

**Housing policy and
sustainable urban
development:
evaluating the use
of local housing
strategies in
Queensland, New
South Wales and
Victoria**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper introduces research being undertaken by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) University of Sydney Research Centre to identify the institutional, legislative and political parameters affecting local government involvement in housing, and clarify opportunities to enhance this involvement within a broader framework of sustainable urban governance.

Integrating housing policy objectives with the urban planning responsibilities of local governments is central to sustainable urban development. Local governments influence the private housing market through their planning and development control decisions, have strong connections to the local community, and are well positioned to facilitate a “whole of government” approach to housing outcomes (ALGA 1995, Purdon and Burke 1991). Despite this, councils in Australia have traditionally been unwilling to recognise the housing impacts of planning decisions, or to assume a proactive role in shaping housing outcomes (Paris 1990).

While there tends to be extensive research on social and environmental policy and practice at higher levels of government, critical investigation of local government activities is overdue (Adams and Hine 1999, Dunn et. al, Verhage 2002). This is partly due to the difficulty of generalising across the different institutional, social and environmental contexts that characterise local governments within Australia and internationally. Despite these differences, the literature that does exist points to a number of commonalities in the experiences of local governments, and highlights the similarity of trends in housing policies throughout the world. These include:

- A retreat from central government intervention in housing and urban development outcomes, observable in many industrial capitalist countries (Gleeson and Low 2000, Verhage 2002). This trend means that there are greater pressures for lower levels of government to undertake some of these functions.
- Conflicts between spatial planning objectives which focus on environmental outcomes, and housing policies, which tend to prioritise social needs (Priemus 1998). This suggests a need to better understand the potential connections between social and environmental policies and programs, and to identify opportunities for more cohesive planning processes.
- A diversity of local government approaches and activities apparent even at regional and district levels (Paris 1990). This diversity frequently means that central policies are not well targeted to local experiences and conditions. It also suggests that there might be untapped innovation and expertise at the local level that is not reported (Adams and Hine 1999).

The majority of the literature and related policy advocates the preparation of a housing strategy (or equivalent) to encourage more active local government involvement in shaping housing outcomes (DTLGR 2002, LGSA 1998, Purdon and Associates 1991, Verhage 2002). Local housing strategies typically incorporate an analysis of local housing supply, demand, future demographic and market trends, as well as recommendations for planning processes, land use plans and development regulations (ALGA 1995, Purdon and Burke 1991, DUAP 1996, 2001b). They therefore provide a basis for more integrated decision making across the various planning and service delivery functions of local councils (MAV 1999). The strategies could also provide a framework for co-ordinating activities across local, regional, and state levels of government (DUAP 1996, Goss and Blackaby 1998).

Over the past decade, many local councils across Australia have prepared housing strategies, in some cases as a result of direct state intervention through planning legislation. However, there has been little critical investigation of the extent to which such strategies have met expectations in terms of more proactive local government involvement in housing policy, or more co-ordinated, whole of government responses to housing need at local and regional levels. There are also questions about the extent to which the strategies have been implemented in practice or led to changed housing outcomes on the ground. This is reflective of a broader gap in research concerning the contemporary role of Australian local government in shaping housing outcomes.

This research aims to address this gap by analysing and comparing the housing related roles currently undertaken by Australian local governments, critically evaluating the implementation of local housing strategies, and identifying models of excellence and innovation. The research also aims to ascertain primary legislative and institutional constraints to the implementation of the strategies, as well as factors contributing to success, including the involvement of other local, regional, and state stakeholders.

These aims build on research undertaken in the early 1990s by the National Housing Strategy and will provide an empirical basis for understanding the contemporary role played by Australian local governments in housing. The research should also provide a basis for addressing constraints to local government involvement in housing, and contribute to improved intergovernmental relationships between state and local governments in the development and implementation of housing policy. It will also reveal scope for local governments to play a leading role in whole of government approaches to sustainable urban development and management.

The methodology for the research includes focus groups and case study investigation of local governments in metropolitan areas of New South Wales (NSW), Queensland and Victoria. The focus groups, comprising local government planners and housing officers, peak bodies, and state government representatives, were conducted between June and July 2002. From these discussions, a number of local governments will be selected for more in depth case study analysis and comparison.

This paper introduces the conceptual framework for the study, outlining the connections between sustainable urban development, housing policy, and local governance. It provides an overview of arguments for and against stronger local government involvement in these activities and identifies five broad opportunities for strategic intervention to promote more affordable, adequate, and appropriate housing outcomes. The paper also reviews international and national research on local government housing related activities, highlighting common experiences and themes, and identifies the key research questions for this study. Anticipated research outcomes, application, and dissemination are outlined in conclusion.

1. INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

This paper introduces research being undertaken by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) University of Sydney Research Centre to identify the institutional, legislative and political parameters affecting local government involvement in housing, and clarify opportunities to enhance this involvement within a broader framework of sustainable urban governance.

This Positioning Paper is the first research output of this project. It reviews existing academic literature including key issues and priorities for investigation, provides an overview of the policy context for local government involvement in the delivery of housing policy outcomes, and details the research methodology for this project.

Subsequent outputs of this project (including the Final Report and a Research and Policy Bulletin) will detail the results of the research. The results will also be disseminated through a series of seminars for local government.

1.1 The need for more active local government involvement in housing policy and practice

Over the past decade there has been mounting national and international pressure for local governments to play a more active role in shaping housing related outcomes through their planning and service delivery functions (DTLGR 2002, UN-Habitat 2002, RAPI 2000). This reflects the fact that decisions made at local government level have a crucial impact on the quantity, quality, and affordability of housing supply within a particular geographic area yet are frequently made without an explicit policy framework for shaping or monitoring these outcomes (Purdon and Burke 1991). For example, the rezoning of land, the approval of a particular development, or the decision to upgrade services or infrastructure all affect the location, density, form and cost of housing (MAV 1999). Similarly, there are a number of levers available to local governments to retain and promote low cost housing through the planning process (Cox and Miers 1998, Lawson 1995).

In addition to the social imperatives associated with housing, there is growing awareness of the need to consider the environmental impacts of residential development. Local government authorities have a clear responsibility to promote environmentally sustainable development and therefore are ideally placed to integrate these two policy areas in their decision making (Brugman 1996, LGSA 2001).

However, it is often difficult to assess or generalise about local government activities or experience due to the various institutional parameters within which they operate, and the diversity of social and geographic contexts that define them (Paris 1990). For these reasons evaluative, empirically based research concerning the various roles played by local governments in urban development, environmental management and housing is limited. This research investigates these roles by examining recent local government experience in implementing local housing strategies.

1.2 Evaluating the use of local housing strategies

Local housing strategies, incorporating an analysis of local housing need, market characteristics, and proposals for planning / policy intervention, are consistently advocated as a way of improving housing outcomes at the local level (eg. ALGA 1995, DTLGR 2000, DUAP 1996, MAV 1999). However, there has been little critical investigation of the quality of these strategies, let alone the extent to which they have been implemented in practice, or led to changed housing outcomes on the ground. Similarly, there has been little investigation of the relationship between social planning documents like housing strategies, and other, overtly environmental initiatives undertaken by local governments, such as those under the auspices of Local Agenda 21¹.

¹ At the 1992 Rio "Earth Summit" Australia joined many other nations in committing to the preparation of "Local Agenda 21" strategies for sustainable development by 1996. The strategies are prepared by local governments, and intended to combine

This project aims to address these research gaps by:

- *Analysing* and *comparing* the housing related roles currently undertaken by local government in three Australian states and identifying options to enhance these roles;
- *Critically evaluating* the implementation of local housing strategies in relation to defined housing needs and objectives, and identifying models of excellence and innovation;
- *Ascertaining* the primary legislative, institutional, and political constraints to the implementation of housing strategies, as well as factors contributing to success; and,
- *Reviewing* the involvement of other local, regional, and state stakeholders / housing providers in the development and implementation local housing strategies and the implications of this for achieving a whole of government approach to sustainable urban development.

