



Climate Change and Adaptation – Sea Level Rise and Housing Development

Policy Background

- While global climate conditions have changed historically, the impact of man-made influences and future short and long term trends will continue to be researched, debated and interrogated by the advocates and sceptics. In this context some scientists are predicting that Australia will be seriously affected by changes in climatic conditions.
- As a result of this, predictions and estimates of rising sea levels, greater occurrence of high/king tides, storm surges, coastal erosion, increased rainfall and frequency of flooding arising from climate change have been embraced by Governments. While the collective (albeit ad-hoc) response is evolving, their cautious and risk averse nature places significant emphasis on (the potential for) greater seawater inundation, affecting the built environment.
- The responses have evolved not only through the belief that climate change poses a real threat, but future litigation fears if no action is taken.
- These responses by all levels of Government to the threat of sea level rise have the potential to adversely impact on housing - both new and existing.
- In the absence of a national benchmark, state and local governments are applying planning policy approaches to the development industry with a view to eliminating any potential coastal hazards caused by sea level rise over the next 100 years.
- The main issue for the housing industry is around the varied approach adopted by the different levels of governments in responding to this issue, along with other likely construction and production impacts that will be enforced into the future.

Policy Issues

- Actions by the Federal, State and Local Governments to date in response to climate change have been inconsistent and there is the potential for even greater variation to emerge in their responses over the next decade. This is due in part to a fear of litigation if no action is taken at an early stage.
- The varied approaches to the issue of sea level rise are creating uncertainty for the development industry and in particular with planners on the ground regarding what criteria should be addressed when designing new developments and preparing development applications which take adequate account of climate change.
- Any increased burden on the development industry through a myriad of responses to climate change, and sea level rise benchmarks will have a long term affect on residential subdivisions, housing design and the approval process.

- A national benchmark for coastal vulnerability is yet to be firmly established. The Federal Government are using IPCC and CSIRO data along with post IPCC scientific findings to inform their decisions to date on this critical issue.
- Planning decisions made around the (potential) impact of sea level rise will affect land development and housing supply through:
 - increased cost of construction;
 - changed construction methods;
 - change in current housing designs and products;
 - greater setbacks from foreshore areas;
 - increased costs associated with consultant studies;
 - increased refusals of development applications; and
 - loss of developable land as there is an increase in the amount of land zoned vulnerable to coastal hazards.
- While the debate on climate change has extremely broad social, economic and policy implications, the impact of sea level rise policy and regulation on land use planning and building regulations, is more direct and blunt. At its most extreme, it is possible that development will be prohibited, or at best highly regulated in designated sea level rise affected areas.

HIA's Policy Position on Climate Change and Adaptation – Sea Level Rise and Housing Development

- All levels of Government should only pursue practical and sensible approaches to the issue of sea level rise using risk based approaches to ensure that the response is commensurate with the threat.
- The Federal Government should:
 - establish a national sea level rise benchmark based on Australian conditions;
 - undertake coastal vulnerability mapping based on Australian research including carrying out additional monitoring and data collection; and
 - address the ad-hoc approaches which are being implemented through state and local government planning requirements.
- A moratorium applies until national benchmarks are established.
- State and local governments should not incorporate sea level rise considerations into planning decisions until national benchmarks and coastal hazard mapping is complete.
- Local governments should adopt an approach that requires applicants and land owners to formally acknowledge the predicted sea level rise risks. This would allow for residential development to proceed on existing residential zoned land without the need to refuse or delay an application on the grounds of projected sea level rise.
- Any loss of developable land as a result of planning decisions made on the grounds of sea level rise should be a trigger for state/local governments to consider increasing the urban footprint elsewhere to provide an offset.