

National Development Assessment Definitions

In 1997, the Prime Minister released his statement "More Time for Business" which highlighted the need to reduce red tape for small business and outlined strategies and implementation procedures to achieve this. In 1998, leaders in development and planning agencies and organisations met in Adelaide to discuss ways to improve and harmonise development assessment systems. The Development Assessment Forum (DAF) was formed at this meeting.

DAF is a joint initiative of Federal, State, Territory and Local Governments, the development industry and relevant professional bodies. Its purpose is to reach agreement across Australia on ways to improve the processes for development approval and cut red tape without sacrificing the quality of the decision-making.

DAF recently achieved an historic agreement by ratifying a set of development assessment definitions that will aid in the harmonisation of development and planning systems across Australia. State/Territory planning agencies, Local Government and industry and professional organisations were all consulted in the process of developing these definitions.

DAF proposes that the 19 definitions be adopted and included in all development approval systems around Australia, so that consistent terminology and meaning are used.

Harmonisation of definitions has the potential to improve development assessment systems in the following ways:

- Effectiveness of industry is assisted by the use of common definitions for major design elements;
- Transparency is assisted by familiarity with common terms; and
- Efficiency is enhanced by voiding the need to check definitions of commonly used terms (Mant 1998).

In putting together this list of definitions, DAF recognises that the potential list of definitions is unlimited and has focussed on those that are the most common and likely to be implemented.

In determining the preferred definitions for development assessment, the following principles were applied:

- Operational definitions and definitions with linkages to other legislation would be considered ahead of land use definitions;
- Where the dictionary definition adequately addresses development assessment terms, no further definition is required in planning schemes;
- To build on and ensure consistency between planning instruments and the Building Code of Australian (BCA), it was agreed to adopt the BCA definitions wherever possible;
- The definitions adopted should be quantifiable and not value judgements; and
- The definitions must be readily understandable by the public and expressed in plain English.

The States will be responsible for implementation of the recommended definitions. It is recognised that the development assessment system in each State is structured in different ways. This will mean varying rates of introduction of the definitions into planning schemes according to reform agendas in individual States and Territories. Representatives from State and Territory planning agencies, Local Government Associations and the development industry agreed on the 19 national definitions.

In finalising the definitions and considering the submissions received, one of the key principles was that the definitions should be as simple as possible.

Item	Definition
Allotment	A piece of land or space described in a land title.
Building	A fixed structure which has a roof and which may be wholly or partly enclosed by walls.
Building height	The vertical distance from natural ground level to the roof or parapet at any point.
Basement	A storey either below ground level or that projects no more than one metre above finished ground level.
Building line or Setback	The minimum distance from any allotment boundary to a building.
Dwelling	A building or part of a building used as a self contained residence which must include: Food preparation facilities; A bath or shower; A closet pan and wash basin. It includes out-buildings and works normal to a dwelling.
Gross floor area	The total floor area of the building measured from the outside of the external walls or the centre of a common wall.
Net floor area	The total floor area of all buildings on a site. It does not include walls, the area of stairs, loading bays, accessways or car parking areas or any area occupied by machinery required for air conditioning, heating or power supply or lifts.
Frontage	A boundary of a lot which abuts a road.
Ground level (natural)	The natural level of a site at any point.
Ground level (existing)	The existing level of a site at any point.
Habitable room	Any room of a dwelling other than a bathroom, laundry, toilet, pantry, walk-in wardrobe, corridor, stair, lobby, photographic darkroom, clothes drying room and other space of a specialised nature occupied neither frequently nor for extended periods.
Ground level (finished)	The finished level of a site at any point.
Private open space	An outdoor area of land or dwelling for the exclusive use of the occupants.
Floor space ratio or plot ratio	The gross floor area divided by the area of the site.
Site coverage	The proportion of a site covered by buildings.
Mezzanine	An intermediate floor within a room.
Storey	That part of a building between floor levels. If there is no floor above, it is the part between the floor level and the ceiling.
Swimming pool	Any structure capable of being filled with water to a depth of more than 300 millimetres and primarily used for swimming, wading or paddling.

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The website is at:

www.daf.gov.au

DAF website contains DAF publications, DAF members events and links to all State and Territory planning departments, Local Government associations and the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services.

Copies of the background paper on the definitions are available on the DAF website or through:

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