

'IBODIES'

Model proposed for ACT to separate politics and infrastructure

The industry association for consulting firms in the built environment has called for greater separation between politics, planning and projects in the ACT in a report 'Infrastructure Governance in Australia' published today [30/01/18].

The report by Consult Australia presents a model infrastructure body or "IBody" for adoption by all jurisdictions including the ACT following a nation-wide review of existing practices.

Kevin Keith, State Manager for the ACT, said: "To connect people to places and products to markets via infrastructure is critical for continued economic growth. Yet politics can interfere with this process, placing unnecessary stress on long term growth, and occasionally wasting taxpayer funding. This is why independent bodies are needed."

The report examines infrastructure bodies in others states including Infrastructure NSW, Infrastructure Victoria, and Building Queensland, and identifies those that do not, including the ACT, SA and NT. It recommends a nation-wide approach to infrastructure planning and delivery to include: Parliament, as opposed to the Minister, controlling activities; a board made up of the public and private sector; a long-term plan developed and project priority list published; and, greater compatability with Infrastructure Australia to develop best practice and consistency.

Keith added: "It's not just about an infrastructure body, it's about the right infrastructure body with a long-term plan and true independence. Regardless of who is in power, if advice is provided to the government of the day and not parliament, then it is independence-on-a-leash. It risks the clash of short-term political and long-term economic cycles, which can see decades of foresight required for infrastructure planning potentially lost in the weeks of an election campaign."

"A standardised approach across all jurisdictions would buffer this, locking in independence through statute so only parliament could make changes. This also gives industry more certainty that what is planned to happen will, so they can skill their workforce accordingly."

The report 'Infrastructure Governance in Australia' is available at www.consultaustralia.com.au

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NOTES TO EDITOR

1. About the report

Consult Australia has launched its Thought Leadership Paper entitled, 'Infrastructure Governance in Australia', which proposes the following model for independent infrastructure bodies ('lbodies') in all jurisdictions.

2. Recommendations for ACT

Consult Australia recommends that in the Australian Capital Territory an independent infrastructure body be created, in each, by an Act of Parliament. The Acts will set out the function and structure of the infrastructure bodies based on four core components, independence, planning, assessment, and prioritisation.

Independence

- 1) The functions of the infrastructure body will be set out in legislation, and the Government (via the Minister) will not be allowed to direct or control its activities.
- 2) All strategies and plans prepared by the infrastructure body will be responded to by the Government within a specified period. The strategy, plans, and Government response must be presented to Parliament, thus promoting bipartisan support and accountability to Parliament.
- 3) If the Government wants to deliver an infrastructure project that is not included in the pipeline, or change the order of priority, it must seek Parliamentary approval.
- 4) The Board of the infrastructure body will be a balance of representatives from the public and private sectors. Private sector representatives must have appropriate skills relevant to infrastructure strategy/planning/delivery, including design and construction.

Planning

- 5) The infrastructure body will be responsible for developing:
 - Long-term infrastructure strategies, and
 - Shorter-term plans to underpin and deliver against the aims of the strategy.
- 6) The strategies and plans will be developed with a formal process of engagement across all stakeholders, political, public sector, business, interest groups, community groups etc. The other infrastructure bodies should also be included to ensure that the strategy and plans have cross-jurisdictional alignment and interconnectedness.
- 7) The plans will have consistent assessment components (objectives) formed around productivity, livability, and sustainability (including integrated land-use) that can be reported and measured against.

Assessment

- 8) The Infrastructure body will provide project implementation plans for major infrastructure projects (the amount to be defined in the legislation).
- 9) Project evaluation and benefit realisation will be embedded within the decision-making processes, as a condition of funding and as a core component of project scoping.
- 10) Infrastructure Australia and the other infrastructure bodies, are to work together to develop national guidelines for business case development, consistent with Infrastructure Australia's assessment guidelines.

Prioritisation

- 11) The infrastructure body will assess and publish a pipeline of priority infrastructure projects.
- 12) The methodology for the assessment of priority projects should be based on an agreed framework of assessment principles.
- 13) The infrastructure body will have responsibility for the review, evaluation, oversight, and monitoring of infrastructure delivery (but not project delivery).

3. About Consult Australia

Consult Australia is the industry association representing consulting firms operating in the built and natural environment sectors. These services include design, engineering, architecture, technology, survey, legal and management solutions for individual consumers through to major companies in the private and public sector including local, state and federal governments. We represent an industry comprising some 48, 900 firms across Australia, ranging from sole practitioners through to some of Australia's top 500 firms with combined revenue exceeding \$40 billion a year.

4. For more information and to arrange an interview

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