



Nomination for BRICKBAT

PDI Act 2016



This Act appears to reflect the wishes of the development industry and State Government but substantially ignore the extensive community input given during the almost 2-year consultation. This response is demoralising and likely to result in a reduction in participation by groups and individuals in future consultation processes and engender little confidence that decisions on future planning policies will adequately reflect community views.

Community unrest with the current prescriptive consultation processes was a major driver for reform but it is unclear whether the Act will improve those processes or rather further remove communities and local councils from planning and development decisions, as it dictates that:

- A Community Engagement Charter will be developed but will not be enforceable.
- Engagement will be restricted to the policy setting stage and removed from development assessment, which is when most members of the public become aware of planning matters.
- Fewer development applications will go out for public notification and there will be less scope for third party appeals.
- Only one elected council member can be on a Development Assessment Panel (an improvement on the State Government's intention, which was to remove all elected members).
- Policies and Codes will be developed and are likely to follow a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- The Planning Minister appoints the Planning Commission and makes the final decision.

Another concern for communities is that heritage recognition and protection were not incorporated into the Act. There are now uncertainties around heritage listings and whether they will be given adequate protection at a later date.

With a strong focus on promoting and facilitating development, there is a risk the Act will deliver a planning system suffering from a serious democracy deficit. Success in delivering good planning outcomes supported by the community will depend on attitudes and culture within planning authorities and whether councils and particularly the State Government are willing to commit to and follow through on genuine, meaningful community engagement.