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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA RELEASE

More Funds for Planning Tribunal Welcomed

HIA has today welcomed the Minister for Planning's announcement of more funds for Victoria's Planning Tribunal.

The Planning Minister announcement should help in reducing building delays as the funds will target general planning matters such as dwellings and extension proposals that unfortunately end up at VCAT.

Delays and uncertainty have long been the biggest problems HIA members have had to tolerate with the planning system.

HIA Victoria Executive Director, Gil King has commended the Government's move to tackle delays at VCAT.

"HIA has long lobbied for the employment of VCAT's sessional members to relieve the backlog of cases as required he said".

"The complexity of planning requirements and politics associated with objections and council decisions, mean that minor residential matters end up at VCAT unnecessarily but at a significant cost to Victorian families. "

As the Planning Minister acknowledged, too many cases end up at VCAT, and the numbers are growing, adding time and complexity to simple residential matters.

Between 2009-10 and 2010-11 VCAT received an increase of 13 per cent of cases and in the first 6 months of 2011-12 there has been a 9 per cent increase.

"In a climate of increasing planning permit requirements and complexity of planning controls, there are a growing number of proposals which require planning permission. Consequently, the demand for VCAT's resources is growing. HIA members have been tolerating growing delays – which have now blown out to up to 9 months for a matter to be heard" Mr King said.

Simple residential matters end up in VCAT for a range of reasons including appeals against the validity of planning permit conditions, objector appeals of council's approvals of permits, a proponents appeal of a refusal and an appeal against a council's inability to make a decision within the statutory timeframe.

Our members report that there are often unwarranted objections lead to VCAT appeals but because proposals are strongly supported by planning schemes, generally get approved by VCAT.

Mr King also emphasised that "as well as more funds to increase number of members to process planning matters, the Government needs to address reducing the complexity of planning by reducing the number of simple dwelling proposals that require a planning permit.

There are a number of single dwelling matters that don't need planning permission, so would never end up in VCAT nor be burdened by the holding costs associated with local government planning processes and a lengthy planning appeals process."