Dr Margaret McKenzie  
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:  

This submission addresses the following

b. examine the appropriate role of local government in generating economic development and review the allocation of responsibility in this area with the State Government;

The role of VCAT should be reformed as it should not be able to override a local council refusal of a planning permit. Local council should only allow planning permit after stringent, transparent criteria are met, and a full and transparent consultation process is undertaken. All councillors and officers should publicly declare and advertise their interests in the process. The test for acceptance of a planning permit should be based on a default of status quo. The planning proposal should have to be defended by the developer, rather than automatic unless challenged by council or ‘objectors’. Objecting is a long and expensive process as it stands, rather, no permit should be the default. Also, planning refusal should be binding whereas granting permit should be appealable. This would also be consistent with international standards where acceptance of a development plan is not the default, status quo is the default. This would make for much more a much more rational basis for heritage, environmental and a public good basis for planning. It would be consistent with public interest and natural justice.

The state should not agree to planning permits unless it matches them with appropriate infrastructure including public transport, as well as environmental, heritage, design and equity criteria. It should preserve green wedges, height restrictions and keeping open land along rail lines as the basis for urban planning. In my view there is an argument for an increased consistent Commonwealth role in determining planning scope, especially in relation to national parks. Permits should certainly not be at the final discretion of the Planning Minister. That enables the developer lobby to have the final say.

c. examine whether the role of local government in rural and regional areas has different economic development tasks to that of metropolitan based municipalities;

Both should have environmental and heritage criteria as the basis for planning permits. Both should also be able to refuse planning permits on the basis of the absence of supporting state infrastructure including public and freight transport. Hence it should not be possible to build at eg Wilson’s promontory or any other national park. These have to be managed in a way that provides uncommercial facilitation of tourist visits which support preservation of the parks.

d. identify the barriers to local economic development, including compliance costs for business and planning delays, in operating in local municipalities and develop solutions to address these barriers;

Barriers to planning permits are negligible now and ludicrously low compared to equivalent jurisdictions globally: this is a cowboy country in terms of planning.
In fact barriers to planning permits should be raised in terms of the hurdle criteria of public interest, environmental and heritage considerations and evaluations. At the moment it's a free for all for developers, with community interests able to be completely overridden, which is essentially undemocratic. Design should also be a major consideration in order to avert the proliferation of slums which are now visible.

e. examine ways in which municipal councils and the Victorian Government can jointly support local economic development, enhance and promote employment and attract new investment, especially in localities with emerging economic potential;

As above, planning laws should not be primarily for the private interests of developers, it should be difficult to defend and obtain a planning permit, the criteria should be stringent and consistent, with heritage and environmental criteria at the top. Green wedges should be preserved, and urban height restrictions strictly adhered to. The land along railway lines should be kept as green strips unavailable for build development eg the developments along the rail line between Northcote and Croxton stations on the South Morang line are hideous and should never have been permitted. Otherwise Melbourne will lose its beautiful Federation character.

Finally planning should be mindful of the need to preserve and encourage a socioeconomic mix in each street both urban and rural, to prevent encroaching ghettoisation and inequity which are highly anti social trends and which will destroy society in the long run. I support medium density development which adheres to these criteria, rather than the high density and highly destructive and irresponsible development which is encouraged currently.