

KELLEHERS AUSTRALIA

In-House Memorandum

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Responding to COVID-19 in the building and planning industries

On 3 May 2020, the Victorian government established the *Building Victoria's Recovery Taskforce (Taskforce)*, co-chaired by Roger Teale, Jude Munro AO and Stan Krpan, to examine policy measures in the building and planning industries that can be put in place to facilitate the government's stimulus response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Sadly, it contains only limited alignment with the State's climate change response. This is regrettable. Kellehers urges the Taskforce to support environmentally sustainable projects that also advance the State's urgently required responses to climate change. Many such projects are 'shovel ready'.

The Taskforce is overseen by Planning Minister Richard Wynne and Treasurer Tim Pallas. It must report regularly over the next three months with focus on three areas:

- **Planning options** that facilitate 'shovel ready' projects, once the shut-down period is over.
- **Social Housing options** that include
 - early purchase of stock or co-investment in projects
 - Renewal of public housing stock; and
 - Growth and increased capacity in the community housing sector.
- **Stimulus measures** involving short-term suspension or removal of various government revenue measures and new or expanded stimulus initiatives, specifically those that:
 - Deliver reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved resilience consistent with the Government's commitments on climate change; and
 - Deliver improved social and environmental outcomes.

The Taskforce's Terms of Reference require to report on:

1. Interim measures that can be taken to keep the building and development sector operating.
2. A pipeline of projects to be considered by Government that stimulate the economy post-COVID.
3. Identification of any supply/demand issues and their solutions.
4. Fast tracking planning and other approval processes of suitable projects.
5. Planning reforms to improve planning system efficiency.
6. Outcomes, including the value of projects identified and jobs created or protected.
7. Opportunities to increase the supply of social and affordable housing.

The Taskforce is to liaise with industry and unions. It is to support existing Victorian government policies, eg *Suburban Rail Link*, "*Priority Precincts*" (suburbs and regions with opportunity to support jobs and housing growth), *Plan Melbourne Land Use Frameworks*, the *Better Regulation Commissioner's Report on Planning*, and the *Ministerial Advisory Council on Planning for Affordable Housing*. The Taskforce will guide government response to the economic impacts of COVID-19.

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A separate Working Group will be convened by the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, to consider policy options in the civil construction industry consistent with the government's "*Big Building Agenda*". Again, Kellehers considers that these must align closely with State government climate change goals and policies, with priority to public transport and environmentally sustainable civil construction works.

Kellehers has clients keen to advance environmentally sustainable projects who find themselves delayed through the planning system and gaining far lower priority than the usual round of development projects that either are environmentally neutral or environmentally damaging. Now is the time that government, forced to provide COVID-stimulus can be smart by ensuring preferred stimulus projects provide clear and measurable environmental benefits and contributed to emissions reductions and international climate change goals.

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