce administrative load on councils caused by multiple enquires about application status.	Extend SPEAR to support online tracking of planning applications for all Victorian councils. Ensure SPEAR co-exists with existing systems and offers additional functions (for example referrals).
Online planning processes	Enable planning transactions to be carried out online (for example fee payment, advertising, further information requests, referrals).	Extend SPEAR to support online tracking of planning applications for all Victorian councils.
Statistical reporting	Increase the availability of statistics about planning processes for monitoring purposes. Promote ongoing Council participation in the PPAR project.	Extend the PPAR system to support other forms of data exchange between DSE and councils.
Online access to land information	Enable online access to planning information services in a convenient easy to use manner.	See Action 12.3.
Online tracking of amendments	Enable the progress of planning scheme amendments to be tracked online.	Extend the ZAPP system so that planning scheme amendment status is tracked directly from ZAPP.
Online identification by site	Allow planning control information to be integrated with online mapping functions to allow searchable zoning and property information.	Integrate the planning scheme content in ZAPP and with Planning Maps Online to provide site specific, searchable planning information.
Lodgement and search for VCAT appeals	Provide capacity to create electronic lodgement of appeals. Enable searching of VCAT decisions.	Develop a new system to support electronic lodgement of appeals to VCAT.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
2.1 Develop a framework for the future development of online planning systems in Victoria and establish an expert working group to guide investment.	March 07 Expert group established	DSE
2.2 Integrate DSE online systems to offer improved access to information and a range of online planning services.	Jun 08	DSE

Simplify processes

Simplifying planning processes is critical to timely decision-making. This section builds on *Better Decisions Faster* and recommends:

- reform to the referrals process to ensure that referrals only occur when essential specific advice is required (Action 3)
- improvements to the consistency of notification practices (Action 4)
- regular review of delegation practices (Action 5)
- the introduction of performance targets for timeframes in the planning scheme amendment process (Action 6).

Action 3 Refine referrals

Referral requirements in planning schemes have a valid role in ensuring that proposals meet important technical requirements. However, delays due to referral provisions were identified as a significant factor in delaying decisions. Stakeholders indicated the strong position that where a referral requirement is included in a scheme, referral authorities must be able to respond in a timely fashion.

The Australian Capital Territory has recently introduced a deemed to consent provision where if a referral agency has not responded within the prescribed time the agency is considered to consent to the application. It is recommended that Victoria examine options for the introduction of a similar provision.

The use of technology can substantially reduce response times, particularly where a response is standard. Melbourne Water, for example, has reduced response times for some subdivision applications to 24 hours.

In many circumstances, it may also be possible, for referral agencies to specify their requirements in advance of a planning permit application so no referral is required during assessment of the application, particularly where the requirement relies on specific technical information, such as a flood level. For such matters, it could be the applicant's responsibility to obtain the referral authority comment (or consent) and to include it with the application. For other matters, referral authorities may be able to specify in a standard agreement that referral is not required if specified requirements are met.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
3.1 In consultation with relevant authorities, examine options to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review all referrals in planning schemes and decide whether a standard agreement can be put in place to reduce the need for some referrals in each case • introduce a deemed to consent provision if no response to a referral is received in 21 days • provide for prior consent from referral authorities before submission of an application for specified types of applications. 	Aug 07	DSE, referral authorities, LG, & Technical Working Group

Action 4 Align notification and review with impact

Third party involvement in the Victorian planning system is recognised as an important component of a fair and equitable system. The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* sets out what a responsible authority must consider when deciding whether to give notice, and when an applicant or third party can appeal a decision. The Act also enables planning schemes to specify notice requirements for classes of applications and to exempt applications from notice.

There are wide ranging interpretations of what is reasonable notice and this sometimes results in confusion in the community and the development industry.

Better Decisions Faster proposed three classes of notification, these being:

Class 1 – No notification

Class 2 – Notification of adjoining and opposite owners only

Class 3 – General notification – as considered appropriate by the responsible authority.

Planning schemes currently identify a range of circumstances where notification is not required (Class 1). It is recommended that Class 2 be introduced to planning schemes to outline those circumstances where notification is only required to adjoining and opposite owners.

