



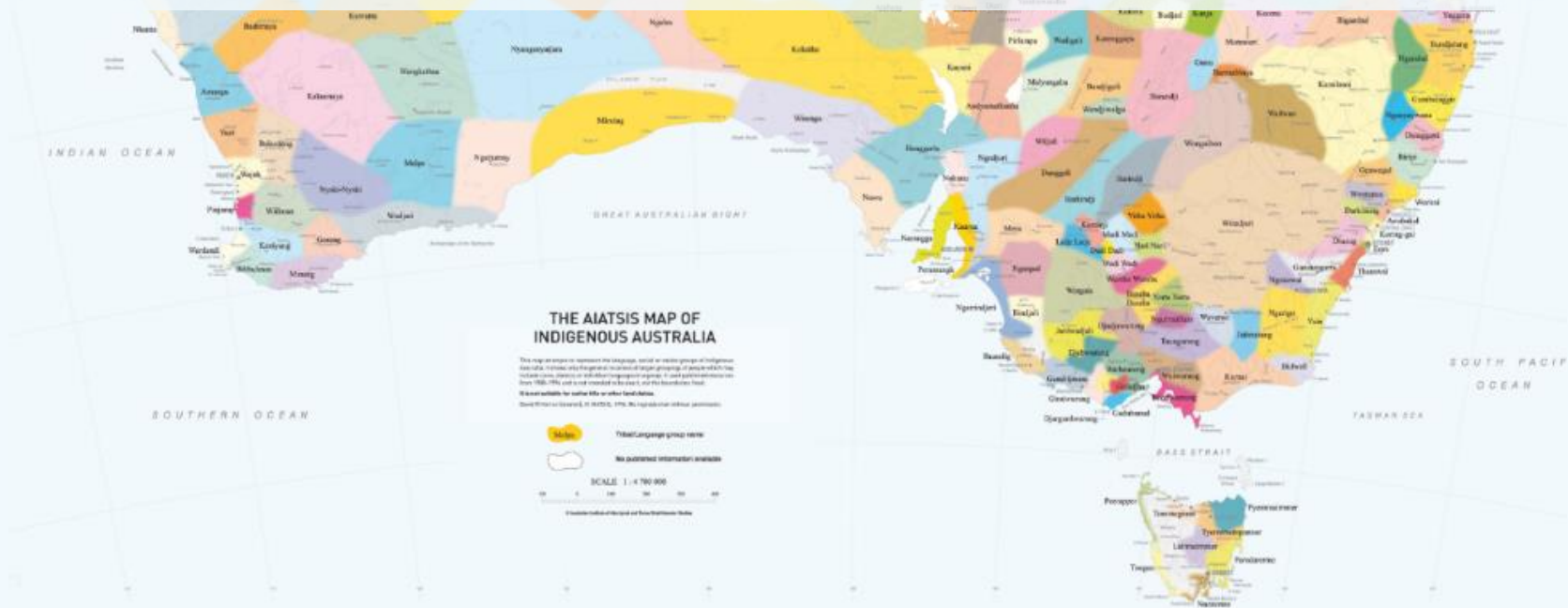
Tiny and Alternate Housing Survey of Australian Councils

Dr Heather Shearer & Professor Paul Burton

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Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the traditional custodians of the land, pays respect to the Elders, past and present, and extends that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Abstract

Australian Local Governments: How open are they really to tiny, temporary and alternative dwellings?

Unaffordable housing is a significant and growing problem in Australia, particularly for **renters**. While conventional strategies such as releasing more greenfield land and offering subsidies to first-time buyers may help to some extent, they are not sufficient to fully address the **complex challenges of an increasingly dysfunctional housing market**. In response, there has been some discussion of the **potential contribution of tiny, temporary, and other alternative dwellings**, amid concerns that they are not favoured in many local planning schemes.

We report on the results of a **survey conducted among planning staff in a sample of local councils across the country**. While not necessarily representing formal council views, we found that many planners favour a more supportive stance in respect of tiny houses, broadly defined. However, they also call for **appropriate safeguards** to ensure such dwellings are **designed and built to relevant standards, connected properly to local services and infrastructure, and not located in areas with a high risk of bushfires and floods**.