The findings of the first research aim build on work carried out in the early 1990s for the National Housing Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 1991, 1992) and provide an empirical basis for understanding the contemporary role played by Australian local governments in housing. Research aim two will enable a critical evaluation of current local housing strategy implementation, and identify models of excellence and innovation to improve housing strategy methodologies. The third aim provides a basis for addressing constraints to implementation relating to legislation, institutional capacity, and community awareness. The outcomes of research aim four will provide an empirical basis for addressing concerns regarding the intergovernmental relationships between state and local governments² in the development and implementation of housing policy.

These aims will be pursued through focus groups and case study research involving local governments in metropolitan areas of New South Wales (NSW), Queensland and Victoria. The focus groups, comprising local government planners and housing officers, peak bodies, and state government representatives, will be conducted between June and July 2002. From these discussions, a number of local governments will be selected for more in depth case study analysis and comparison.

1.3 Policy relevance

This research focuses on intergovernmental relationships at the interface between housing policy and urban planning. It has been developed in consultation with representatives of the NSW agencies responsible for social housing and land use planning (NSW Department of Housing and Planning NSW), as well as the NSW Local Government and Shires Associations (LGSA). It relates explicitly to current debates in urban policy development and planning practice and will contribute directly to housing policy and planning reform agendas.

1.3.1 State initiatives

Planning NSW (and its previous incarnations) has played a strong role in promoting local government involvement in housing policy over the past decade. This includes introducing state planning policies to retain low cost housing; the provision of funding to local governments for housing initiatives; and establishing an Affordable Housing Advisory Service to develop low cost affordable rental housing with local government, community and private sector partners. In 1995 the Department also introduced legislation requiring councils in metropolitan Sydney to prepare residential development strategies. While the emphasis of these strategies was on achieving urban consolidation objectives in line with local conditions and priorities, councils were required to analyse housing market trends, and identify strategies to provide a mix of housing choices appropriate to the needs of their locality. The strategies have now been in place for several years so it is feasible to evaluate their success in relation to defined housing and environmental outcomes. New state planning policies with significant, and potentially conflicting implications for local government involvement in housing (residential flat design and affordable housing) are also foreshadowed, so the findings of this study will inform the implementation of these initiatives.

environmental, social and economic objectives, integrate planning and policy making, and involve all sectors of the community (Mercer and Jotkowitz 2000).

² eg. ALGA 1995

The NSW planning system is also undergoing significant legislative reform. The objectives of the reform are to simplify the current complexity of planning instruments and processes in NSW, and provide a basis for more coordinated, whole of government decision making at local, regional, and state levels (DUAP 2001a). The results of this research will therefore inform the development of new and effective models for integrated local area planning in NSW.

Other states of Australia have traditionally taken a less overt role in encouraging local governments to address housing policy objectives through their urban planning activities. However, current metropolitan planning initiatives in Victoria are providing impetus for more proactive local government involvement in achieving housing policy objectives, such as affordability, appropriateness and choice (DOI 2001). Similarly, the Queensland Department of Housing has released a policy on affordable housing and “sustainable communities”, which outlines a commitment to developing legislation, policy and planning strategies for implementation in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including local government (QDOH 2001).

1.3.2 Local initiatives

Many local councils have themselves undertaken initiatives to improve housing outcomes relating to affordability, accessibility, and housing choice. Notable examples include Waverley, North Sydney and Willoughby councils in NSW, Prahran in Victoria and Brisbane City Council in Queensland, all of which have implemented innovative local housing projects. In 1995 the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) released a policy acknowledging the central role of local government in the retention and promotion of adequate, appropriate, and secure housing outcomes through its statutory, strategic planning, and service delivery functions. It identified a lack of recognition by state governments of the importance and responsibilities of local government and called for clarification of this role relative to other spheres of government. It also identified a need to understand the implications of local government activities on local housing conditions. With the exception of a comprehensive toolkit to assist local councils in Victoria prepare local housing strategies (MAV 1999), there has been almost no research efforts to contribute to policy development in this area since this time.

1.4 Structure of the paper

This paper is structured in five parts. The following part introduces the conceptual framework for the study, outlining the connections between sustainable urban development, housing policy, and local governance. It provides an overview of arguments for and against stronger local government involvement in these activities and identifies five broad opportunities for strategic intervention to promote more affordable, adequate, and appropriate housing outcomes. Part three summarises international and national research on local government housing related activities, highlighting common experiences and themes. This literature consistently advocates the preparation of strategic planning frameworks for researching, planning and responding to housing problems. While the terminology describing these frameworks differs from place to place, the concept of a local housing study, policy or strategy that incorporates some or all of these activities, has become ubiquitous in recent years. However, there is almost no evaluative data concerning the extent to which these strategies have been prepared or resulted in demonstrably better housing outcomes. This leads to the research aims, questions, and methodological approach for this study, outlined in part four. Anticipated research outcomes, application, and dissemination are described in conclusion.

2. SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Although there is an historical nexus between housing policy and urban governance, evident during the early twentieth century town and country planning initiatives in Britain and the United States, local authorities in Australia have rarely played a proactive role in shaping housing outcomes through their planning functions (Paris 1990, 1993). Rather, they have been accused of catering to the demands of the private market, with little regard for the broader social and environmental consequences of planning decisions (Gleeson and Low 2000). To an extent, these criticisms relate to limitations within the planning system itself. Although planning instruments can encourage or deter certain dwelling types (through development controls), and affect the location and supply of housing (through zoning and density controls), most plans are limited to matters able to be enforced through statutory means (Taylor 1998). For this reason, they are often described as “reactive”: while they contain objectives for the future development of a place, their provisions are only triggered when an activity requiring consent is initiated. Planning regulations must therefore be made sufficiently attractive to private developers to be enacted. Even when local councils are in a position to utilise their powers to influence development objectives, there is often a reluctance to do so, due to the threat of political or legal challenge. In recent years this reluctance has been reinforced by a market based ideology that advocates less, rather than more government intervention in the urban development process (Gleeson and Low 2000, Taylor 1998).

However, a number of factors now make it imperative to review the relationship between urban planning and the housing system, particularly at the local level. In Australia the shift from “supply side” funding for housing assistance to income support measures has necessitated new approaches to addressing housing need through the private market (Berry and Hall 2001). This implies a need for more proactive local government engagement in monitoring and shaping the residential development process. In addition, there is mounting pressure to integrate social policy objectives with broader environmental sustainability initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 (Bruggeman 1996, UN-Habitat 2002). These arguments are reviewed here. Firstly, principles of sustainable urban development and the implications for housing policy are discussed. These emphasise integrated decision making across social, economic, and environmental sectors, and identify local government as the key player in achieving environmentally sustainable development. For such a role to be achieved, it is necessary to understand the characteristics and parameters surrounding local governments, discussed with reference to Australia in section two. This is followed by an overview of arguments regarding local government involvement in housing and the type of housing policy outcomes they should promote. Five key opportunities for strategic intervention in achieving these outcomes are then conceptualised in section three.

2.1 Sustainable Urban Development

It has become rare to find a policy or planning document that does not refer to the term “sustainability”, although its meaning is often difficult to pinpoint. Official definitions of “sustainability” emerged during the late 1980s in response to global concerns about environmental degradation and atmospheric pollution, although earlier notions can be traced to the UNESCO “Man and the Biosphere” (MAB) program established in 1971, which aimed to identify models for the sustainable management of human settlements (Bonnes 1998).

2.1.1 Defining sustainability

In its most general sense, “sustainability”, means ensuring that human activities do not compromise our essential social and natural support systems either now or in the future (Beatley 1995; Beatley and Manning 1997; Dixon and Fallon 1989). Perhaps the most widespread use of the term “sustainability” is in conjunction with the word “development”, as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the “Brundtland Commission”) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising

the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). However, this definition has been criticised for its anthropological and development oriented focus (Beatley and Manning 1997; Harding 1998).