In addition, it is suggested that best practice guidelines about the reasonable extent and type of notification for Class 3 would promote more consistent notification practices. These guidelines could include:

- advice as to how an applicant should satisfy council that the notification has occurred as directed
- plain English notification forms
- best practice ideas, such as including a reduced version of the development plans with the notice form
- advice about mediation – when can it help, how to achieve the best results

The guideline might also include a model 'Submission form' that encourages objectors to more specifically set out how an application may affect them.

A number of submissions also suggested providing an ability to not consider an objection where it does not relate to the permit requirement. For example, objections relating to use as a restaurant when the application is only for waiving the car parking requirement should not be considered.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
4.1 Examine legislation to clarify consideration of objections so that objections that do not relate to the purpose of the application can be disregarded.	Jun 07	DSE & LG
4.2 Introduce a new class of notification in planning schemes to give three classes of notification, and specify the class of notice to be given for all applications	Aug 07 VPP's amended	DSE, Roundtable, Technical Working Group & LG
4.3 Prepare guidelines that set out best practice notification procedures	Dec 07 Guidelines released	DSE & LG

Action 5 Promote efficient decision-making

An MAV survey indicates that most planning permit decisions are delegated to planning officers. The survey suggests councillors make about 4% of planning permit decisions; however, this varies considerably between councils.

To promote better delegation practices, it may be useful to develop model delegations for councils to consider. It is also appropriate for councillors to consider the efficiency of their delegation schedule when the planning scheme undergoes regular review. This review should ensure officers can make decisions that are consistent with stated policy.

As policy makers, councillors may sometimes need to be involved in planning permit decisions if an application raises an issue of policy or has significant new policy implications. A number of submissions expressed concern that some councillors may not have the knowledge or skills to make decisions in accordance with the relevant planning scheme. In these circumstances, it may be useful to council to establish an expert committee early in application process to draw on both internal and external specialist skills and to assist councillors in their final decision-making. The training efforts of the VLGA and MAV should also continue, and DSE and local government could develop additional skill support for councillors.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
5.1 Develop one or more model delegation instruments for councils to consider	Dec 06 Model delegations released	MAV & VLGA
5.2 Encourage the regular review of delegation schedules as part of the review of planning schemes	Ongoing	DSE
5.3 Develop a model for the wider use of 'expert' committees early in the application process to support councils in making significant decisions	Ongoing	VLGA & MAV
5.4 Provide planning skill support for councillors, including continuing to conduct councillor training programs for planning matters.	Ongoing	VLGA & MAV

Action 6 Reduce amendment timeframes & documentation

Many submissions raised concerns about the timeframes associated with the planning scheme amendment process. There may be potential to reduce timelines in some areas such as:

- electronic transfer of documents
- pre-appointment of panels, when it is known there will be submissions, to avoid long timelines between exhibition and consideration by a panel
- authorisation of amendments
- approval of amendments.

Many Council submissions also raised concerns about the work involved in the planning scheme amendment process. The quantity and scope of documentation required for amendments is perceived as a disincentive to preparing an amendment.

The technology now exists through the Zope Amendment Production Platform (ZAPP) and the Amendment Tracking System (ATS) for documentation to be automatically generated at each stage of the amendment process without having to re-enter information. For example, the property description, once entered can be re-used wherever needed. Once ZAPP is in full operation there should be a substantial reduction in replication.

If an amendment proceeds to a panel hearing then the only additional work required should be to prepare a 'response to submissions'. If a full hearing is required then it is suggested that a panel could make explicit directions to council about the type of additional material that should be provided.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
6.1 Publish performance targets for amendment processes	Dec 06 Targets released	DSE
6.2 Develop a protocol so that a panel can be pre-appointed, and the date for a directions hearing to be specified prior to exhibition where appropriate	Mar 07 Protocol released	DSE & PPV
6.3 Review the <i>Strategic Assessment Guidelines</i> so that the level of strategic justification needed is proportional to the significance of the proposal	Mar 07 Revised SAG released	DSE, Roundtable, PPV & LG
6.4 Develop new simplified amendment documentation suitable for inclusion in electronic amendment systems.	Jun 07 Revised documents available	DSE, PPV, Technical Working Group & LG

Clean out and clean up

Many submissions indicated that while there is broad support for policy based planning schemes concerns remain about the operation of State and local policy and how they integrate in decision-making. At times, this leads to delays in decisions and different interpretations by councils and VCAT.

There are also resource constraints to efficient policy based decision-making. The number of planners available to make planning permit decisions is less than the required number to assess the 53,000 applications received annually.