There is also an understandable concern to **protect the amenity** of people already living in areas where tiny homes might be located and to be able to deal with some tiny home manufacturers and retailers' claims that their products do not require any form of council approval.

We conclude by assessing the contribution that tiny houses might make to the overall challenge of addressing the current crisis of housing unaffordability and scope for planning schemes and policies to support a greater contribution in a thoughtful and coherent way.

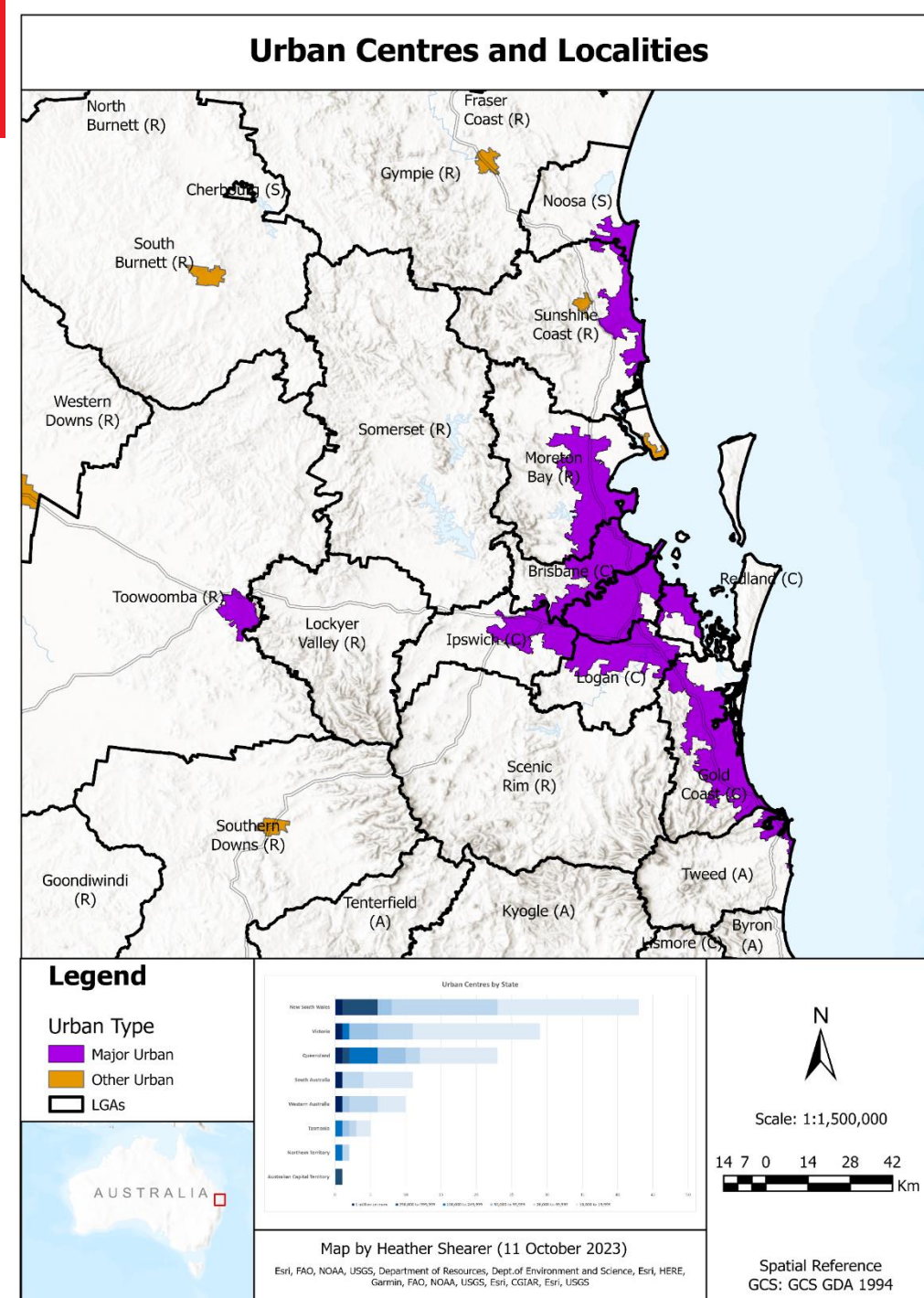
Assumptions...only one is accurate

1. *“Councils are THE biggest barrier to the tiny house movement”*
Survey Respondent
2. *“Tiny houses are THE solution to the housing affordability crisis”*
Survey Respondent
3. *“If another council permits <tiny houses on wheels>, we will consider it too”* Council Planner, Queensland
4. *“Tiny houses on wheels are an affordable way to enter the housing market”* multiple Social Media Posts
5. *“If you permit tiny houses, the area will just become a slum”*
Survey Respondent

