

December 2021

Regional Housing Taskforce

This document answers frequently asked questions regarding the Regional Housing Taskforce.

Why was the Regional Housing Taskforce created?

- The NSW Government wants to ensure that all residents have a safe space to call home, no matter where in the state they live.
- The way we live, and work is changing. Strong regional economies mean more people are choosing to stay in the regions because they can work close to where they live.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is also causing a shift in people swapping cities for a sea or tree change by moving to the regions.
- These factors are putting pressure on the supply and affordability of homes in the bush and on the coast. Dwelling prices have jumped by 27 per cent in regional NSW over the 12 months to the end of September 2021 compared to a 24% rise in Sydney for the same period.
- Rental vacancy rates in regional NSW have halved to an average of less than 1% in the past year.
- The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces Rob Stokes announced the Regional Housing Taskforce in July 2021 to investigate regional housing issues and the planning barriers people are experiencing in buying, renting and building a place to live in the regions.
- The taskforce has focused on four housing issues: supply, affordability, diversity, and resilience.
- The focus of the Regional Housing Taskforce has been to:
 - identify and resolve barriers in the planning system to housing supply and affordability
 - provide recommendations on ways to speed up the delivery of new homes in regional NSW
 - find ways to encourage the building of new houses on appropriately zoned land.

Who was on the Regional Housing Taskforce?

- Garry Fielding was the Government-appointed Chairperson who lead the Taskforce. Mr Fielding is a Life Fellow and former NSW President of the Planning Institute of Australia with more than 40 years' experience. He is the State-appointed Chair of the Western Regional Planning Panel and recently retired from development and planning group City Plan.
- The Taskforce also included NSW Government executives with expertise in planning, development, and housing. This includes staff from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, as well as the Department of Regional NSW.

What did the Regional Housing Taskforce do?

- During July and August 2021, the Taskforce consulted widely with councils, the development sector, not-for-profit housing providers and community groups.

- The Taskforce prepared an independent [Findings Report](#) that summarises the key issues identified through the consultation, engagement and research that was released on 1 October 2021.
- The Findings Report contains feedback and insights from 168 submissions and more than 400 people who participated in 11 virtual meetings, one-on-one sessions and other events the taskforce presented at during consultation.
- The Taskforce closely considered all feedback and submissions in the preparation of a second independent [Recommendations Report](#) that it provided to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces on 29 October 2021 with recommendations on how the Government can better use the planning system to address housing needs and stimulate supply in the regions.

What has the Regional Housing Taskforce recommended to the Government?

- The Taskforce found that the challenges in delivering an adequate supply of diverse and affordable housing that meets the needs of regional communities are many and varied.
- The task for Government and the planning system is not simply to increase the supply of housing generally, but to provide a diverse range of housing that supports the full spectrum of housing needs in regional communities now and into the future.
- The [Recommendations Report](#) identifies eight principles to serve as a foundation for decision-making and guide reform of policies and processes to increasing housing supply and improve housing outcomes across regional NSW:
 1. Invest in upfront, place-based strategic planning to improve decision-making, provide certainty and enable more efficient assessments.
 2. Provide a more transparent and certain supply pipeline and activate latent supply by addressing infrastructure requirements and resolving site constraints.
 3. Strengthen collaboration by the NSW Government with the Federal Government, local governments, and industry to improve the identification, funding, and delivery of infrastructure to support priority housing.
 4. Ensure new housing is appropriately located, well-designed, fit for purpose, and better provides for the diversity of housing needs, including strengthening planning and approval pathways for innovative typologies and tenures.
 5. Consider social and affordable housing as essential social and economic infrastructure.
 6. Facilitate the delivery of diverse housing that meets demonstrated need through targeted use of government land.
 7. Build the capacity of local government and local industries to plan and deliver housing in the regions.
 8. Enhance monitoring and evaluation of policy and housing outcomes.
- The Taskforce has made five key recommendations for Government and 15 supporting targeted interventions that relate to the recommendations.
- **The key recommendations are:**
 1. Support measures that bring forward a supply of “development ready” land.
 2. Increase the availability of affordable and diverse housing across regional NSW.
 3. Provide more certainty about where, when and what types of homes will be built.

4. Investigate planning levers to facilitate the delivery of housing that meets short term needs.
5. Improve monitoring of housing and policy outcomes and demand indicators.

What is the NSW Government's response?

- The NSW Government has accepted all of the Taskforce's recommendations.

What is the Government doing to implement the recommendations?

- The Government will implement all of the Taskforce's recommendations and is taking the following immediate action to respond:
 - Setting up a \$30 million Regional Housing Fund for 20 councils experiencing high levels of housing stress to deliver new and improved public space and infrastructure if they address the Taskforce's recommendations;
 - Expanding the Urban Development Program to monitor and manage housing land supply and provide a strong evidence-base to guide infrastructure delivery; and
 - Updating planning rules to make it easier to provide temporary workers housing.
- The Government will develop a comprehensive whole-of-government response in 2022 to address all recommendations.

What is the Regional Housing Fund?

- The Regional Housing Fund has been established to provide \$30 million to support regional councils in high-growth areas to deliver infrastructure needed to increase housing supply.
- The funding is available for 20 regional councils identified by NSW DPIE as experiencing some of the highest levels of housing stress to apply for by 18 February 2022.
- For more information on the Regional Housing Fund, including the list of eligible councils, refer to the [Regional Housing Fund website](#).

Where will the Urban Development Program be expanded to?

- In the first instance, the NSW Government will establish an Urban Development Program (UDP) in the high growth Far North Coast region and expand the existing Hunter UDP to the Central Coast and Mid-Coast council areas.
- The new Far North Coast UDP will cover the Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Tweed council areas.
- The expanded Hunter UDP will cover the Central Coast, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Mid-Coast, Newcastle, and Port Stephens council areas.
- For more information, refer to the [Urban Development Program website](#).

What happens next?

- The Taskforce's recommendations are detailed and extensive. The Government will develop a comprehensive whole-of-government response in 2022 to implement programs and policies that address all the Taskforce's recommendations.
- The Government will consult with relevant stakeholders to identify the best path forward to implement the recommendations.

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