Realistically, this imbalance needs to be reduced by identifying both opportunities to remove unnecessary matters from the need for planning approval and by streamlining the process for straightforward applications.

According to submitters, there is scope to further reduce the number of matters that unnecessarily require planning approval and to simplify the level of assessment currently required. This would allow greater attention to be given to more complex proposals and to tasks such as policy development and planning scheme improvement.

This section recommends:

- possible opportunities for the removal of further unnecessary matters from the system, a protocol for removing redundant provisions and increased rigour in assessing whether new permit requirements should be included (Action 7)
- review of targeted VPP provisions (Action 8).
- improvements to the SPPF and LPPF to improve their inter-relationship, expression and currency (Actions 9 & 10)

Action 7 Remove unnecessary matters

Many submissions identified matters that could be removed from the need for planning approval. The Minister for Planning has previously announced that the need for planning approval will be removed for:

- minor works associated with a dwelling currently captured by the small lot provisions
- minor works associated with a dwelling currently captured by the heritage provisions
- minor works in business areas.

The amendment for these changes is being prepared and it is recommended that the amendment be approved and gazetted as soon as possible.

A further range of minor matters that can be fully or partially exempt from planning control were also identified. Subject to further consultation, these could include:

- fences
- swimming pools
- single dwellings and single dwelling extensions that meet prescribed standards
- subdivision of existing buildings
- tree pruning
- satellite dishes
- temporary banners
- minor attachments and services to commercial buildings such as lift overruns, cooling towers and flagpoles
- artwork
- minor works undertaken by local government.

If these matters were removed from planning schemes this would result in an estimated reduction of 3000 planning permit applications annually on top of the estimated 4000 permits removed in the first stage.

Submitters also suggested that the efficiency of planning schemes could be further improved by rewriting overlays so that only matters clearly linked to the purpose of the control need planning approval. I recommend that revised standard overlay schedules be considered to avoid unnecessary matters being captured by particular overlays.

Matters already controlled by other processes

The review process also identified a number of matters which require a licence or permits under other legislation as well as a planning approval. This duplication is time and resource intensive, may incur an additional fee and may not provide any significant additional benefit to the community.

It may be possible to remove matters from the planning system if the issues that the planning process currently considers can be adequately addressed by another approval mechanism.

Redundant provisions

Submissions raised the ongoing need to update planning schemes as new information or circumstances change, by updating provisions that cease to be relevant or effective.

Examples include:

- Removing overlays that manage a hazard, such as the Special Building Overlay, Land Subject to Inundation Overlay, Erosion Management Overlay from properties no longer subject to the hazard.
- Removing the Environmental Audit Overlay after the audit has been carried out.
- Removing the Public Acquisition Overlay after the land has been acquired.
- Rezoning land from the Public Use Zone if it is no longer in public ownership.

It is recommended that a 'fast track' protocol be developed using the existing provisions of section 20(4) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, specifying appropriate standards of validation for the changed circumstance and, where necessary, ensuring that proposals to remove or correct out of date provisions are progressed through a separate amendment.

Tests for new permit or referral requirements

To prevent the recapture of matters or the inappropriate introduction of new permit or referral requirements, there must be clear justification for the inclusion of new permit triggers in planning schemes.

A series of tests that could be used to assess the appropriateness and extent of new controls emerged from the review. It is recommended that the inclusion of a new provision be considered against tests such as:

- Can other existing regulatory or process mechanisms directly and effectively deal with the issue sought to be controlled?
- Is the scale of the proposal sufficient to generate an impact that justifies the need for planning consent?
- Does the cost of compliance outweigh the community benefit?
- Is it likely that a planning assessment will improve the outcome?
- Does the control capture matters that do not specifically relate to the purpose or objectives of the control?

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
7.1 Institute a procedure to fast track the removal or correction of redundant provisions in planning schemes	Dec 06 Fast track procedure in place	DSE, Roundtable & Technical Working Group
7.2 Identify further matters that do not need planning approval	Mar 07 Schemes amended	Roundtable, DSE & LG
7.3 Revise the <i>Strategic Assessment Guidelines</i> to improve tests for new or expanded control or referral provisions	Mar 07 SAG revised	DSE
7.4 Rewrite overlays so that only matters linked to the purpose of the control need planning approval.	Jun 07 VPP overlays reformatted	DSE, LG & Technical Working Group
7.5 Review the need for planning approval for matters where there are duplicate processes, in consultation with relevant agencies	Aug 07	Roundtable, LG, DSE & relevant agencies

Action 8 Review targeted VPP provisions

Heritage

Heritage is managed in planning schemes by a combination of State and local policy and the provisions of the Heritage Overlay. A number of submitters have suggested that the heritage provisions be reviewed. Review of the heritage provisions, opportunities to reduce the number of permit applications and streamlining the approval processes under the Heritage Overlay could be conducted by an Advisory Committee. This could include opportunities to use the code assess track identified in Action 1.

