



# Joint Regional Planning Panels

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Complaints Report

01 Jan 2014 – 30 Jun 2014

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## 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 of Planning.

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 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 January 2014 to 30 June 2014.

## 2. Complaints received

During the period from 1 January 2014 to 30 June 2014, the secretariat investigated 5 new complaints from members of the public. There were 2 responses finalised in the period. As at 1 July 2014, there were 3 complaints to be resolved.

This represents an improvement on past reporting periods in relation to the number of complaints received (compared to 9 complaints received in preceding reporting period). However, it should be noted 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
<b>Sydney East</b>	3
<b>Hunter and Central Coast</b>	1
<b>Sydney West</b>	1

Table 2. Issue breakdown and number of times issue raised

Subject	Issue	No. of times raised
Panel membership	Suitability / qualifications of panel member	2
Determination	Review of decision sought	2
	Jurisdiction of the panel to consider the matter	1
Speakers	Representation of applicant by lawyer	2
	Unfair time given to presenters at public meeting	1
Panel	Pre-judgement of matter by panel	1
	Bias shown to applicant	1
	Did not listen to objectors at public meeting	1
Site visit	Submitters not given notification of, or opportunity to attend, site visit	1
	Site visit undertaken with applicant	1
Records	Non-availability of internal panel minutes	1
	No approval of meeting minutes	1
	Errors in meeting minutes	1

### 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 42 days. It is noted that timeframes were slightly longer than normal due in part to an internal error in the delivery of one of the complaint letters.

### 4. Key outcomes

With regards to the two complaints completed in the period, 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 or Joint Regional Planning Panels Operational Procedures following an investigation of these complaints.

The responses to the complaints which were completed in this period clarified regional panel processes, including nomination of council panel members and availability of meeting minutes.

Complaints regarding the determinations of regional panels and requests for review of decisions are outside the scope of the complaints policy.