Fig 1. Map illustrating selection process

Methods

- Using UCL (urban centres and localities) layer ABS
 - Identified approximately 250 councils to contact
- Sent emails addressed to generic council address, Att: Planning Staff
 - Received 147 valid responses
 - The majority worked for councils as Planners
 - Limitation - should have included Local Laws & Building and Plumbing Staff
- Some further 9 respondents were interviewed
 - These were in Queensland, Victoria, WA.
 - Interviews were open-ended and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes



Tiny House on
Wheels



Manufactured
House (Park)



Tiny House on
Skids



Garage or Shed
House



Shipping
Container
House



Modular House



Bus Caravan
Van



Campervan or
Tent House



Site Hut



Fig 2. Dwelling Types Surveyed

Summary of Survey Responses

- 207 responses were received, 148 were valid
- 86% currently worked for a council, 5% as non-government planners, 4% used to work for a council, 2% as a state planner, and 3% other (rounded up)
- 27% Qld, 26.4% NSW, 16.9% Vic, 12.8% WA, 10.8% SA, 5.4% Tas, .7% NT
- Affordability a serious issue – Strongly Agree 44.4%, Agree 35.2%, Neutral 9.9%
- Councils extremely different in how they dealt with alternative and temporary dwellings, even within the same State

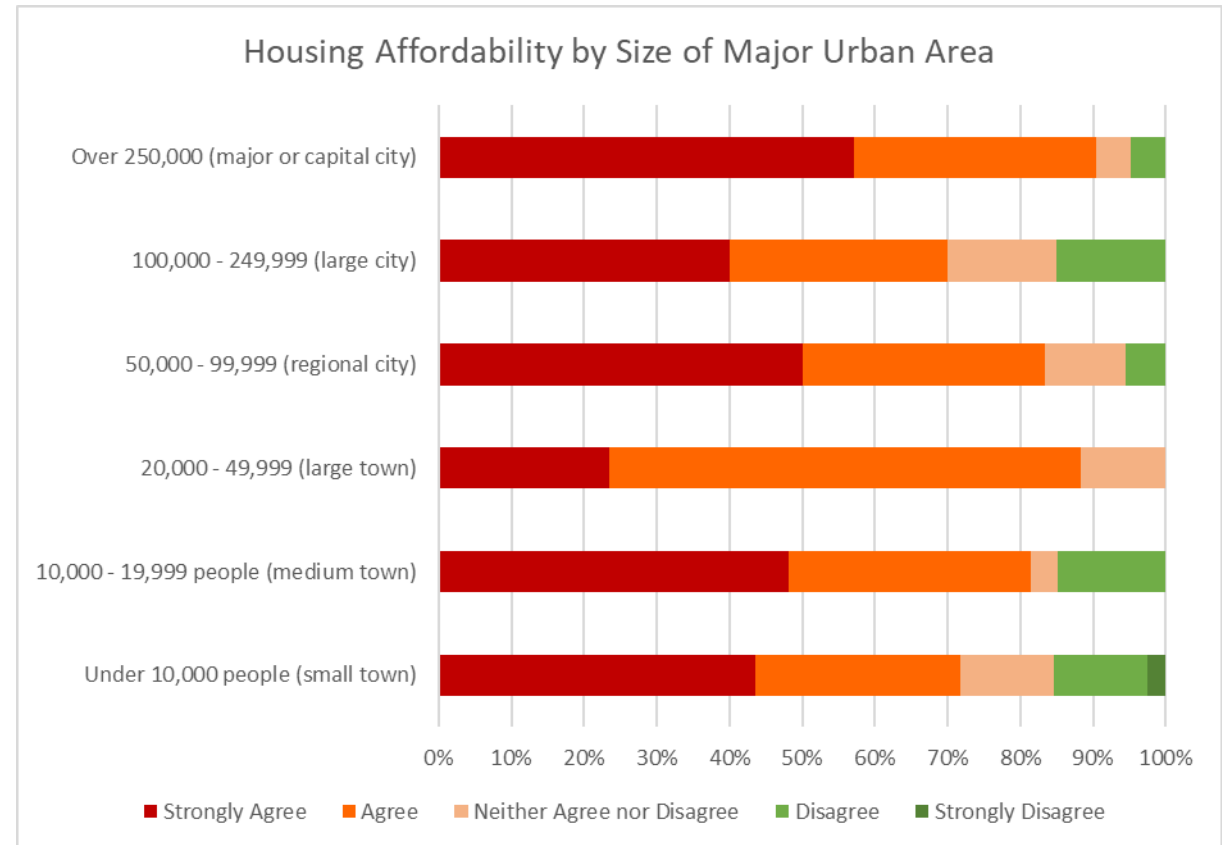


Fig 3. Is housing affordability an issue in your Council area? 5 point Likert Scale

