



Joint Regional Planning Panels

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Complaints Report

01 July 2013 – 31 December 2013

1. Introduction

The six Joint Regional Planning Panels (regional panels) provide independent merit based decision making on regional development. They are not subject to the direction of the Minister or the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

Regional development is a class or type of development as described in Schedule 4A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979*. Regional development is publically exhibited and assessed by local council staff. An assessment report is then prepared by council staff and submitted to the relevant regional panel for determination.

The regional panels are committed to addressing enquiries and resolving any complaints that may be raised about their operation, including complaints about the policies, procedures or quality of service of the regional panels or the Regional Panel Secretariat (secretariat).

The Joint Regional Planning Panels Complaints Handling Policy (complaints policy) aims to promote an accessible, fair and equitable complaints handling process. The complaints policy does not extend to dealing with complaints concerning dissatisfaction with a determination of a regional panel, government policy or legislation or decisions of government.

All complaints are assessed on their individual merits. When dealing with a complaint the secretariat undertakes a review in order to ascertain the facts of the matter and determine an appropriate course of action. Written responses are provided at the conclusion of the matter.

The secretariat view complaints and their resolution as an opportunity for improvement of service quality. Similarly, the reporting of complaints enables the secretariat to determine if any systemic problems exist or if any trends to the complaints received warrant further action.

Under the complaints policy the secretariat is required to report on the number and scope of complaints, key issues and any policy or operational response that has been taken to address the concerns raised.

This complaints report covers the 6 month period from 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013.

2. Complaints received

During the period from 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013 the secretariat investigated 9 new complaints in this period and continued the investigation of 1 complaint from the previous period. 9 of the complaints were received from members of the public and 1 from a proponent. All 10 complaints were finalised in this period.

The number of complaints in relation to regional panel operations during this period represents an improvement on past reporting periods, with a lower number of complaints received.

It should be noted however that the number of complaints received is not necessarily an effective indicator of the seriousness of the matters raised. In some cases the decision on a single controversial application by a regional panel can trigger a number of complaints.

The following tables break down the complaints by regional panel region (Table 1) and by the number of times particular subjects and issues of concern are raised (Table 2).

Table 1. Complaints by regional panel region

Region	No. of complaints
Sydney East	3
Southern	6

Table 2. Issue breakdown and number of times issue raised

Subject	Issue	No. of times raised
Notification	Inadequate time to consider planning report/amended plans	7
Reasons for decision	Lack of reasons for decision	1
Panel chair	Attitude of panel chair	7
	Not enough time for speaking at panel meeting	7
Determination	Not satisfied with outcome	7
Code of Conduct issues	Concerns regarding nature of relationship of a panel member with representatives of the applicant and behaviour towards a councillor	2

3. Resolution times

The secretariat aims to resolve complaints within 4 weeks (30 days) of their receipt. During this reporting period complaints were resolved in an average of 13.6 days, with the shortest resolution being 7 day and the longest being 21 days.

4. Key outcomes

All complainants were provided with a response on conclusion of a review of the matter. There were found to be no breaches of the Joint Regional Planning Panels Code of Conduct (code of conduct) on any occasion following an investigation of the complaints.

A long-running and contentious matter generated a number of complaints against the Southern regional panel. A regional panel website error in relation to a planning report for this matter meant that the report was only available for 3 days prior to the meeting. This added to concerns about the process and determination of this matter. The secretariat has apologised for the regional panel website error and the planning report was made available at the regional panel meeting.

Complaints regarding the determinations of regional panels are outside the scope of the complaints policy.