

Welcome to the Development Assessment Forum newsletter. Our first issue provides an update of the Development Assessment Workshops held around Australia in March/April 2000.

What is DAF?

The Development Assessment Forum (DAF) was formed in 1998 comprising representatives from:

- State and Territory planning departments
- local government / municipal associations
- the Commonwealth Government (National Office of Local Government)
- industry bodies
- professional bodies

DAF's charter is to advance leading practice in Local Government Development Assessment (DA), aiming for national agreement on ways to improve the processes for development approvals.

Why the workshops?

Since formation, DAF has commissioned a number of reports to help achieve its goals. The workshop programme earlier this year sought stakeholder input and agreement on two key areas of DAF work- the development of its leading practice 'Principles' and its proposal for a set of nationally consistent development assessment definitions.

Twelve workshops were held in March and April, attracting 150 participants from sectors including – local government, State/Territory/ Commonwealth government, planning consultants, architects, designers,

builders, engineers, and industry representative bodies.

The workshops, facilitated by consultant Chris Schomburgk, were held in Brisbane, Coffs Harbour, Sydney, Canberra, Albury/Wodonga, Adelaide, Melbourne, Launceston, Hobart, Cairns, Darwin and Perth.

Discussion was divided into three main areas:

- draft "Principles of Leading Practice" paper
- standard definitions
- other opportunities for improvement.

Principles of Leading Practice

At the inaugural meeting of the Development Assessment Forum in June 1998, a definition of 'leading practice' in development assessment was agreed. At the DAF meeting in May 1999, it was resolved to amend these 'Points of Agreement' and the DAF paper "Agreed Principles of Leading Practice in Development Assessment" was developed.

The DAF recognises that what constitutes leading practice will vary over time as new ways of working and new examples of continuous and substantial improvement in practice are identified. The feedback (summarised below) from this series of workshops, feeds into the review and further development of the DAF "Principles" and into the current DAF work programme.

Performance-based planning needed training and clarification. There were also concerns about whether it would take longer to assess applications using this approach. The need for certainty was also raised.

Pre-application consultation was considered essential to the process and some councils were charging a fee for this.

Lodgement was an issue, given the often poor quality of applications received. Application fees were also discussed

Notification/consultation needed training as it was agreed that we don't generally consult well enough.

Assessment time was an issue – especially for industry. The example of Albury City Council was widely applauded. It offers applicants a guaranteed service with refund of fees if time-frames aren't met.

In decision-making, it was agreed that delegation should be the lowest practical level, but that guidelines for delegation were needed.

Appeals drew considerable discussion and this was an area where more work was warranted. The Tasmanian example of legislation fixing a maximum time for determination of an appeal, was highly regarded.

Categories of assessment drew mixed response. The need for a 'prohibited' category was discussed, with preference for an 'undesirable' category instead.

Strategic Planning was considered an essential pre-cursor to DA. The issue of 'place-based planning' drew most discussion. The need for planners and administrators to prepare better 'statements of desired outcome' was seen as an area for future training.

Concurrence and referrals was identified as an area for improvement. The need to have referral agencies prepare codes and to accept their role in a single DA system was seen as a significant hurdle.

LIS/GIS was widely accepted as important for achieving reform principles. The need for open access to a broad range of data sets was seen as imperative. Development of performance standards for software was also viewed as important.



Principles

Standard Definitions

major area for reform

The workshops identified the need to differentiate between operational definitions and land use definitions as a major area for reform.

Operational definitions – building height, gross floor area, ground level etc – were strongly supported for national standardisation. It was also noted that the Building Code of Australia (BCA) already contained some of these definitions and these should be used at least as a starting point. Many examples were cited of the simplicity of this project, yet there was still wide disparity in interpretation and use of terminology.

This was an area of unanimous support and DAF was strongly urged to achieve this aspect of national reform.

Land Use definitions were also considered worthy of standardisation, although it was acknowledged that this was less likely due to local issues. The Victorian (and proposed Tasmanian) example of ‘nesting’ land uses under a minimum number of generic terms, was considered a good starting point.

The desirability of achieving national consistency for a range of engineering standards – eg driveway crossover widths, car parking space dimensions, emerged as a side issue.

Other opportunities for reform

- standardise development application fees (as in WA and some other States); engineering specifications such as carparking space, driveway crossover; software specifications for development application tracking and Land Information Systems (LIS);
- harmonise appeal bodies and appeal time frames;
- national DA systems benchmarking approach;
- higher level assessment for “major” projects, provided the guidelines for any such “call-in” are made clear;
- national standard application form;
- balance shorter time frames with quality of decisions;
- the survey profession to be represented on DAF;
- training at high school level for elected representatives in civic or political processes as they relate to DA;
- ongoing education of all parties to the DA system (*see training for performance based approach*);
- ensure we’re not just about planning, but all aspects of development
- ensure a commitment to the process of reform and the outcomes of this project

Where to from here?

The workshops highlighted a number of areas for DAF’s future work, including:

- training on the preparation and use of *performance based codes* for development control. Target groups should include planners and others involved in drafting the codes, developers and consultants involved in preparing applications, local government assessment officers, elected representatives, and the public;
- an appropriate minimum standard for the quality of information provided at lodgement;
- improved *consultation techniques* for development applications;
- preparation and dissemination of *guidelines for delegation*
- review and reform of *appeal systems*
- the nexus between the level of assessment and the type of assessor (eg: can all code assessment be undertaken by appropriately qualified private certifiers?);

- statements of *desired future outcomes* that can be properly interpreted as part of place-based planning;
- *consistent software specifications* for electronic lodgement and exchange of documents;
- a *national set of definitions* dealing with operational aspects of development as distinct from land use aspects;
- investigate opportunities for national standardisation of some *engineering standards*;
- investigate opportunities to set *standard application fees* and a *standard application form*;
- national standards for *performance measurement* and benchmarking of planning schemes and DA systems.

DAF will now consider and prioritise these suggestions.

where

Visit our Website

The DAF website contains copies of all the background reports, links to all State and Territory planning departments, various local government or municipal associations, and to the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services.

The website is at:

www.daf.gov.au

More Information

Contact the DAF Secretariat at the National Office of Local Government by phoning 02 6274 8127 or by e-mailing daf@dotrs.gov.au

Development Assessment Forum members are:

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ACT Department of Urban Services	02 6207 1715
Vic Department of Infrastructure	03 9655 6690
NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning	02 9391 2000
WA Ministry for Planning	08 9264 7501
Tas Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment	03 6233 2195
NT Department of Lands, Planning and Environment	08 8999 6109
Australian Local Government Association	02 6281 1211
Municipal Association of Victoria	03 9667 5555
Local Government Association of SA	08 8224 2000
WA Municipal Association	08 9321 5055
NT Local Government Association	08 8981 3660
Local Government Association of Tasmania	03 6231 0666
Local Government Association of Qld	07 3334 2222
Local Government and Shires Association of NSW	02 9242 4085
Property Council of Australia	02 9336 6946
Housing Industry Association	03 9280 8200
Royal Australian Planning Institute	02 6262 5933
Engineers Institution of Australia	02 6270 7302
Urban Development Institute of Australia	02 4267 2017
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