

Having been to VCAT numerous times against, or sometimes in support of, local and State planning and environment matters, I commend Labor Victoria for introducing this Bill, and feel compelled to comment in general support of the proposed Planning and Environment Amendment (Recognising Objectors) Bill 2015.

My experiences at VCAT have been mostly very disappointing because of the unequal contest between objectors with limited resources and well-resourced developers, planners, corporations or lawyers. Planning and environmental regulations seem designed to favour development or action by well-resourced agencies, businesses or individuals rather than favouring the community or care of the natural environment. And the hike in VCAT fees is a highly undemocratic and unfair way of limiting objections. This is not true progress and is undemocratic and unequal in every way, disadvantaging both society and the environment.

This imbalance can be partially corrected by VCAT being required in their ruling to take into account both the number of objectors and the merit of objections. My observation is that most objectors attend VCAT for altruistic reasons or because too much change is being forced upon them and their communities. True progress happens when actions bring changes that benefit both society and the environment - recognising objectors and the merits of their arguments would be a small progressive step.

Yours faithfully

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