

## Local Government

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### Planning review changes in NSW raise ire of developers

Jacob Saulwick

Developers will confront a new system to review council decisions on proposed rezonings after changes announced by Planning Minister Rob Stokes last week.

Mr Stokes said a new rezoning review process would replace the pre-Gateway review.

He said the changes would ensure a faster and more independent review process. And they would stop developers proposing, and re-proposing, amendments to rezoning decisions at the review stage.

"This will end the absurd situation of proposals rising like zombies again and again in an endless cycle of amendments and resubmissions during the review process," Mr Stokes said. "A simpler, easier-to-understand and quicker review process will benefit applicants and the community alike."

As part of the changes, which came into effect last week, if developers want to review a proposed rezoning they will have to first pass a strengthened strategic merit test.

The developer lobby said there had been a lack of consultation over the changes.

"The tone of the announcement implies that it is applicants that have been at fault in delaying the processing of planning proposals but much of the fault actually lies with the state government's slow and inconsistent planning system," the chief executive of the Urban Taskforce, Chris Johnson, said.

#### COUNCILLORS KEPT WAITING

Mayors and councillors from seven local government areas confronting forced mergers have been kept waiting for a response

to a letter to Mike Baird raising concerns about the amalgamation process.

The councillors, from Mosman, Hunters Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Strathfield, Cabonne, Oberon and Shellharbour, wrote to the Premier last month requesting the government suspend mergers for the time being.

Their councils have not yet merged because they or neighbouring councils have challenged the process in court. But the government is likely to merge the councils should those court challenges be unsuccessful.