Many suggest that, like other aspirational terms such as “freedom”, or “justice”, notions of sustainability are likely to remain ambiguous (e.g. Beatley 1995; Lafferty 1996; Harding 1998). Central to the idea is the notion of fundamental physical and ecological limits to growth. When considered in relation to “natural” systems, like forests, soils, or ocean fisheries, “sustainability” implies a manner of utilising and managing these resources in a way that maintains the capacity for renewal (often described as “carrying capacity”). When considered in relation to social systems, “sustainability” means pursuing individual and community well being in a way that promotes equity both within and between generations. Rather than emphasising the economic growth model as a method for satisfying human needs and aspirations, sustainability principles emphasise the renewal and *enrichment* of natural and social forms of capital rather than their *exploitation* in the pursuit of private wealth (Beatley and Manning 1997; Gleeson and Low 2000).

In Australia, the phrase “ecologically” sustainable development is prevalent in official policy statements and environmental legislation, most frequently defined as “using, conserving and enhancing the community’s resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased”. (Commonwealth of Australia 1992b, p 6). Although this definition still implies a model of economic growth, it also emphasises the connections between social and ecological wellbeing. Thus it provides a useful conceptual and policy framework for understanding the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of housing (and is the overall definition of sustainability adopted in this work).

2.1.2 Principles for sustainable environmental governance

Until recently, the sustainability agenda has focused on the management of pollution and the use of renewable energy (e.g. Beder 1993; Harding 1998) rather than on land use and settlement planning, for which concrete standards have been far more difficult to conceptualise. However, in the past few years there have been a number of attempts to synthesise the key themes of sustainability as a set of principles relevant to environmental governance, including spatial land use planning. These principles incorporate expectations regarding the decision making “process” – that is, the development and implementation of government policy, as well as “outcomes” – that is, the social, environmental, and economic outcomes of these decisions.

In relation to the decision making processes, the first principle is that of integrated and participatory decision making. The principle draws on ecosystem theories which emphasise the interdependence of social and ecological worlds. In practical terms this means that decision making systems must be capable of integrating a variety of potentially competing social, cultural, economic, and environmental considerations, across traditional sectoral and administrative boundaries, as well as space and time (Beder 1993; Harding 1998).

This leads to the second principle of sustainable governance, which is that a *spatial* rather than *sectoral* approach is needed, with a particular emphasis on the local level as the most appropriate spatial scale for integrated, participatory decision making to occur (Gleeson and Low 2000). This was a key theme to emerge at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which resulted in the Agenda 21 framework for local environmental action (Adams and Hine 1999, UN- Habitat 2002). In fact it now appears that while the initial focus of Local Agenda 21 strategies was on environmental issues, due to the locally based, participatory forms of decision making they encouraged, they now provide a basis for addressing a broader range of issues under the new global Habitat Agenda of “sustainable human settlements” (UN- Habitat 1996, 2002).

The Habitat Agenda promotes the universal goals of “adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive.” Thus the third broad principle of sustainable governance explicitly combines the dual concepts of social and ecological wellbeing as central objectives in all decisions relating to urban development and land use (Beatley 1995, Beatley and Manning 1997). This generally

includes a commitment to expanding access to affordable, adequate and appropriate and environmentally responsive forms of housing (Beatley 1995, Bealthey and Manning 1997, UN Habitat 1996).

2.1.3 Planning for sustainable settlements

This has led to considerable debate about the sustainability of various urban forms (eg. Minnerly 1990, Newton 2000, Burton 2000). It is generally argued that the particular pattern of human settlement in Australia, characterised by high rates of urbanisation but low density, is intensifying environmental problems associated with energy and water consumption, waste and pollution, and biodiversity loss (these problems were quantified in the latest Australian State of the Environment (SOE) Report 2001). Much recent environmental planning policy both in Australia and internationally has therefore aimed to concentrate populations in “compact cities” which conserve land and achieve efficiencies of scale in transport and resource use (eg. DTLGR 2000, DUAP 2001b). Compact city forms where residents live in close proximity work, shops and recreation, are also claimed to contribute to stronger social networks and “community cohesion” (Beatley and Manning 1997).

Evidence to support these assertions is somewhat limited (Burton 2000). Indeed, it is sometimes claimed that concentrated populations amplify environmental pressures associated with resource use, pollution, and biodiversity loss, while accentuating social problems like poverty, inequality, and crime (Australian SOE 2001). Furthermore, while compact cities might provide a greater diversity of housing type they may also be less affordable since land costs are also higher (Minnerly 1992, Burton 2000).

In any case, the location, configuration, and construction of housing by definition have major impacts on land and resource use. Prescriptions for more sustainable patterns of residential development therefore emphasise subdivision layouts which respect local biodiversity, and promote freedom of access, safety and security, as well as housing designs which maximise energy collection and use, and which minimise internal and external sources of pollution (Newman 2002, DUAP 2001). Innovative guides to assist local governments and developers achieve more sustainable patterns of subdivision and more energy efficient design in new residential development have recently emerged (eg. DUAP 2001b, 2001c). For the most part however, while these prescriptions may refer to some broader housing objectives, particularly affordability and housing mix, their emphasis is typically on managing the physical aspects of the development process.

2.1.4 Sustainability and housing policy

Similarly, despite the significant environmental impacts associated with new housing production, and the replacement of inappropriate housing stock, the majority of housing policy documents appear focussed on the social and economic dimensions of meeting housing need (Priemus 1998). Indeed, while the term “sustainability” is used liberally in planning and policy documents produced by housing authorities in Australia, this generally relates to ongoing financial “sustainability” of operations, the capacity of a tenant to “sustain” their tenancy, and to describe the resilience of social networks within a particular particular community (eg. DHS 2001, DOH 2001).

One potential convergence between social and ecological sustainability is in relation to the area of urban renewal and rehabilitation. As noted above, urban renewal and infill policies are now regarded as important environmental strategies. The rehabilitation and reconfiguration of disadvantaged urban areas, particularly those with high concentrations of low income and public housing also provides a strategy for addressing social exclusion and poverty. Yet until recently, there have been few attempts to actively incorporate greater environmental sustainability in their design or rehabilitation (Morgan and Talbot 2000).

In summary, while the rhetoric of sustainable urban development emphasises an integrated approach to social and physical environments, in reality there are a number of institutional and disciplinary barriers to achieving sustainable decision making processes across multiple administrative and sectoral divisions. Consequently, the affordable and adequate housing agenda now falls squarely within the rubric of sustainable urban development, but the majority of environmental plans and urban development programs remain locked within traditional development paradigms (Gleeson & Low 2000).

2.2 Sustainable urban development and local governance

In response to these issues, there is mounting national and international interest in the potential for local governments to play a more active role in implementing the sustainability agenda. Initially this was focussed on environmental projects through the preparation of Local Agenda 21 strategies, but attention has since moved to broader social and economic issues associated with human settlements (Brugmann 1996). For example, the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) recently reaffirmed its commitment to recognising local authorities as their closest partners in implementing the Habitat Agenda of “ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier and more liveable, equitable, sustainable and productive” (UN-Habitat 2002). Similarly, the United Kingdom’s Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLGR) national housing policy “Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All” emphasises the strategic role of local authorities, particularly in “meeting needs across all types of housing and integrating housing policy with wider social, economic and environmental policies” (DTLGR 2000, p. 6). In Australia, the Planning Institute of Australia’s³ national agenda for “Liveable Communities” identifies municipal councils as central players in addressing issues like affordable housing, inequality and social exclusion (RAPI 2000).

2.2.1 Characteristics of local government in Australia

To understand the existing and potential housing roles of local government it is necessary to outline the broad parameters within which it operates. In comparison to other nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, local governments in Australia have limited policy, planning and service delivery responsibilities (Paris 1990). Not recognised in the Australian Constitution, local governments are regulated by state legislation, which defines their administrative, procedural and financial responsibilities. They are also subject to a variety of state laws (and agencies) for their particular urban development and environmental management functions.

