

The Heritage Inquiry Submissions - Lodgement by 5pm 31-01-2022

Submission by:

Ms Beverley Lines



Request to Speak to the Enquiry: **Yes**

1. Housing Affordability

I think one of the most important problems needing to be addressed is “negative gearing”. When this was introduced Australia was very different to now and I maintain this ongoing policy is causing the market to be unfairly geared in favour of investors, who in turn are causing property prices and rents to be inflated.

Where people aspire to live seems also to be a real problem. If more companies set up in regional towns and employment opportunities were spread more widely I believe this would assist in reducing such vast numbers from only wanting to live close to the major cities where even previously appropriate infrastructure is now totally inadequate. The continuing trend of forcing home buyers into apartments, which is not the desired type of dwelling for families at all; coupled by new developments in our outer suburbs being on tiny allotments with no play area for children outside; is creating entirely new social problems as parents do not think it is safe to allow children to wander off to a “community play area” which may or may not be available and living so close to neighbours seems to also cause unacceptable noise disturbance and social disharmony.

Another significant factor is people’s expectations of where they believe their budget should enable them to live. Previous times have seen first home entrants prepared to start basic and gradually build up - changing to upgraded more desirable locations over time and as income permits. Market forces have and are likely to continue to put certain prime locations out of reach to first time buyers and low-end renters. It is therefore paramount that social housing be built in areas where cost of living is more affordable, there are employment opportunities and ideally in some regional areas where immigrants would be welcomed in for the abundance of work - regional manufacturing, fruit/vegetable harvest, shearing etc.

2. Population Policy

All levels of government within Australia have been pushing increased immigration and the “big Australia” policy - trying to convince everybody this is great for all of us. I think this policy is completely misguided and at no stage have Victorians or the Australian population been asked to vote on this policy. Overcrowding, inadequate public infrastructure including medical/hospital facilities, transport, education, public open space, waste management, and traffic problems have all been caused by this obsession with increasing our population to the point many of us are struggling to ascertain what if any advantages have been achieved by this policy.

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There are suburbs in Melbourne where little or no English is spoken and these residents come from so many different cultural backgrounds it is difficult for many to transition adequately with secure employment and the ability to sustain themselves. Lack of appropriate integration for new immigrants is a major cause and has led in some cases to misguided youth turning to crime as they have not felt included in society.

It is important to continue with an appropriate refugee/compassionate intake, however under existing immigration policy the concept of buying Australian citizenship and then being able to bring other family members out to join is highly questionable and I believe a flawed policy, leading to complex problems like short term business ventures failing completely or issues surrounding dual passport holders and no revenue coming into our State or Federal economy from taxation not being paid by these people.

Currently all we are hearing about is a desire to bring in foreign labour to address apparent shortages. Why then do we still have such vast numbers of people of employable age completely dependant on welfare? Healthy welfare recipients should be required to undergo re-training where there is a need and must be prepared to re-locate to where this employment is.

3. Planning - Environmental Sustainability

This is something I am passionate about - I think currently our planning experts at every Government level have it all wrong. I will concentrate on the demographic area where I currently own and occupy a stand-alone home within a heritage overlay precinct within Toorak. Current planning claims to address climate change and environment protection yet typically all new developments are a complete contrast to any such consideration. Even high density cities such as Singapore and Dubai have vast set backs for apartment complexes and they must be placed on angles that do not obstruct other existing buildings, cause wind tunnelling, or block out natural light. There is also a strict requirement in terms of amenity provided - green space and tree canopy designed to offset carbon emissions and provide residents with a desirable living amenity. The aesthetics of what we have and continue to keep building is appalling and in my opinion these buildings will become slums of the future where no-one will want to reside. Many of the new multi-story high density developments are funded by overseas investment where greedy developers do not have any regard to quality of build (cladding debacle), cracking and water penetration and issues regarding noise, insufficient parking and totally inadequate amenity being provided for purchasers. Boundary to boundary development is the norm with little or no tree canopy or green space and any planting that is put in is mostly inappropriate and not fit for purpose. Recently I have observed massive prickly palm like trees put within caged in balconies - not providing any amenity whatsoever and I would ask how these can ever be removed? The covid pandemic has led to a fear of living and working in high density environment resulting in prices and rents being at an all time low for inner city apartments whilst stand-alone homes remain at an all time high with demand far outstripping supply. Ongoing destruction of established tree canopy and green space is a disgrace and certainly not helping the environment in any way.