Type of Dwelling Permitted by State

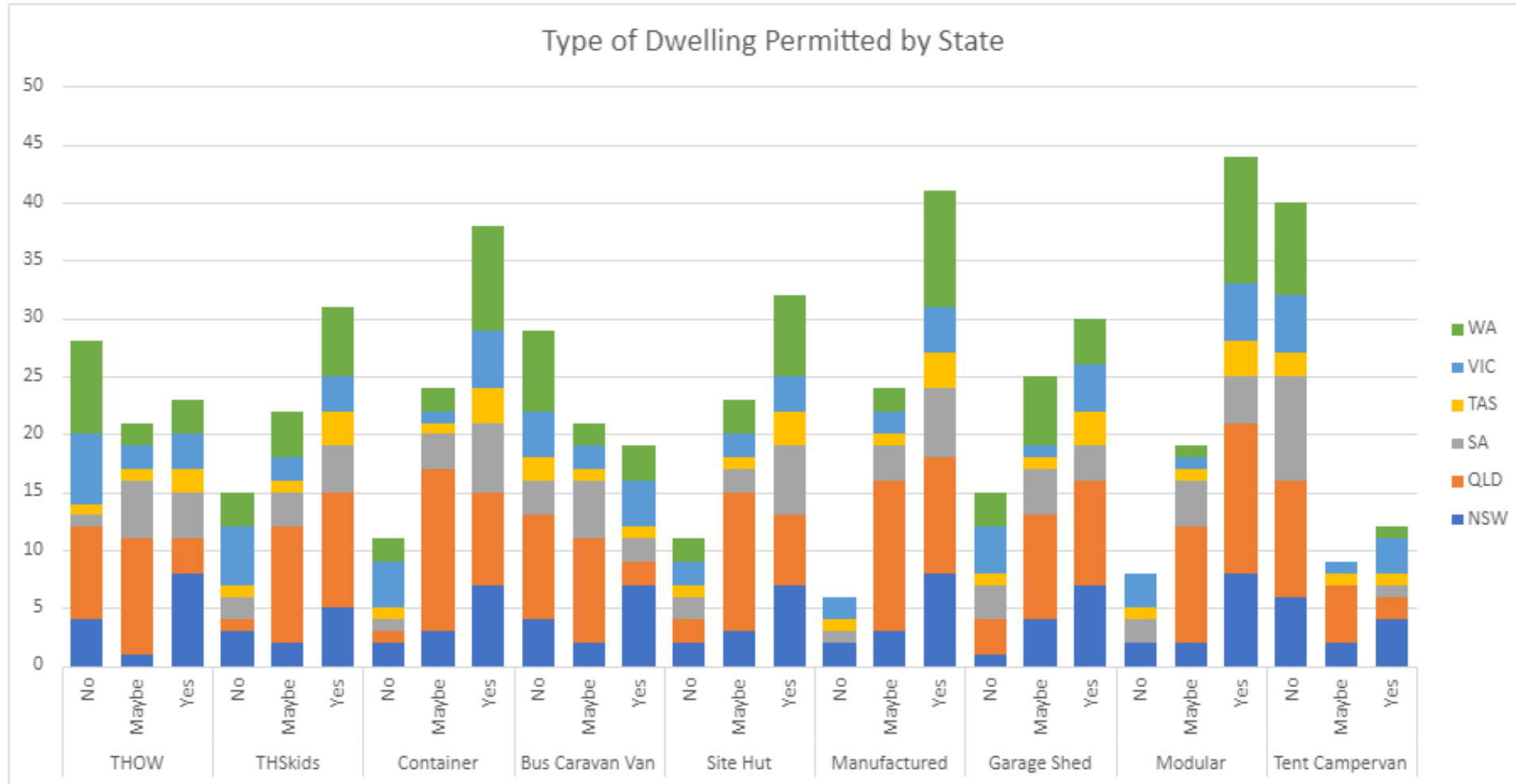


Fig 4. Categories of permitted dwellings (permanent habitation) by State (count)

Duration of Permitted Occupation (THOW)