For the most part, local government participation in broader State and Federal policy and resource allocation processes has been limited (Adams and Hine 1999, Stilwell and Troy 2000). This is symptomatic of an historical tension between the multiple levels of government in Australia, which “continues to bedevil attempts to plan the development of more efficient and equitable cities” (Stilwell and Troy 2000, p. 909). In particular, housing policy has represented a highly complex interaction between the three tiers of government in Australia. This is characterised by a historical reluctance of state governments to acknowledge local governments as anything more than a minor player with administrative responsibility for narrow concerns like “roads, rates and rubbish” (Adams and Hine 1999).

2.2.2 The arguments for and against greater local government involvement

Local councils themselves may be unwilling or unable to assume greater responsibilities. Many councils have limited capacity to undertake additional roles, and may lack the requisite human resources to do so (Purdon and Burke 1991). Others are wary of adopting a proactive or innovative position in relation to politically sensitive areas like housing, which has traditionally been identified as a State responsibility. Furthermore, the increasing pressures for local councils to be entrepreneurial, and to compete with surrounding localities for development investment, may conflict with broader social and environmental objectives (Dunn et al. 2001, Gleeson and Low 2000).

Despite these issues, there are several compelling reasons to encourage greater local government involvement in housing policy. Nationwide deregulation and fiscal reform have led to a devolution of both environmental and community service responsibilities to lower levels of government. There is significant evidence to demonstrate that affordability problems and housing stress have intensified since the mid 1980s, particularly in inner metropolitan areas of Australia (Berry and Hall 1991). At the same time, long term decline in Commonwealth funding for “supply side” forms of housing assistance under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), is coupled with a growing emphasis on

³ The Planning Institute of Australia changed its name from the “Royal Australian Planning Institute” in July 2002.

income support measures to assist low income households purchase their housing through the private sector. Local government has the primary responsibility for regulating the production of this housing through their planning and development control functions.

A range of arguments in support of local government involvement in housing have been articulated in recent studies and policy documents, most of which have been sponsored by local government organisations (eg. MAV 1999, LGSA 1998, ALGA 1998). In summary these emphasise the strong role already played by local governments through their planning, development control, and service delivery functions, although implications of these are not always recognised (ALGA 1995). Secondly, the housing needs of a given population, and the characteristics of housing supply are complex, and vary markedly between local government areas. Therefore, local government is frequently in the best position to monitor and respond to local needs, often through participatory processes that in themselves contribute to greater community wellbeing (MAV 1999).

The trend towards greater entrepreneurialism noted above also provides an argument for more strategic local intervention in housing. Housing can be a significant factor in local economic growth – in addition to direct jobs in construction, attractive housing can bring new residents to an area (DUAP 2001, Goss and Blackaby 1998). Similarly, a shortage of appropriate housing can reinforce employment problems as a barrier to establishing new industries or servicing existing ones⁴. A strategic framework to ensure a timely supply of attractive and appropriate housing could therefore directly contribute to broader financial prosperity and community wellbeing (ABS 2001, NAHB 2001).

2.2.3 What type of housing outcomes should local government promote?

In advocating an enhanced role for local governments in relation to housing, it is important to clarify what this role should aim to achieve. At an international level, the UN-Habitat Agenda promotes “equal access to affordable, adequate housing for all persons and their families”, through locally appropriate responses which respect the “carrying capacity of ecosystems” (UN-Habitat 2001). The national housing policy for England aims to “offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home and so promote social cohesion, wellbeing and self dependence”, within a wider agenda to “revitalise urban and rural areas and tackle social exclusion” (DTLGR 2000). The policy is closely integrated with the Department’s broader urban and rural planning strategies and supported by a dedicated national planning policy guidance note (PPG 3) on housing. This policy commences with a number of specific national government commitments, emphasising affordability, choice, and equity of access, as well as environmental sustainability in their provision.

These commitments recall the three objectives of Australia’s National Housing Strategy (NHS), which emphasised expanding the “range and supply of adequate, appropriate and affordable housing choices accessible to all Australians”, to “develop more efficient and effective housing provision and land development”, and “to achieve urban forms and structures” that contribute to “safe, quality and sustainable environments” (Commonwealth of Australia 1992a)⁵. A number of the state local government associations have identified their own housing policy statements drawing on what has become known as the “adequate housing model” (Lawson 1995, NSW LGA 1998). This model identifies three key components of “adequate housing”: affordability, appropriateness, and availability. These components in turn incorporate issues like appropriate housing design for household size, life cycle, physical ability and culture; as well as the availability of housing supply in appropriate locations close to social networks, services and employment. In summary therefore, a local government housing policy would aim to achieve affordable, appropriate and adequate housing that is sensitive to existing and future community needs, and responsive to the built and natural environment.

⁴ In Australia this problem has long been identified by rural councils, documented recently in relation to the Alpine region (DUAP 2000). A similar problem has emerged recently in metropolitan areas of the United Kingdom where housing is no longer affordable for “key workers” (DTLGR 2000).

⁵ Although the strategy struggled to gain formal policy recognition per se.

2.3 Housing related functions of local government

Broadly speaking, local government responsibilities for housing relate to identifying community needs, managing the supply of residential land and housing stock, coordinating the provision of infrastructure and services, and in some cases, directly providing housing to special needs groups (Nenno and Brophy 1983; Paris 1990; Purdon and Burke 1991). Thus they are concerned with both “production” and “consumption” aspects of housing (Beyer 1968). As shown in the table below, these aspects are closely related. However, they are often considered separately, particularly in Australia where Commonwealth and state governments have direct responsibility for housing assistance, and local governments for regulating aspects of production. To breach this division, a strategic framework for understanding current and projected housing need within a particular locality, environmental constraints and opportunities, and economic trends, is required.

Table 1: Housing Activities of Local Governments

PRODUCTION	CONSUMPTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying appropriate and available land for new residential development • Facilitating land parcels for residential subdivision • Identifying appropriate development controls for residential development, including mechanisms which retain, promote, and finance affordable housing • Environmental / social assessment of proposed residential developments • “Streamlining” approvals to hasten the supply of housing stock and reduce costs associated with development • Working with other housing providers (eg. private, public, community sector) to encourage particular housing outcomes • Joint ventures with public, community, or private sector developers to supply affordable housing or housing for special needs • Donating land to public or community housing providers for social housing development, or donating land to private developers to stimulate housing production within a depressed market (eg. rural and remote communities) • Directly producing housing stock for special needs groups (such as the aged, homeless, people with a disability, council employees) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and monitoring housing needs within the local government area, and disseminating this information to social housing providers • Active collaboration with other providers (eg. private, public, community sector), to encourage integrated and strategic responses to housing assistance within the local government area • Advocating about local housing needs to higher levels of government • Co-ordinating or delivering appropriate support services (eg. Services for the aged, homeless or crisis resource centres) • Financial assistance (eg. rate relief) to social housing providers / low income households • Managing housing stock owned by council

Sources: Purdon and Associates 1991, BBC 1995, MAV 1999

These activities can be grouped within five broad processes or functions of urban development:

Urban management and renewal

- The conservation or renewal of existing housing and neighbourhoods through spatial land use planning is a core role of local governments (Nenno and Brophy 1983). Such strategies are associated with positive outcomes like improved amenity and community revitalisation, but also linked to gentrification and the loss of low income rental housing.

Responding to demographic and market trends

- Responding to demographic and market trends influencing housing supply and demand within accelerating and declining localities is also a core local government function (Nenno and Brophy 1983). This includes the strategic spatial planning work undertaken by councils to identify existing, potential or underutilised sources of residential land, to manage the release of land, and to streamline the development process by reducing “red tape” associated with council approvals⁶. Identifying appropriate residential controls to encourage particular types of housing would also fall within this function, particularly where the objectives are to stimulate a declining housing market (eg. density bonuses to encourage the repopulation of inner city areas) or restrain an accelerating one (eg. constraints on the conversion of low income housing or of rural land). In relation to this function, the connection between spatial planning decisions and housing market is crucial, but still poorly understood by governments (recognised by ALGA 1995).

