

Submission from the Master Builders Association of the ACT Territory Plan Draft Variation 343 (DV343)

Master Builders Australia has been operating for over 100 years, representing the interests of up to 30,000 members Australia-wide, with around 1,200 members in the ACT. The MBA represents the interests of commercial builders, residential builders, civil contractors, suppliers/subcontractors and professionals. The MBA is also a Registered Training Organisation and a Group Training Organisation. In preparing this submission, we have canvassed the views of our members for their input and their comments have been incorporated into this submission.

Summary of MBA position

In summary, MBA is supportive of DV343 for the following reasons:

- It will provide opportunities for additional housing stock to be built which will benefit local builders and contractors, and help relieve the chronic shortage of land for home building that currently exists in Canberra,
- It will assist to defray the costs to government of the 'Mr Fluffy' legacy (as stated in the Consultation Notice), and
- It provides opportunity for sensible and measured urban infill development which will diversify the housing stock, and allow smaller and more affordable housing close to existing urban infrastructure.

Policy Considerations

Canberra is currently an extremely low density city. Increasing the number of households within existing suburbs will become a necessity in the future to maintain viable communities. Additional housing and more diverse housing types will provide greater opportunities for young families to be able to live close to existing schools, centres and public transport. Further, by encouraging dual occupancy development within existing communities, opportunities will be provided for our aging residents and down-sizer's to move into smaller homes designed for their changing needs, while staying within their existing community.

These policy outcomes are reflected in the ACT Planning Strategy, specifically planning strategies 1 and 3.

Strategy 1. *Create a more compact, efficient city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along the major public transport routes, and balancing where greenfield expansion occurs.*

Strategy 3. *Provide more cost effective and sustainable living options by improving the existing housing stock and establishing more choice in housing types in a variety of locations.*

Allowing an intensification of housing within suburbs affected by the 'Mr Fluffy' blocks, albeit a less than 1% increase in density, will directly support planning strategies 1 and 3 by:

- Adding housing stock within the existing urban area as an alternative to greenfield expansion (which has some long term limitations),
- Providing smaller and more affordable housing options for Canberra's,
- Providing opportunities for down-sizer's to build housing suitable to their needs within existing urban areas, and
- Increasing the diversity of housing stock within the existing urban area.

MBA is highly supportive of Government measures which advance strategy 1 and 3 of the ACT Planning Strategy.

Impact on the Construction Industry

Canberra's local construction industry has been experiencing extremely difficult trading conditions over recent years. A limited supply of land for building is one reason attributed to the depressed trading conditions. A significant benefit of DV343 is that more land will become available for redevelopment, providing valuable opportunities for local builders and contractors to build more homes. While this additional supply does not replace the need for a long term supply of greenfield land, it nevertheless will provide welcome opportunities for local builders and the industry broadly.

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Opportunity to Extend the Benefits

While MBA is supportive of DV343 as proposed, we believe there is an opportunity for Government to extend the benefits that will be afforded to 'Mr Fluffy' blocks to all blocks within the RZ1 zone greater than 700m².

The social, environmental and economic benefits that DV343 provides should not be limited to affected 'Mr Fluffy' blocks. The achievement of the planning strategies referred to earlier would be further advanced by allowing dual occupancies to be built on all blocks in the RZ1 suburban zone which are 700m² or greater. These expanded provisions should also allow these blocks to be unit titled, and adopt the same plot ratio and design criteria as proposed in DV343.

Such an expansion would increase the benefits for the local building and construction industry.

Building Height

DV343 proposes to restrict the height of dual occupancies further than the allowable height for single dwellings in the RZ1 zone in certain circumstances. Considering the policy intent is to allow dual occupancies in the RZ1 zone, the design of dual occupancies should be encouraged to be of a similar standard to single dwelling houses. Little community benefit appears to be gained by restricting height to single story in certain circumstances. In fact, this restriction may result in undesired design outcomes such as large ground floor building areas encroaching into areas of the site which are more suitable for private open space.

MBA believes that the same height restrictions that apply to single dwelling houses in the RZ1 zone should apply to all dual occupancies permitted under DV343.

Design Criterion

MBA supports the inclusion of design criterion to ensure that dual occupancy dwellings meet design standards and to ensure this form of housing is accepted by neighbouring communities. MBA is desirous of working with the ACT Government to ensure the proposed design criterion meet this objective, while also being workable for the construction industry.

Conclusion

In summary, MBA is supportive of DV343 because it advances a number of important planning strategies as outlined in the ACT Planning Strategy and will provide much needed work opportunities for our local construction industry.

We also suggest that the principle of allow dual occupancy dwellings in the RZ1 zone could be extended to all lots greater than 700m² subject to the same titling, building height, plot ratio and design criterion as the 'Mr Fluffy' blocks.

If you require any further information, or would like to clarify any points made in our submission, I may be contacted on (02) 6247 2099.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Hopkins
Deputy Executive Director