Car parking

An Advisory Committee has already been appointed to review the car parking provisions. The Advisory Committee is to make recommendations on integration of the *Melbourne 2030* policy objectives, the relevance of the existing provisions and opportunities to streamline the car parking provisions.

Signage

Some submitters indicated that the signage provisions in planning schemes need review so that they are easier to understand and more relevant to emerging trends in advertising signage such as projected images, advertising on street furniture and integration with buildings.

I recommend that a review of the signage be conducted by an Advisory Committee to consider opportunities to simplify the relevant provisions, reduce the number of permit applications and streamlining the approvals process.

Definitions

It is recommended that the definitions in planning schemes be reviewed to ensure they are relevant and up-to-date. Many of the submissions made reference to specific definitions they would like to see modified or included. These included café, backpackers, childcare centres, bar and nightclub.

I recommend that a review of definitions be conducted by an Advisory Committee to consider opportunities to simplify the definitions.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
8.1 Review the heritage, car parking and signage provisions in planning schemes and associated guideline documents	Feb 07 Car parking report submitted Apr 07 Heritage report submitted Dec 07 Signage report submitted	DSE, Roundtable, Technical Working Group
8.2 Review the definitions in planning schemes	Dec 07 Report submitted	DSE, Roundtable, Technical Working Group

Action 9 Make State policy more relevant to local decision-making

The SPPF has been in operation in its current form for 10 years. Although its policy content is updated and reviewed as new State policy is approved, the structure and expression have changed little, and can be made more effective and easier to apply to decision-making.

Some submissions called for an improvement in the relationship between the SPPF and LPPF's to give greater clarity about how State policy can be applied in local circumstances. It is recommended that options to improve the structure of the SPPF and its relationship to local policy be developed for discussion.

A number of submissions suggested that the SPPF and VPP tools should be reviewed every three or four years in the same way as planning schemes are reviewed. It is recommended that a regular audit of the SPPF be undertaken to ensure its ongoing relevance to local decision-making. The initial audit could also include a review of the functionality of the current SPPF structure.

Some submitters also suggested increased involvement by DSE is needed for the interpretation of State policy. They suggest:

- a formal mechanism for comment by State Government on matters affecting State policy or of State or regional significance
- greater attendance at PPV and VCAT by DSE for matters of State or regional significance.

It is recommended that a protocol be developed to guide DSE's future attendance at panels and VCAT where DSE does not have a specific statutory role.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
9.1 Publish a discussion paper on options to improve the structure of the SPPF and its relationship to local policy	Feb 07 Discussion paper released	DSE
9.2 Introduce a protocol about DSE attending VCAT and PPV hearings.	May 07 Protocol implemented	DSE
9.3 Audit the SPPF every four years to improve its effectiveness including how policies are best made relevant and effective for local decision-making	Jun 07 First audit	DSE, Roundtable & LG

Action 10 Make local planning policy stronger

The status and role of local planning policy in decision-making was previously considered by the *Whitney Committee* and the *Better Decisions Faster* project. Although policy based planning schemes have broad support, councils want greater weight given to local planning policy in VCAT decisions.

This is appropriate if the local policies are consistent with State policy or provide local expression of how State policy will be delivered on the ground. Most local policies go through an approval process, that includes a review by an independent panel and they should be applied consistently by councils and VCAT, except where it is clearly inappropriate or undesirable to do so.

Because of the differing views about the role and status of local policy I recommend that the Minister consider making a formal statement clarifying:

- the relationship between State and local policy reinforcing the importance of local policy in planning decisions
- what happens when there is no State policy on the particular issue
- that all policies used in decision-making be contained in planning schemes.

The Statement should also encourage councils to seriously review their local policies, with the assistance of the State Government, so that they are best positioned to achieve consistent outcomes.

