

# Most decisions to be taken out of minister's hands

## Panels

Robert Harley

As many as 80 per cent of the applications now being decided by the minister under his controversial Part 3A "call-in" powers would be decided by a new Planning Assessment Commission.

So most property development decisions would go to the PAC, with the minister retaining control over major infrastructure works.

The NSW Local Government and Shires Association has supported the PAC, subject to a number of checks and balances.

The LGSA has suggested membership and operation of the PAC be overseen by a parliamentary committee; that applications before the PAC be allowed legal representation; that applicants and third parties retain appeal rights; and that the minister be restricted from intervening. The draft legislation does restrict the

minister from intervening. But the LGSA rejects the use of Joint Regional Planning Panels as "an unnecessary duplication of existing government and judicial bodies that will add costs and time to the development assessment process".

Property Council of Australia NSW executive director Ken Morrison described the establishment of the PAC and Joint Regional Planning Panels as a "first step" towards depoliticising planning decisions.

Mr Morrison said it was ironic the government was not getting credit for making decision-making more transparent in the current political environment.

Instead, he said, the government was "getting beaten up for it".

Both Mr Morrison and Aaron Gadiel, chief executive of the Urban Taskforce, said the \$50 million threshold, above which joint regional planning panels would be responsible for decision-making, was too high.

"There needs to be a much lower threshold for the planning reforms to work for typical suburban development projects," Mr Gadiel said.

"A lot of those projects are in the \$5 million to \$30 million range. A \$50 million project outside of central Sydney is a very, very rare thing. The day-to-day business of development in suburban Sydney is in the \$5 million to \$30 million range."

with Paddy Manning