

1 November 2015



New inquiry: Urban planning

The Government has asked the Productivity Commission to look at ways of improving New Zealand's urban planning system.

This inquiry follows on from the Commission's investigation of how councils make land available for housing, which found that New Zealand's urban planning laws and processes were unnecessarily complicated, slow to respond to change and did not meet the needs of cities.

The Commission has been asked to identify the most appropriate system for allocating land use in cities to achieve positive social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes. This includes the processes that are currently undertaken through the Resource Management Act, the Local Government Act and the Land Transport Management Act. It also includes elements of the Building Act, Reserves Act and Conservation Act that affect the ability to use land in urban areas. The inquiry will look beyond the existing planning system and consider whether a fundamentally different approach to urban planning is needed.

"Most New Zealanders live in cities, and cities are places where most of the country's economic activity occurs. It's important that our planning system effectively controls harms to people and the environment, makes enough room and infrastructure available for homes, businesses and industry, and responds quickly to change," said Commission Chair, Murray Sherwin.

"Cities across New Zealand face a range of challenges. Fast growing cities like Auckland are finding it difficult to provide enough capacity to house their rising populations, while others face the problem of maintaining essential services and infrastructure with flat or declining populations. Urban areas need a planning system that can respond effectively and efficiently to these pressures."

"Our inquiry will explore the development of the current planning system in New Zealand, assess its performance compared to other countries, and identify where change is needed. The aim is not to draft new laws ourselves, but set out what a high-performing planning system would look like."

"Many people have an interest in effective urban planning, including residents, businesses, developers, planners, iwi, local authority staff, community representatives and environmentalists. We are interested in hearing from people who are familiar with planning systems here and overseas, so that we can understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and identify a future regime that meets New Zealand's needs."

The Commission will begin the inquiry with the publication of an "issues paper" that will outline its proposed approach to the inquiry, the context for the inquiry, and a preliminary list of key questions to be addressed. We expect the issues paper to be available by mid-December. It will seek submissions from all interested parties and will be accompanied by a broad consultation process to help inform and ground the Commission's analysis. The Commission's final report to the Government is due on 30 November 2016.

About the New Zealand Productivity Commission

The Commission – an independent Crown entity – was established in April 2011 and completes in-depth inquiry reports on topics selected by the Government, carries out productivity-related research, and promotes understanding of productivity issues.

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