Many submissions raised the costs associated with policy reviews, the difficulty of getting stakeholder engagement about broad issues, long timeframes and competing priorities as disincentives to the improvement of local policies. The capacity to undertake policy improvements also varies considerably across the State. In provincial Victoria, in particular, there are limited resources and many competing priorities.

It is recommended that one or more expert teams be established to assist councils implement low cost, policy neutral reviews of their local planning policies. The expert team or teams could include council representatives and would ensure that local policies are clear, concise and unambiguous. In addition, the review teams could assess whether:

- the desired outcome is mandatory compliance or flexibility. If it is mandatory compliance then the policy may need to be translated into a control
- the language of the policy is clear enough to identify the matters that an applicant should comply with
- the policy is consistent with State policy (if appropriate) and if not how it can be modified to achieve consistency.

It is also suggested that any policy neutral improvements arising from this process could be fast tracked by Ministerial amendment.

To backup the review of local planning policy it is recommended that the preamble to the LPPF be amended to more clearly outline the role of local policy and that the VPP Practice Note *Writing Local Planning Policy* be reviewed and include model policies where this would be of benefit.

Where strategic studies anticipate implementation through planning scheme provisions it is recommended that the proposed statutory provisions be developed at the same time, so that they can be shown to be practical and achievable, tested with DSE and other stakeholders.

The requirement to review planning schemes every three years was also raised as a resource issue for councils. This is an important part of continuous improvement of the planning system and it is sensible to amend this requirement to every four years to align with other local government review requirements.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
10.1 Establish an expert team or teams to provide independent advice to councils about more effective expression of existing and new local planning policy to provide greater certainty and facilitate amendments to planning schemes arising from this process	Dec 06 Team operational	DSE & PPV
10.2 Publish a Ministerial Statement about the role of local policy in decision-making	Mar 07 Ministerial statement	DSE
10.3 Ensure the preamble of the LPPF gives better instructions about the role and weight of local policy in planning decisions	Mar 07 Preamble amended	DSE & Roundtable
10.4 Review the VPP Practice Note <i>Writing Local Planning Policy</i> to promote greater consistency in the expression of local planning policy and to clarify issues relating to certainty in language and expression	Mar 07 Revised practice note	DSE & PPV
10.5 Examine the legislative requirements associated with the three-year review of planning schemes.	Jun 07	DSE
10.6 Encourage new strategic studies to include proposed provisions at the time of consultation so that they can be easily progressed through to planning scheme amendments	Ongoing	LG & DSE

Build resources

The shortage of planners is a nationwide issue that has attracted significant attention over the last few years. There are about 800 planners in local government in Victoria and most of these are in metropolitan Melbourne. There is an average of 19 planners at each metropolitan council while the average for rural Victoria is four planners.

In addition to streamlining planning processes it is important to consider how scarce resources can be better utilised and how to develop skills so that the planning process can be as efficient as possible.

This section suggests:

- an approach to student and graduate skill development (Action 11)
- how to build resources through the MAV's Planning Bank concept and the sharing of resources between councils (Action 12)
- potential improvements to enforcement capacity (Action 13)

Action 11 Develop skills

Submissions from a range of stakeholders pointed to the ongoing need to develop and maintain skills for planning professionals.

On the job training and support is important for the transfer of information and skill development. Workplace training is already a component of some existing tertiary studies; however, the learning outcomes from work placements could be improved through the:

- development of base competencies for local government planners and the achievement of these during work placements
- development of a State and local government graduate development program
- promotion of scholarships and cadetships (\$380,000 has already been provided for provincial Victoria from the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund).

The PLANET program run by DSE seeks to enhance the skills and knowledge of planning professionals. PLANET plays a vital role in communicating DSE new initiatives and system changes and assists in developing the knowledge and effectiveness of planners. Suggested topic areas for future courses that emerged from the review are:

- preparation of structure plans and development contribution plans
- making policy relevant to decision-making
- design assessment skills
- referrals
- notification
- secondary consents.

Many submissions also indicated that the availability of practice information for planners is something that could be improved. Although there is a wide range of information available on the DSE website, such as *Using Victoria's Planning System* and *Planning Practice Notes*, navigation to some of these resources is complicated. The United Kingdom has an online 'planning portal' that condenses all information about the planning system; planning schemes, a national planning register, specific guidelines and job vacancies www.planningportal.gov.uk. The site has different access points for professional planners and the community. It is recommended that the feasibility of adopting a similar approach for Victoria be investigated.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
11.1 Establish a structured graduate training program within the planning industry	Ongoing	DSE & MAV
11.2 Use the PLANET training and professional development program to provide training in areas of new need or gaps	Ongoing	DSE
11.3 Create an online 'planning portal' through which information about the planning system can be easily accessed	Jun 08 Planning portal operating	DSE

Action 12 Share resources

The shortage of planners is a concern. In particular, submissions from provincial Victoria raised concern about the scarcity of staff resources and the demands of policy development.