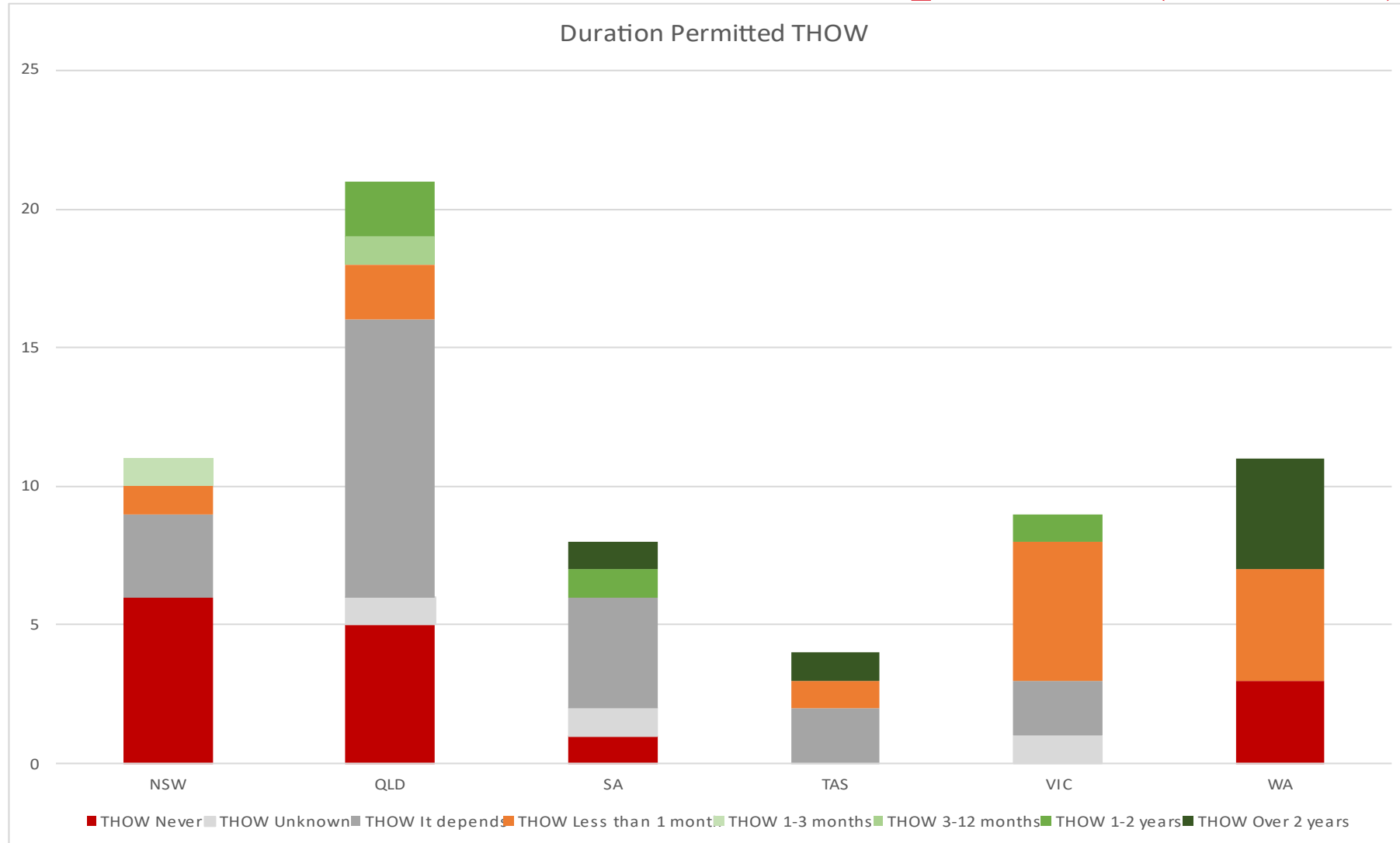


Fig 5. Duration of permitted habitation, Tiny House on Wheels, by State (count)

Quotes (1)

- *“It is desirable to have the widest possible range of accommodation types, including tiny houses, to meet the wide variation in household circumstances and preferences.”* Planner, Major City, Qld
- *“If being used as a permanent dwelling they need to meet the requirements to be habitable on a permanent basis i.e. be fit to be occupied. Still need to obtain the relevant approvals to be used as a permanent dwelling, but Council will accept these types of dwellings and will likely grant approval for them.”* Planner, large town, SA
- *“If a residential building is proposed on wheels it is classified as a caravan and is subject to council's local law, which states that it can be on a residential property no more than 2 weeks in any 8 week period. The Building Regulation no longer has a minimum size for a Class 1 dwelling so tiny houses are permitted and are also being utilised as secondary dwellings (i.e. granny flats).”* Planner, large town, Qld

Quotes (2)

- *“We are currently in the process of reviewing our Community Amenity Local Law to include Tiny houses as well as created a new application framework. One of largest barriers is the BMO in coastal areas. the Fire Overlay.”* Planner, medium town, Vic
- *“Will need to be classed by a certifier as a secondary dwelling, be fixed, and come under the general restrictions for them. Caravans and other structures on wheels cannot be used permanently.”* Planner, major city, Qld
- *“The regulations need to be reviewed and suitable options discussed. We had a squatter in a farm property, living in a caravan, who had destroyed the farm house. The council refused to enforce its own caravan restrictions. The residential tenancy act did not apply because it was a rural property and the person did not have a lease. Yet the land owners could do nothing.”* Councillor, small town, NSW