Responding to special needs

- This function includes protecting or facilitating supply of low to moderate income housing and housing for special needs, through planning mechanisms, financial incentives, or direct provision (see Purdon and Burke (1991) for a comprehensive discussion of these approaches). To some extent these approaches are dependent on supportive legal frameworks and local political commitment.

Integrated local area planning

- This function refers to the potential to integrate housing policies with broader social and environmental planning activities of local government. During the mid 1990s there was a particular emphasis on achieving this through what was termed “integrated local area planning” (BBC 1995). In addition to comprehensive land use planning, this implies integrating the range of functions undertaken by local governments such as economic and community development, environmental protection and conservation, infrastructure provision and social services, and corporate planning.

Collaborative planning

- There is considerable potential for local governments to work with other levels of government and community partners to coordinate housing policies at regional and state levels. It is through such activities that a whole of government or “place management” approach to housing policy can be facilitated. Opportunities for collaboration include the development of regional studies and plans (such as the NSW Alpine Regional Strategy, which incorporates an explicit, intergovernmental commitment to address seasonal housing needs associated with fluctuating employment in the area); the preparation of local planning instruments, particularly those which include significant rezoning for residential land; and the regional allocation of housing assistance funds under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

Rather than actively engaging in these functions by facilitating or innovating to shape housing outcomes, it is often claimed, both nationally and internationally, that local governments have tended to play a passive role in reacting to market trends and preferences (eg. Gleeson and Low 2000, Paris 1990, Purdon and Burke 1991, Ministerial Task Force on Affordable Housing 1998, Taylor 1998, van Vliet 1990). The following section reviews these arguments in the light of existing national and international research.

⁶ It is argued that “streamlining” development approvals processes promotes housing affordability by reducing development costs and avoiding artificial scarcity in the supply of residential land. (Commonwealth of Australia 1991).

3. RESEARCH ON THE HOUSING ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

While there tends to be extensive research on social and environmental policy and practice at higher levels of government, critical investigation of local government activities is overdue (Adams and Hine 1999, Dunn et. al, Verhage 2002). This is partly due to the difficulty of generalising across the different institutional, social and environmental contexts that characterise local governments within Australia and internationally. Despite these differences, the literature that does exist points to a number of commonalities in the experiences of local governments, and highlights the similarity of trends in housing policies throughout the world. These are summarised in the following section, followed by a review of research describing the housing activities of local governments internationally and in Australia.

Both national and international research emphasises the need for housing policies to be situated within a strategic framework for implementation. At the local level therefore, “local housing strategies” or their equivalent, are thought to be vital for ensuring a strategic and integrated approach to addressing housing need within a particular locality. (Goss and Blackaby 1998, MAV 1999, Purdon and Burke 1991). There are now a number of “how to” guides to assist local authorities to prepare housing strategies (eg. DUAP 1996, Goss and Blackaby 1998, MAV 1999). However, there is virtually no published research documenting local government experience in preparing these strategies or implementing them in practice. This research gap, and associated questions for investigation, is discussed in section four.

3.1 Key themes

Literature on local government involvement in housing tends to be historical – focussing on its changing role within housing or urban planning (eg. Hall 1996, Paris 1993) – or technical – focussing on specific mechanisms for local governments to use in achieving particular housing outcomes (such as affordability or energy efficiency). Overall four, interrelated themes emerge.

- A retreat from central government intervention in housing and urban development outcomes, observable in many industrial capitalist countries (Gleeson and Low 2000, Verhage 2002).
- Increasing tensions between central and local governments, particularly regarding responsibilities for policy setting and planning functions (Stilwell and Troy 2000).
- A diversity of local government approaches and activities apparent even at regional and district levels (Paris 1990).
- Conflicts between spatial planning objectives which focus on environmental outcomes, and housing policies, which tend to prioritise social needs (Priemus 1998).

These are discussed below.

3.1.1 Changing urban governance

In most industrialised, capitalist nations of the world, there has been a perceptible retreat by central governments from a significant interventionist role in planning and urban development. This has meant that local governments have had to assume increasing responsibility for social, economic, and environmental outcomes (Adams and Hine, 1999, Verhage 2002). To a greater or lesser degree local governments may have the institutional capacity and strategic policy framework to accommodate this shift, but evidence suggests that in most cases local governments have been unable or unwilling to take on this burden (Purdon and Burke 1991). Indeed, while the majority of a local government area is “reasonably well housed”, or stands to gain from increased property values associated with gentrification, there is unlikely to be strong political pressure for intervention. Furthermore, in a shrinking fiscal environment, the main mechanisms open to local governments are their spatial land use planning and development control functions, yet the use of these powers is increasingly challenged by property developers and the housing industry (Gleeson and Low 2000, Verhage 2002).

3.1.2 Tensions between central and local governments

The majority of literature concerning local government involvement in housing identifies a tension in the relationship between “central” – either national, state, regional or provincial levels of government, and local authorities (eg. Paris 1993, Purdon and Burke 1991, Verhage 2002). This tension typically reflects a resentment, on behalf of local authorities and their constituents, to decisions that are perceived to be imposed from “above”, particularly where these decisions are regarded unresponsive to particular circumstances at the local level. The consequences of this tension often result in perverse outcomes – like a complete “backlash” against central government policy at the local level, and strategies to “disempower” local governments at the state level (Mercer and Jotkowitz 2000).

3.1.3 Conflicts between housing policy and spatial planning

Similarly, apparent tensions between the housing policies of central governments and spatial planning objectives for implementation at the local level, have emerged (Priemus 1998). A symptom of this is the increasing move to identify market and financial approaches to housing provision while pursuing more rigorous environmental agendas. For example, Hugo Priemus (1998), writing about recent developments in the Netherlands, points to the loss of the “old coalition” between housing and spatial planning. He identifies a new alliance between spatial planning and environmental policy, as the result of an “attempt by the Dutch government to combine a market-oriented housing policy with substantial environment ambitions (which have limited market support)” (Priemus 1998, p.31). The consequences of this new “coalition” could include an “artificial” shortage of land and what he perceives to be the encouragement of higher housing densities in contrast to resident preferences. It could also lead to a conflict between environmental priorities (emphasising the conservation of land and resources), and social and economic objectives associated with stimulating new housing construction (Morgon and Talbot 2000).

3.1.4 Divergence of local government approaches

As noted above, it is difficult to generalise about the experiences of local governments internationally, and even within Australia, as these are highly contingent on particular institutional, socio-economic and environmental contexts. However, it is clear that even within the same region or province, a remarkable diversity of local government approaches are common (Marcuse 1990). These conditions may encourage innovative responses to local needs and conditions, as revealed in a comparative analysis of NSW local government approaches to biodiversity conservation undertaken by the author (Gurran 2001). However, there is also evidence to suggest that some local governments also engage in “unneighbourly” behaviour by actively shifting social or environmental responsibilities to adjoining areas (Law 2001). There is obviously less potential for this where strong regional planning or policy frameworks exist, and these are increasingly advocated by central governments in the United Kingdom and Australia (eg. DTLGR 2000, DUAP 2001).

These themes are discussed in greater detail through the following review of international and national experience.

3.2 International experiences

Much of the international literature germane to this study focuses on the use of planning mechanisms to retain or promote housing for low income or special needs groups, within the changing governance and policy contexts described above. These mechanisms tend to rely on local governments for their implementation, although state intervention is generally required to provide legislative or financial support.