The demand for planners, particularly for strategic projects, is variable. The MAV has developed a 'Planning Bank' concept that is essentially an on-call resource agency to match work needs with available resources. The role of the MAV is to underwrite the capability of those registered with Planning Bank. It is anticipated that the Planning Bank will be most useful to provincial Victoria and will encourage relationships or partnerships between councils. The Planning Bank has received funding from the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund.

Substantial funding has been made available to assist councils implement strategic projects. To promote flow-on benefits from this funding, the methodology, findings and recommendations of strategic work could be shared between councils to the extent possible. This can be facilitated through:

- consistent project requirements (where desirable)
- a continuous improvement website and chat rooms
- information sharing sessions amongst regions.

Submissions indicated an option to address scarce resources that has not yet been fully explored is the 'pooling' of resources between councils. Sections 86 and 88 of the *Local Government Act 1989* enable the authorisation of officers of other municipalities for a particular purpose.

The pooling of resources is also relevant to regional or issue based collaborative policy development. The Inner Melbourne Action Plan (IMAP) is an example of a regional strategy and action plan. Four inner regional councils and VicUrban developed the Plan. Formalised governance arrangements are in place to facilitate the implementation of IMAP. In provincial Victoria the development of the *Great Ocean Road Region Strategy* was a collaborative effort between DSE and coastal councils.

It is recommended that this approach be explored by councils on an issue basis. This mechanism could, for example, work well for rural strategies where the issues involved are similar between adjoining municipalities.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
12.1 Implement the MAV Planning Bank program.	Ongoing	MAV
12.2 Share information about strategic work amongst regions and promote combined projects between adjacent councils.	Ongoing	LG & DSE
12.3 Promote the 'pooling' of resources for particular projects or functions.	Ongoing	DSE & MAV

Action 13 Improve enforcement capacity

Effective enforcement is fundamental to the operation of the planning system. There must be both a check of compliance and consequences for non-compliance. There is some dissatisfaction about the level of checking of compliance with conditions of planning permits. There is a perception that councils rely on the community to 'police' development compliance.

The Planning Enforcement Officers Association plays a valuable role in the professional development of enforcement officers, and sharing of knowledge. The compilation of an enforcement manual outlining legislative requirements and best practice for the collection of evidence, prosecution and briefs would be a valuable tool.

There is a view that enforcement of planning schemes and permits is a community service that is funded through the rates system. An alternative view is that compliance with a permit is the responsibility of the permit applicant and any formal inspection regime should be built in at the cost of the applicant.

As well as applying to strategic work, the sharing of resources suggested in Action 13.3 could equally apply to the enforcement of planning schemes. While one municipality may not justify the appointment of an enforcement officer, the combination of several municipalities might.

Recommended actions	Key Milestone	Responsibility
13.1 Publish an enforcement manual to assist councils with limited enforcement resources to undertake their enforcement function	Jun 07 Manual published	MAV, PEOA & DSE
13.2 Develop ways to implement systematic compliance inspections for planning permits	Jun 08 Discussion Paper released	DSE & LG

Looking ahead

The planning system operates under the mandate of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

This section recommends that the Act be examined to explore issues raised during the review process (Action 14).

Action 14 The Planning and Environment Act 1987

Many submitters raised issues which impact on the operation of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

It is recommended that the Act be examined to explore the issues raised by submitters during this process and to ensure that it continues to provide a basis for a fair, efficient and transparent planning system.

A program to develop options to improve the operation of the Act could involve:

- stakeholder consultation
- identification of the scope of change needed
- review of best practice opportunities in other jurisdictions
- development of a systematic program to consider and refine options for improvement.

Recommended action	Key Milestone	Responsibility
14.1 Examine the issues raised regarding the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> and update the Act as necessary	Mar 07 Establish committee and terms of reference established	DSE & Roundtable

Action 15 Update planning fees

Most councils consider the fees and charges prescribed under the Planning and Environment (Fees) Regulations 2000 do not adequately reflect the actual cost of council planning application assessment services.

