

Tasmanian Planning Commission
GPO Box 1691
Hobart TAS 7001
Via email tpc@planning.tas.gov.au

Dear Tasmanian Planning Commission

Re: *Draft Tasmanian Planning Policies*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Tasmanian Planning Policies (TPPs). The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) is the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania and a leading voice representing Tasmanians on low incomes. Our vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity.

When Tasmanians are connected to digital services, they are healthier, safer, more productive and able to connect with local, national and international communities. With an increasing number of government and other services delivered or accessed online, digital access and the ability to use digital technologies is now an essential part of daily life.

Yet Tasmania remains the country's least digitally included state and the gap with the mainland is widening. Digitally excluded Tasmanians are less able to participate in our economy to: find and maintain work; access education, health and government services; maintain social connections; and find reliable information, especially in times of crisis.

Barriers to digital access

A key barrier to participation is access to broadband internet due to a range of factors including cost and whether broadband infrastructure is available to a premises. While most premises have broadband infrastructure available, it is new developments in particular that may not have the necessary infrastructure in place when new housing is first released onto the market.

Tasmania's current planning laws do not make it mandatory for developers to provide for connection to broadband infrastructure at the time land is developed. This has led to the frequent situation where occupants of new developments move in and do not have access to broadband internet. While this can be arranged, for some Tasmanians experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability, this can be a lengthy and unaffordable process that results in new occupants left without broadband internet at all.

An effective solution is to consider telecommunications infrastructure as an essential service and ensure it is required in the TPPs along with other essential services such as electricity and water.

Telecommunications infrastructure in TPPs

TasCOSS supports the reforms in the draft TPPs that make it mandatory for broadband infrastructure to be connected to new premises before they are sold. Amending planning policy in this way is a positive

and inclusive step to ensure developments contribute to better levels of connectivity, equality and digital access.

In particular, TasCOSS supports the following sections of the draft TPPs:

- Section 1.2.3 – Strategies
Recognising telecommunications as a strategy to improve liveability of settlements and support the wellbeing of the community, in particular supporting employment opportunities and the ability to work remotely and access global markets.
- Section 5.1 – Provision of Services
Promote the efficient, effective, sustainable and safe delivery of services including telecommunications. Strategies to do so include:
 - Encouraging the connection of new lots, or providing for potential future connection to, telecommunication services at the time of subdivision, where the land is in a serviceable area and there is a reasonable expectation that the future use of the lot will require telecommunications services.
 - Encouraging the protection of significant existing and future water, gas, electricity, sewerage, stormwater and telecommunications infrastructure assets and waste disposal and resource recovery facilities, sites and infrastructure corridors from sensitive and incompatible use and development encroaching those assets, facilities, sites or corridors.
 - Supporting the provision of contemporary telecommunications and information technology that are widely accessible and meet the needs of business, industry, public infrastructure and domestic users.

These draft provisions are a sensible way forward and would bring Tasmania’s planning laws, policies and processes on par with best-practice in other states, notably Victoria.

Summary

The benefits of the digital economy cannot be enjoyed when many members of our community face significant barriers to getting online, including access to broadband internet. TasCOSS welcomes the inclusion of telecommunications in the Draft TPPs as a positive step towards addressing the digital divide.

We fully support the inclusion of telecommunications in the final Tasmanian Planning Policies.

Yours faithfully



Adrienne Picone
Chief Executive Officer

26 June 2023