3.2.1 Affordable housing

The American Planning Association (APA) has played an active role in drawing attention to the potential for local governments to stimulate supply of “low and moderate income” housing through measures like inclusionary zoning, trust funds, and taxation mechanisms (including measures to reduce the burden of developer contributions to infrastructure provision) (Pendall 1992, White 1995, Morris 2000). Other strategies endorsed by the APA include monitoring and conserving forms of low income shelter such as single room occupant housing, as well

as using development agreements to establish affordable housing schemes. While tensions are identified between protecting environmental amenity, community character, and financing adequate public facilities, an extensive survey of local activities in metropolitan areas of the country identified a number of successful examples where local governments have managed to implement these agendas without compromising other community objectives (White 1995). Similar research commissioned by the APA in 2000 identified a number of examples where density bonuses for affordable housing have been used by municipalities in California, New Jersey, and Maryland, to implement affordable housing while still achieving urban design goals (Morris 2000).

Similar experiences have been documented in the United Kingdom. In recent years there has been a significant shift from local government's direct role in housing provision to an emphasis on "enabling" the provision of affordable housing by Housing Authorities and the private market (Goodlad 1994). A wide range of mechanisms are permissible, including the use of developer contributions to levy funds for affordable housing provision, the use of density controls to provide smaller housing units and facilitate entry points to the private housing market, and rezoning sites in rural areas that would not otherwise be developed (Smith 1999). A recent review of this experience highlighted conflicts between affordable housing and other planning objectives – for example, the use of former industrial sites for affordable housing rather than their retention for employment (Smith 1999). Despite this tension, in both the United States and United Kingdom it seems that developers and residents have come to accept affordability provisions within a few years of their implementation (Smith 1999, Marcuse 1990, White 1995).

3.2.2 Housing and special needs

Beyond broad affordability measures, research detailing local government activities in relation to other special housing needs is limited. In the United States, there is evidence that many local governments are reluctant to provide for the needs of homeless populations and may even utilise options to shift homeless populations to neighbouring municipalities through mechanisms, which are increasingly punitive (Law 2001). It appears that such responses reflect public attitudes and perception of homelessness (Brinegar 2000), highlighting the political factors constraining local government activities. Spatial land use zones have historically been used to exclude lower income groups through restrictive covenants or controls, and there is evidence to suggest that such exclusionary tactics remain prevalent (Marcuse 1990). The increasing occurrence of "gated communities" is a particularly overt mechanism for establishing enclaves of wealth, yet it is rare to find strong local government policies for resisting their development (Sandercock 1998).

3.2.3 Environmental Sustainability

In recent years a body of research investigating what could be described as the "greening" of residential development policy has emerged. In the United Kingdom, a nationwide survey of local residential energy efficiency strategies found a wide variation in their quality and highlighted a range of constraints to their implementation (Jones, Leach and Wade 2000). The study did not consider the relationship between these strategies and other housing objectives such as affordability. Similarly, an international review of local government achievement in implementing the Habitat Agenda found that more than 1500 local governments in 49 countries have established "Local Agenda 21" processes, resulting in new planning tools and methods for assessment and monitoring of environmental impacts (Brugmann 1996). However, there is almost no detailed discussion of the way in which these initiatives have been integrated with social objectives like affordable or appropriate housing (Morgon and Talbot 2000).

3.3 Australian research

Since the late 1970s there has been periodic research and policy interest in the potential for local governments to play a more active role in shaping housing outcomes.

3.3.1 National studies

The first national study of local housing activities was commissioned by the Australian Housing Research Council in 1978 (Purdon Associates 1991). The report found significant potential for enhanced involvement and recommended the amendment of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) to enable funding for this purpose. As a result, a number of individual housing studies were funded in Victoria and NSW during the 1980s. These focussed on specific housing needs and opportunities, but also tended to reflect more generally on the potential roles for local government. A major objective of these studies was to promote awareness within local authorities of their “direct” and “indirect” impacts on the housing market (Paris 1990).

A major review of this work was undertaken in 1991 as part of the background research for the National Housing Strategy (Purdon and Associates 1991). This report aimed to document the existing role of local government in the delivery of housing services and proposed a range of policy options for enhancement. Despite some notable exceptions, the study concluded that the majority of local governments had been both inactive and resistant to innovation, responding to conservative public attitudes rather than attempting to influence community opinions. The report also observed increased community awareness of the potential for housing as an investment, and concern by individuals to protect this investment. This was often expressed as opposition to development thought to threaten property values (in many cases, housing perceived to cater to lower income or “undesirable” social groups), and a desire to encourage gentrification.

While the Purdon report and subsequent National Housing Strategy documents were comprehensive in identifying existing and potential roles for local governments, the extent of this involvement was not fully investigated until 1994. At this time a national survey of 212 randomly selected councils attempted to determine the level and type of housing activities undertaken in different states and territories (Lawson 1994). The survey found that the issues most frequently considered by councils were physical planning considerations such as land availability, the quality of housing design and construction, and density. Issues considered least were household tenure, the implications of state and federal housing policies, affordability for low income earners, adequacy and appropriateness for special needs groups, and the energy efficiency of housing designs. The survey did find that almost half of Australian local governments had participated in partnership ventures to provide housing, most commonly with state / territory government and community housing groups. However, the majority of these partnerships targeted council employees or the aged, with very few examples of partnerships targeting other needs groups such as people at risk of homelessness, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, or new migrants (Lawson 1994, LGSA 1996).

In 1995 the Australian Local Government Association commissioned research to develop a national local government housing policy (BBC 1995). This research consisted of consultations with state governments and some case studies of good practice. It also documented statutory and organisational arrangements for housing services in each state, although much of this material is now somewhat dated. As to be expected in a document intended to develop a national policy for local government involvement in housing, the report emphasised that local governments are already undertaking a significant role in influencing housing conditions. However, it was acknowledged that many councils are not fully aware of the impact that their planning and regulatory functions may have on the affordability and appropriateness of housing within their areas. A model continuum of housing roles, ranging from the awareness and identification of needs, through proactive planning and regulatory functions, the facilitation of housing outcomes, and direct provision and management of housing, was constructed to illustrate potential opportunities (included in Appendix one).

Since this time there has been very limited research on local government activities. The information that does exist suggests that active local government involvement in housing remains the exception rather than the norm. For example, a 1998 survey of local governments in Victoria found that only 15 respondents had undertaken a housing strategy and only 33 reported a reference to housing in their broader planning framework (MAV 1999). However, the potential to use local planning mechanisms to retain and provide affordable housing has been emphasised in a small number of national and state studies and policy documents (eg. NSW Affordable Housing Taskforce 1998; Cox and Miers 1998; DOI 2001).

3.3.2 Barriers and opportunities

Collectively this research has highlighted a number of barriers and opportunities affecting local government involvement in housing activities. These are summarised in Table 2, and include a range of political, financial, institutional and legislative issues. Opportunities or success factors appear to be strong political support at both levels of government, dedicated resources and training, as well as flexibility to use enabling mechanisms such as planning controls.

Table 2: Barriers to and opportunities for local government involvement in housing (1990 – 2001)

BARRIERS	OPPORTUNITIES / SUCCESS FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local politics / community attitudes, reluctance to innovate • Institutional barriers – lack of interaction between planners, community service staff • Lack of housing information, lack of skills to or funds to undertake housing research • Legislative constraints (eg. Uncertainty about the use of planning mechanisms) • Lack of funds for direct provision • Hostility / resentment towards state government policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political commitment and willingness to innovate • State government funding / incentives • Dedicated housing officer • Flexibility in planning controls • Resources to participate in partnerships / joint ventures • Strong support of state government for local activities

Sources: Purdon Associates 1991, BBC 1995, Dominish 2001

On the other hand, factors limiting councils include a lack of locally aggregated housing information and data, negative community attitudes, and structural divisions within local government and between government agencies (Table 2).

3.3.3 Local housing strategies – panacea or palliative?

Local housing strategies enable local governments to undertake their activities within the context of a strategic framework for researching, planning, and responding to a range of matters including:

- population decline;
- housing market characteristics and change (eg. the type, tenure, and cost of housing)
- coordinated service delivery;
- protection of urban amenity;
- environmental sustainability and efficient land use; and,
- economic and community development (Goss and Blackaby 1998, MAV 1999).