An examination of the prescribed fees has commenced, concentrating on data availability and requirements to quantify the costs of components of the planning process. The MAV and a working group of councils are assisting this process.

The objective of considering fees is to ensure we have a planning fees system that:

- better relates fees to the cost of providing the service (there must also be a recognition of public benefit)
- allows for fees to be systematically rebated in appropriate cases, such as where there is a public interest or where the full fee would be disproportionate to the cost of the proposal.

Recommended action	Key Milestone	Responsibility
15.1 Compile the data needed to support an examination of planning fees so that the system is fairer for all stakeholders.	Feb 07	DSE & LG

The review process

What was the process?

The review process included:

- Submissions:** The opportunity for stakeholders to express their particular concerns and suggestions for improvement. Submissions were received from 125 interested parties including local government, referral agencies, the development industry, community and environmental groups, planning professionals and individuals.
- Workshops:** A series of workshops to identify issues of concern to stakeholders. The workshops were stakeholder based as well as theme based.
- Review Group:** An expert group that acted as the Steering Committee for the review and also provided input into the development of the actions developed in the report.
- Roundtable:** A representative group of stakeholders that acted as a sounding board for the 'quick fix' improvements to planning schemes as well as particular actions in the report. It is expected the Roundtable will continue to assist the Government to consider proposals and options to improve the planning system.

Membership of the review group

The Review Group was made up of:

- Elaine Carbines MLC:** Parliamentary Secretary for Environment (Chair)
- Peter Allen:** Executive Director Statutory Systems, DSE
- Catherine Dale:** Chief Executive Officer, Bayside City Council
(MAV – metropolitan representative)
- Beth Davidson:** Councillor Surf Coast Shire
(President VLGA representative)
- Mark Marsden:** Senior Panel Member, PPV
- Lindsay Merritt:** Chief Executive Officer, Warrnambool City Council
(substitute for Lucinda Peterson)
- Lucinda Peterson:** Strategic Planning Coordinator, Warrnambool City Council
(MAV – provincial representative)
- Lester Townsend:** Senior Panel Member, PPV

Membership of the Roundtable

The Roundtable comprises:

Sarah Buckeridge	Royal Australian Institute of Architects – Victoria
Trevor Budge	President, Planning Institute of Australia – Victorian Division
Liz Johnstone	Senior Policy Adviser – Planning, MAV
Julie Katz	President, Urban Development Institute of Australia
Jenny Moles	Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association
David Mulhall	Building Designers Association of Victoria
Janine Nechwatal	Assistant Director – Planning and Environment, Housing Industry Association (Victoria)
Rae Perry	Chief Operations Officer / Deputy CEO, Victorian Local Governance Association
Ian Quick	President, Save Our Suburbs (Vic)
Simon Ramsay	President, Victorian Farmers Federation
Brendan Rogers	Director, UrbisJHD, Property Council of Australia – Victoria
Brendan Sydes	Principal Solicitor, Environment Defenders Office (Vic)
Rick Traficante	Urban and Regional Planner, Master Builders Association of Victoria

Working in partnership with local government

The Review Group worked in partnership with local government to conduct meetings, presentations and small group workshops. Three major forums were held:

‘Improving the Planning System: A Forum for Local Government’ took place in November 2005. This was a joint initiative of the Eastern Metropolitan Group of councils and the Minister for Planning.

The ‘Sustainable Development in Regional Communities’ Conference was held in Ballarat in March 2006. This conference was hosted by the City of Ballarat and addressed issues specific to provincial Victoria.

The ‘Provincial Planners Workshop’ sponsored by the Planning Institute of Australia focussed on planning issues specific to provincial Victoria was held in Bendigo in June 2006.

A voluntary Technical Officers Group was established by local government to roadtest specific proposals and provide advice about how they might be implemented. The group also played a role in the collection of supporting data.

Stakeholder workshops

Two DSE workshops were held in February 2006. The first workshop was for 'proponents'. The second workshop involved representatives from community groups, referral authorities and government agencies. The ideas and suggestions were further developed by some initial workshop participants.

A thematic workshop was held in May 2006 for all stakeholders to explore the potential of introducing a code assess track into the Victorian planning system. The experiences of the Australian Capital Territory were shared by Jacqui Lavis from the ACT Planning Authority.