Potential Conditions for Approval

Options for Approval Tiny House on Wheels - count

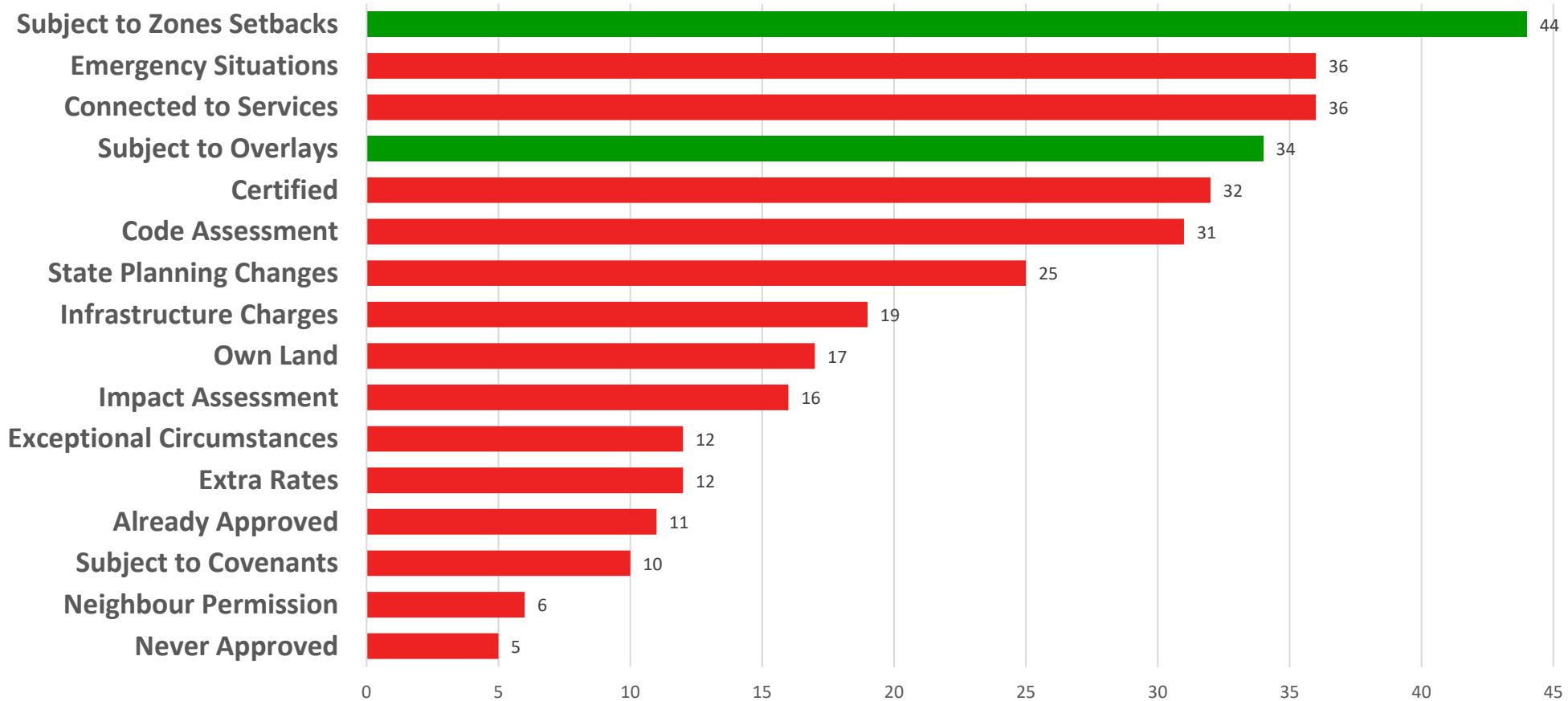


Fig 6. Potential conditions under which Tiny Houses on Wheels may be permitted for permanent habitation (counts)

Themes from Qualitative Research

Name	Files	References
Climate Change	6	24
Housing General	8	336
Tiny and Alternative Houses	7	75
Housing Affordability	6	50
Regulation and Policy	8	409
Building Codes	6	117
Dwelling Type (Planning)	4	18
Health_Environment	4	15
Land Use Planning (General)	8	62
Local Laws	7	16
Short Term Rentals	7	118

Discussion and Conclusion

- Tiny house movement more ‘mature’ now – quite dichotomous
 - Main driver still unaffordable housing...
 - Less DIY and more manufacturers – but VERY expensive (avg at Tiny House Expo around \$140k – aimed at Airbnb market?)
 - A minor, but vocal “prepper”/ anti regulation sub group
- Councils are NOT “the biggest barrier” to tiny houses
 - But are *very* conservative
 - Some, such as Esperance, Fraser Coast, Brisbane, Scenic Rim, etc, are more flexible, at least with tiny houses
- The need is for infill in the middle (and outer ring) suburbs
 - Currently, a lot of tiny houses are “under the radar” in the rural and rural residential areas
 - Need them to be in driveways, backyards, suburbs

Discussion and Conclusion

- To progress alternative houses as infill in the suburbs and be acceptable to councils, important to:
 - Health, safety, amenity – i.e. able to be certified under the BCA/NCC (no wheels)
 - Ensure adhere to zones, setbacks, other constraints
 - The more mainstream and accepted tiny houses and other alternative dwellings are, then the more likely councils are likely to approve them
 - The more accepted they are, the more that the construction industry are to embrace this type of building, and costs will fall (very expensive at the moment)
- Consider equity – just because people are of low income, should they be “forced” into tiny and/or substandard dwellings, of whatever definition
- Some heresy (lol) – Tiny Houses on Wheels are not THE solution (even minor).
 - Expensive, inaccessible, space constrained, difficult to move, heavy, difficult to place, have potential equity issues, issues with waste disposal, poorly designed (many), i.e. steep steps to sleeping loft no safety rails, can only get a personal loan, hard to insure, depreciate
 - Rather buy a caravan if don't own land or a modular/kit/etc house if own land
 - Only ever a niche housing option, but great for Airbnb...