

**Submission  
No 16**

## **INQUIRY INTO APARTMENT DESIGN STANDARDS**

**Organisation:** Office of the Victorian Government Architect

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# Office of the Victorian Government Architect

## Better Apartments Design Standards

### Parliamentary Inquiry

In our role as advisors and advocates for high quality design outcomes for the Victorian community, in 2013 / 2014 the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA) became significantly concerned at the lack of resident amenity evident in the multi-unit homes, both medium and high rise, being built for Melbourne's vision for a 'denser city'. The OVGA began a thorough investigation of the design quality and residential amenity of new multi-unit housing.

The OVGA partnered with the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning (DELWP), working towards the Better Apartments Design Standards (BADS). Reference and working groups included representatives from OVGA, DELWP, City of Melbourne, Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Property Council of Australia (PCA). The OVGA has continued to work with DELWP in an ongoing role on the Standards.

The OVGA continues to undertake frequent independent design review on multi residential projects where DELWP (or occasionally a Local Government) is the regulatory authority. Anecdotally, OVGA can report that there has been significant improvement in general resident amenity since the introduction of BADS in 2017. Design and development industry awareness, acceptance and understanding has grown, and we expect the updated (2021) Standards will extend this.

BADS filled an important gap within the Victorian Planning System. However, OVGA proposes they could have been more aspirational by following the strong precedent set by NSW with their State Environmental Planning Policy No. 65 and Apartment Design Guide.

In 2010, the COAG Reform Council *Review of Capital City Strategic Planning System* identified SEPP 65 as representing **national best practice for the management of design quality in higher density residential development**. The criteria and design guidance in the BADS and Guidelines for Victoria establishes a standard that sits below that in NSW.

As an overview summary, OVGA feedback recommendations made during the development of the original and updated BADS included the following observations, some made in response to seeing 'unintended consequences':

- **A standard / metric for building setbacks** is needed to resolve the interdependencies of sunlight, daylight, privacy, outlook, acoustics and cross ventilation
- **Failing to set minimum apartment sizes** and instead using minimum dimensions for bedrooms and living areas is having unintended consequences for other parts of the apartment, such as living and dining areas
- **The metric related to room depth** appears to be influencing poor outcomes – for example kitchens being located in corridors, which needs to be discouraged



- **Storage** in new developments is not well handled - minimum requirements would be appropriately linked to apartment sizes. Security and best-practice location need better definition
- **Noise impact** can come from several interfaces including corridor, apartment below, above, beside - there is a need for greater emphasis on noise attenuation
- **Establishing a maximum cooling energy load** for apartments is the most direct and efficient manner to materially improve thermal comfort and reduce energy consumption
- The objective for **communal outdoor space** relies on an appropriate area having adequate amenity (this must be linked to number of apartments). In NSW this is defined - '*Communal open space has a minimum area equal to 25% of the site*'.
- **Natural ventilation metrics** are significantly below WA and NSW Standards and greater clarity on 'cross ventilation' versus 'natural ventilation' is needed
- **Communal open space** would be better defined as external and co-located with deep soil areas
- The standard on **dwelling entry and internal circulation** lacks the efficacy of metrics (effective in NSW) including number of dwellings per lift, maximum number of apartments off a circulation core, encouraging multiple entries and discouraging double loaded corridors

Several issues are not covered in BADS and OVGA considers these are important issues linked to resident amenity and project quality:

- **Sunlight** was identified as important in community feedback. Optimising the number of apartments receiving sunlight to habitable rooms, primary windows and private open space would be valuable
- **Outlook** is different to a view and is an important amenity consideration, linked to health and wellbeing
- **Design verification** is embedded in NSW Standards, and is seen to be in the best interest of the public and consumer. The use of architects is mandated for this complex project type, with their performance underpinned by disciplinary systems for non-compliance.

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