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4. Heritage Overlay

Current restrictions on alterations to a heritage overlay property are so onerous practically no-one is willing to take it on. Having to do any alterations in a completely different and standout modern style is ugly and not at all sympathetic to the original design. I think this is absolute madness and is indeed only compounding the fact no-one is keen to have their property listed under a "heritage overlay". We need to instead adopt a model like in the UK where the interior can be completely demolished and the property brought up to modern day family living and be environmentally sustainable, provided the exterior remains in-tact and is renovated in complete accordance with appropriate regulation - retaining all green space and any significant trees.

Perhaps some sort of financial incentive like a rate reduction, to encourage owners of significant property to embrace heritage overlay and have these properties highly regarded, would incentivise any purchaser of these properties that investment in restoration would indeed be rewarding as well as safeguarding our grand homes and commercial buildings for future generations to enjoy. Currently it is regarded as a curse to have your home heritage listed and this is enabling developers to gobble them up (justified on better use of an allotment with multiple development). Toorak is well located to many of Melbourne's elite private schools, at which to gain entry, normally requires booking a child at birth - clearly demonstrating there is a market for the existing stand-alone established homes. These families can well afford the market price and are prepared to upgrade to meet their requirements provided regulation makes this process easier and more achievable. This market do not want to live in any form of high density housing.

Many fine heritage buildings sit within significant shopping/business precincts such as Chapel Street Prahran, Toorak Village, High Street Armadale, Melbourne CBD, to name but a few. Currently owners have not been required to upkeep these buildings and sadly many are in a state of near ruin above street level - often with shop fit outs on the ground level not at all in keeping with any heritage style and therefore quite ugly and inappropriate visually. Continuing to allow property owners to avoid keeping their property in acceptable condition is completely unacceptable. After an initial transition period increasing and ongoing penalties should be applied to achieve compliance.

I think it is urgent new rules be introduced requiring these grand old buildings be refurbished, within strict heritage regulations incorporating environmentally sustainable efficiencies enabling re-purposing for medical, education, early childhood centres, business offices or even some residential accommodation.

The old GPO in Bourke Street is an excellent example of what can be achieved by re-purposing a grand old building into a stylish shopping precinct.

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5. National Trust - Heritage Protection

This is another area where policy has failed. National Trust properties are in the main dilapidated, under utilised and a drain on the economy. We need to have Federal Government take over this portfolio and I believe do something like in the UK and even Singapore where some very special homes can be renovated appropriately and then leased out for residential use - for example Como House in Toorak, Ripponlea in Elsternwick, Werribee Mansion, to name but a few.

Many fine old mansions, church's and other significant listings could be re-purposed in some way by renovating sympathetically and thereby facilitating the ability for an income to be derived to cover ongoing maintenance and contribution to State or Federal Revenue. A system like I am suggesting exists in Singapore with the management of their famous "Black & White Heritage Houses". All leased by the Government and deriving significant rent - some by foreign embassies.

Local Council and State Governments have proven to be completely unable to manage National Trust Property so I believe a commission overseen at Federal Level needs to be set up for this purpose.

The decision to list a property should be liaised between Local, State and Federal Government and once listed on the National Trust Register, Federal Government would then be responsible for overall decision making - State Government being mandated to manage the basic overseeing and reporting any lack of compliance back to Federal Government. This would achieve a Nationally consistent policy framework with breaches being a jailable offence.

6. Conclusion

I recognise my views are confronting and radical; however I have much life experience having owned and lived in 9 different properties in Melbourne (current house in Toorak), 1 house in Brisbane, an apartment in Hong Kong and 3 apartments in Singapore. I undertook post graduate study in real estate whilst living in Singapore on one occasion, and I have always maintained a keen interest in property design, functionality, and financial return on investment. I therefore believe the views put forward in this submission are well founded, have credibility and therefore warrant consideration by this enquiry.

Beverley Lines