



NEW SOUTH WALES

## NEWS RELEASE

The Hon. Kristina Keneally MP

Member for Heffron

Minister for Planning

Minister for Redfern Waterloo

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*Embargoed until 5.00am Thursday 6 November 2008*

### **DELEGATION AND 'DEPOLITICISATION' TO DELIVER BETTER PLANNING DECISIONS**

The NSW Government will depoliticise the planning process and deliver the NSW public more transparency, accountability and certainty about planning decisions.

**More planning decisions will be delegated to independent expert panels** under changes to the planning system to be announced today by Minister for Planning, Kristina Keneally.

"When I came into the planning portfolio in September, I said my priority would be to take the politics out of the planning system," Ms Keneally said.

"Since then I've met with many stakeholders in local and state government and the private sector, all of whom have told me they want a consistent, fair and easy to use planning system.

"The reforms I'm announcing today will increase the transparency and accountability of the NSW planning system and deliver better decisions that the public can have more confidence in.

"The responsibilities and delegation of the Planning Assessment Commission and the Joint Regional Planning Panels had not been finalised until this week. We're now giving effect to major planks in the planning reforms.

"The changes will see **about 90% of major project determinations for coastal and urban development** made by the Planning Assessment Commission and Joint Regional Planning Panels."

#### **Planning Commission**

"The Commission will play a significant role in depoliticising the planning system by 'standing in the shoes of the Minister' and **determining all development applications where a developer has made a political donation within the past two years**," Ms Keneally said.

"The Commission's role as a determining body in these cases builds on the Government's legislation, already in force, which requires proponents of development applications to declare political donations over \$1000 which have been made at any point in the two years prior to lodging.

"The Commission will also determine applications where there are **other potential conflicts** of interest for a Planning Minister, **including projects in a Planning Minister's electorate, or applications where the Minister has a pecuniary interest.**

Ms Keneally said the Government will increase membership of the Planning Assessment Commission to include a wider range of skills, including property development, environmental assessment and community consultation, **building the Commission into the major NSW planning advisory body.**

"The Commission should contain a wide range of expertise so it can effectively advise the Minister about major projects, and also provide most of the personnel needed by Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels and Joint Regional Planning Panels," Ms Keneally said.



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**Joint Regional Planning Panels**

Ms Keneally said the new Joint Regional Planning Panels will come into operation from mid 2009, and will be made up of three state government appointed members and two council appointed members from the local government area where a development application has been made.

“The ICAC Report into Wollongong City Council highlighted that we need a wider range of projects determined by Joint Regional Planning Panels, and recommends the Minister reconsider the panel’s threshold of \$50 million for residential and mixed use projects and \$20 million for commercial ones,” Ms Keneally said.

“The Government agrees with this recommendation and will lower the threshold for residential, mixed use and commercial development projects to be determined by Regional Panels to \$10 million.

“In addition, both public and private community infrastructure and ecotourism development decisions worth more than \$5 million will be made by the panels.

**“The changes to the thresholds I’m announcing mean the number of applications Joint Regional Planning Panels are expected to determine increases from 180 to about 330 per year.**

**“This means projects of major significance will be considered by a panel consisting of both state government and local council representatives, and of course community input will continue to be sought on the decisions they make.**

“Local councils will continue to assess projects and consult with the community as they currently do. However instead of making a recommendation to Councillors, the council will make its recommendations to a Joint Regional Planning Panel for determination.

“Councils will continue to determine the overwhelming majority of development applications – well over 99% of the applications made in NSW each year.”

Ms Keneally said the value of most private and public critical infrastructure proposals means they will continue to be determined by the Planning Minister, unless a proponent has made a declarable political donation.

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**Note to editors**

- **What:** Minister Keneally to outline new arrangements for Planning Assessment Commission and Joint regional Planning Panels to 340 council staff, developers and planners at an Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) industry forum.
- **Where:** The Grand Ballroom, Four Points by Sheraton, 161 Sussex Street Sydney
- **When:** Arrive 12.30pm for 12.45pm