Local housing strategies are common in many European countries and a requirement in the United Kingdom (DTLGR 2002, Goss and Blackaby 1998, Verhage 2002). The preparation of local housing strategies was a key recommendation of the National Housing Strategy 1992 and since this time both state governments and peak organizations have promoted their use (DUAP 1996, LGSA 1998, MAV 1999). The methodology for preparing housing strategies

typically includes an identification of local housing needs and conditions (the “housing study”), the articulation of a vision or set of objectives (the “housing policy”), and concrete measures to implement these objectives (the “housing strategy”) (Goss and Blackaby 1998). Mechanisms for monitoring and review should also be identified, and the MAV proposes a range of indicators for this purpose. These relate to residential building activity (dwelling commencements), housing stock type, tenure structure and change, home purchase and rental affordability, measures of need and demand (MAV 1999).

Despite the emphasis on monitoring and review, the extent to which local housing strategies have been successfully implemented in Australia, or indeed, internationally, is unknown. In fact, to date the existence of a strategy has itself been regarded as an indicator of a council’s commitment to housing policy. With the exception of Chris Paris’s review of Commonwealth funded housing studies (Paris 1990), there is no published research evaluating the quality or efficacy of local housing strategies in Australia.

The Paris study raised a number of questions about the housing study process and methodology (which appeared poorly understood by councils), and there is little to suggest that these concerns have been addressed since this time. Similarly, aside from the exceptional “success stories”, (such as the affordable housing mechanisms implemented by Waverley and North Sydney councils in NSW, and the joint ventures initiated by Port Phillip City Council in Victoria and the Brisbane City Council in Queensland), there appears to be little critical investigation of the extent to which the housing strategies that do exist have been implemented in practice or led to changed housing outcomes on the ground. Similarly, it is not known whether the strategies have met expectations in terms of more proactive, whole of government participation in housing policy objectives.

Given that the majority of councils in metropolitan Sydney, and to a lesser extent councils in other states and territories, have had some form of housing strategy in place for several years, it is now feasible to evaluate this experience. In particular, it is important to evaluate the extent to which these documents provide a basis for integrating housing policy with the broader environmental responsibilities and agendas of local government, such as land use planning. There is also a need understand whether the model itself has proved an effective vehicle for local governments to address defined housing needs and objectives. Evaluating the experience of housing strategy implementation will provide a basis for identifying examples of leading practice, as well as factors facilitating or constraining success. Thus, the investigation of local housing strategies provides a focus for examining the broader question of local government engagement in housing policy.

3.3.4 Summary of research

In summary, both the national and international research points to opportunities for local governments to actively shape housing outcomes through both their physical planning and community service responsibilities. However, these opportunities are limited by tensions between central and local government, as well as between environmental and social planning policies. Despite significant contextual differences, the majority of this literature and policy advocates the preparation of a local housing strategy (or equivalent) to address these problems (DTLGR 2002, LGSA 1998, Purdon and Associates 1991, Verhage 2002). However, there has been very little research on the extent to which local governments have actually prepared housing strategies in Australia, let alone the extent to which the strategies have proved an effective mechanism for enabling local governments to play a more active role in shaping housing outcomes.

4. EVALUATING LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCES IN QUEENSLAND, NSW, AND VICTORIA

The research aims to address these research gaps by examining the housing related roles currently undertaken by local governments in metropolitan NSW, Queensland and Victoria. The detailed research aims are to:

- *Analyse* and *compare* the housing related roles currently undertaken by local government in three Australian states and identify options to enhance these roles;
- *Critically evaluate* the implementation of local housing strategies in relation to defined housing needs and objectives, and identify models of excellence and innovation;
- *Ascertain* the primary legislative, institutional, and political constraints to the implementation of housing strategies, as well as factors contributing to success; and,
- *Review* the involvement of other local, regional, and state stakeholders / housing providers in the development and implementation local housing strategies and the implications of this for achieving a whole of government approach to sustainable urban development.

Consistent with these aims, the following questions guide the research:

1. What are the various housing related roles undertaken by metropolitan councils in NSW, Queensland and Victoria and how do these relate to their broader environmental responsibilities and agendas, particularly land use planning? What are the main opportunities to enhance the exercise of these roles?
2. To what extent has the local housing strategy model proved an effective vehicle for local governments to address defined housing needs and objectives, and what characteristics define successful strategies?
3. What are the primary legislative, institutional, and political constraints to the implementation of housing strategies, as well as the key factors contributing to success?
4. How do other local, regional, and state stakeholders / housing providers facilitate or constrain the development and implementation of local housing strategies within a whole of government approach to sustainable urban development?

The research methods to address these questions are summarised in Table 3 and discussed in the following sections.

Table Three: Summary of Research Methods

RESEARCH QUESTION	RESEARCH METHODS
<p>1. What are the various housing related roles undertaken by metropolitan councils in NSW, Queensland and Victoria and how do these relate to their broader environmental responsibilities and agendas, particularly land use planning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review to establish conceptual framework for analysis • Focus group discussion with representatives from metropolitan councils • In depth interviews through the case studies • Interviews with local and state government representatives in each state
<p>2. To what extent has the local housing strategy model proved an effective vehicle for local governments to address defined housing needs and objectives, and what characteristics define successful strategies?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire for focus group participants • Case study analysis and evaluation of 6 local housing strategies
<p>3. What are the primary legislative, institutional, and political constraints to the implementation of housing strategies, as well as the key factors contributing to success?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussion with representatives from metropolitan councils , Interviews with local and state government representatives • Documentary analysis of relevant state and local government planning legislation and policies • Case study analysis and evaluation of 6 local housing strategies
<p>4. How do other local, regional, and state stakeholders / housing providers facilitate or constrain the development and implementation of local housing strategies within a whole of government approach to sustainable urban development?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussion with representatives from metropolitan councils • Interviews with local and state government representatives • Documentary analysis of relevant state and local government planning legislation and policies

4.1 Comparison of experiences

There is a wide variety of state and local government arrangements for housing and land use planning across the Australian states and territories. These include diverse administrative and legislative arrangements, as well as different social, economic and political contexts. These factors are likely to significantly affect the capacity for local governments to exercise their potential housing roles. For example, state legislation can either facilitate or constrain the ability for local governments to use their planning powers to leverage affordable housing (Cox and Meirs 1998, Ministerial Task Force on Affordable Housing 1998). It is also likely that political factors (such as community concern for housing affordability, or resistance to the introduction of new social housing in a particular area), the size and socio economic characteristics of each local government area, as well as the resources available to each council, will also affect their willingness and capacity to play a proactive role in promoting particular housing outcomes.

A comparative research methodology is needed to understand the impact of these factors on the housing activities and outcomes of local governments. A comparative analysis also ensures that the research findings have broader applicability, offering the opportunity for different jurisdictions to learn from one another. However, in order to avoid excessive generalisation the study will be limited to the three eastern states: Queensland, NSW and Victoria, and focus on councils in within the metropolitan regions surrounding each capital city. These were chosen because of the complexities of housing need in each capital city, and because significant metropolitan planning initiatives, which may have implications for future local government involvement in housing policy, are underway in each of the three states⁷. These include the preparation of a new state planning policy on housing to guide local governments in Queensland; the introduction of a state environmental planning policy to enable certain local governments in NSW to levy affordable housing contributions, and the establishment of a State and Local Government Affordable Housing Steering Committee in Victoria.

To provide a comparative overview of the various housing related functions and experiences of metropolitan councils in the three states (research questions one, two and three), it is necessary to include a number of local governments in the study. However, more detailed analysis is also required to evaluate the implementation of housing strategies and to identify models of good practice (research question two). For these reasons, the methodology for the study combines three primary techniques: structured interviews with state and local government representatives of each state; focus groups with local government planners and housing officers in each capital city, and in depth case study analysis. In addition, the literature review (contained in this paper) provided the conceptual framework to analyse the housing related functions of metropolitan councils and to the key characteristics of housing strategies. This research will also continue to review existing and emerging State government policy and legislation affecting the role of local governments in urban development and housing. These will be documented as part of the policy context for each of the case study states (NSW, Victoria and Queensland).

4.1.1 Structured Interviews

Structured interviews are being undertaken with representatives of the local government associations in each state (ie. the NSW Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA), the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)). Interviews are also being undertaken with representatives of each state planning organisation (PlanningNSW, the Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning, and the Victorian Department of Infrastructure); as well as each housing agency (the NSW and Queensland Departments of Housing, and the Office of Housing within the Victorian Department of Human Services). These interviews are intended to identify:

⁷ . However, the need for comparable research in relation to the remaining Australian states and in rural and regional local government areas is also recognised.

- The extent to which each of the agencies is aware of the housing related activities undertaken by local governments within each state and to assist in identifying examples of good practice (research questions one and two);
- The main legislative, institutional and political constraints to the implementation of housing strategies as identified by each of the state agencies (research question three);
- The extent to which each of the agencies encourage and support local governments in undertaking a proactive housing role (research questions three and four); and,
- The extent to which the local government representative bodies encourage and support their members in undertaking a proactive housing role, and their perceptions of the factors facilitating or constraining this (research questions three and four).

The interviews are being conducted by the chief researcher and being minuted and transcribed by her.

4.1.2 Focus Groups

A focus group comprising local government planners and housing officers, peak bodies, and relevant state representatives, was held in each capital city during June and July 2002. Structured discussion prompts covered three key themes: housing related roles; experience in housing strategy preparation and implementation; and housing relationships with other stakeholders. Participants also completed a short questionnaire covering the history and implementation experiences associated with their housing strategies.

Participants for the focus groups were identified in consultation with the local government representative bodies and AHURI research centres in each state. The proceedings of the focus groups were minuted by the research assistant and also recorded. They are currently being transcribed.

4.1.3 Case Studies

From these discussions, approximately six councils will be selected for detailed case study analysis. The objective will be to select two metropolitan councils from each state, preferably with different housing market characteristics (eg. an inner and an outer metropolitan area). This provides the opportunity to identify and evaluate different local government activities and approaches (research question one). A second criteria for selecting case studies is that the councils have prepared (or substantially prepared) a local housing strategy or equivalent. Preference will be for housing strategies that have been in place for a number of years, to provide a basis for evaluating their implementation (research question two).

The case studies will consist of in depth interviews with land use and social planners, councillors, and local stakeholder organisations; as well as an analysis of the housing strategies themselves. The housing strategies will be examined to determine:

- The sources of information, types of research, and consultative processes used to identify housing needs and objectives
- The types of strategies and mechanisms they contain
- Mechanisms for implementation
- Provisions for monitoring and review against stated objectives

These objectives are typically broad and frequently relate to improving housing affordability and choice, increasing the provision of housing for special needs groups, enhancing planning instruments and assessment policies, and working with other levels of government on housing related outcomes. Thus an objective of the interviews with council planners and housing officers will be to determine the extent to which these objectives are being met.

Where available, housing data relevant to the stated objectives of the strategies will also be analysed. It is envisioned that the type of data collected will relate to housing market trends (eg. increases or decreases in rents, vacancy rates, sale prices within the local government area), types of new residential developments approved (eg. housing for the aged, medium density, suburban release), and social housing issues such as the provision, availability, and appropriateness of public, community and Aboriginal housing within the local government area. Data regarding changes to planning instruments (eg. changes in the objectives of the

plans, residential rezonings, changes in merit criteria for assessment of residential development, developer contribution levies for affordable housing etc.), changed policies regarding development assessment, or the introduction of new planning instruments (such as development control plans), will also be collated. Evidence of policy or program responses at the local government, or sub regional level will also be sought. This information will provide a way of identifying examples of innovation and best practice in local government housing initiatives.

In addition to the housing strategies, relevant planning instruments (particularly state planning legislation, the local statutory land use plan, more detailed development control or assessment plans, and any other relevant council policies, such as a social plan or strategy⁸), will be analysed to determine the extent to which these instruments support or constrain the implementation of the local housing strategies (research question three).

Finally, both the focus groups and case study research will investigate the process of local planning and policy making for housing outcomes – for example, the extent to which social housing providers are involved in local plan making processes, and the extent to which local government planners are invited to participate in the broader housing policy and planning activities state government (eg. the regional allocation of Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) funds). This data will provide a basis for evaluating the extent to which the strategies have been implemented and explain the factors limiting or facilitating this implementation (research question four).

The case study research will be conducted between July and November 2002.

⁸ The terminology for planning legislation, statutory planning instruments, and council policies differs in each Australian state and territory.

CONCLUSIONS – ENHANCING THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN HOUSING

This study builds on the research carried out in the early 1990s in preparation for the National Housing Strategy, to provide an empirical basis for understanding the contemporary role played by Australian local governments in housing. By investigating the implementation of local housing strategies, it will complement the significant policy development and training work already represented in the various resource kits for their preparation (DUAP 1996, MAV 1999). The findings of the study will also contribute housing policy and metropolitan planning processes currently underway in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

In summary, the study should:

- reveal new insights into contemporary institutional, legislative and political parameters affecting local government involvement in housing;
- provide evaluative data concerning housing strategy implementation and practical options for enhancing housing strategy methodologies;
- identify replicable models of excellence and innovation in local government housing initiatives; and,
- clarify the various roles and opportunities for State and local governments to shape housing outcomes within a framework of sustainable urban governance.

Initial findings will be disseminated through an AHURI Work in Progress Seminar (anticipated September 2002). A final report will be submitted in December 2002. The findings of the study will also be communicated through a series of seminars designed specifically for local government planners in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

APPENDIX ONE – CONTINUUM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT HOUSING ROLES

AWARENESS AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS

- Increasing awareness of the role of Local Government in influencing local housing conditions and opportunities, regardless of its recognition of this role.
- Promotion and education of the need and opportunities for achieving adequate, appropriate and affordable housing.
- Membership/support and/or encouragement of regional housing councils, housing forums, committees and groups.
- Researching local housing needs.
- Advocating for resources to achieve these initiatives.



PLANNING AND REGULATORY FUNCTIONS

- Ensuring the availability of an adequate and timely supply of serviced land and suitable infill sites to meet existing and future housing needs.
- Streamlining approval processes to facilitate the production of housing.
- Reviewing development controls and building regulations to promote appropriate and affordable housing suited to local conditions.
- Facilitating and carrying out the efficient, timely and adequate provisions of urban infrastructure and services which provide the context for the provision of housing by others.
- Developing planning and regulatory mechanisms to encourage or require contribution to housing outcomes (eg. incentives, bonuses, Transferable Development Rights, developer contributions/levies/exactions, linkage fees, inclusionary zoning, betterment levies, demolition controls etc.) within the context of legislative constraints in each State / Territory.
- Integrating the strategic planning process to recognise the importance of the interrelationships between housing, jobs, services, and transport, and the effect of these on access to appropriate and affordable housing.
- Assessing and wherever possible mitigating the social impacts of development on housing.



FACILITATION OF HOUSING OUTCOMES

- Providing, co-ordinating, facilitating and/or supporting housing related services and programs.
- Designating and officer with responsibility for housing.
- Preparing housing strategies to achieve adopted roles and objectives.
- Focussing corporate goals and capital works programs to reflect the adopted housing role.
- Encouraging the private sector to contribute to achieving housing objectives.
- Facilitating, supporting and/or resourcing local community groups to initiate housing projects.
- Developing pilot of demonstration projects to encourage innovation in design and diversity of housing choice.



DIRECT PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT

- Entering into joint ventures to directly provide housing stock with other spheres of government, the private or community sectors.
- Residential subdivision.
- Direct provision of housing stock.
- Recurrent support and or management of housing stock.

Source: BBC 1995

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