

115,000 REASONS TO GET CRACKING

Sydney's new building boom

EXCLUSIVE
MILES GODFREY

THERE is enough vacant "greenfield" land in Sydney and the Central Coast for 115,000 new homes — enough to meet existing demand and help first-time buyers get on the ladder.

Planning Minister Rob Stokes told home builders to get cracking and start developing new properties in the west. "My message is get out there, we will support you. Whether it's the northwest, the southwest or the greater Macarthur region, we need more homes for a growing population," he said.

"What we face in Sydney is actually not a shortage of land. What we have faced historically has been the capacity to fund infrastructure to ensure land is converted into houses."

Industry groups also called for bottlenecks in the planning system to be cleared "urgently" so the new properties can be built — potentially easing the massive hurdles facing first-time buyers in Sydney, where prices rocketed 15 per cent last year.

"More homes being built more quickly means a more affordable housing market," NSW Property Council boss Jane Fitzgerald said.

"Unlocking this land for development is essential to boosting housing supply."

The planning department revealed there are nearly 4000ha of "greenfield" land — about 2200 times the playing surface of the SCG — that has been released and rezoned for housing in Greater Sydney and Wyong.

It's more than double the amount of land available for housing in 2011.

Just under 84,000 new homes could be built on that

land right now — with water and other infrastructure already in place.

A further 31,000 properties could be built on land rezoned for housing but which needs extra work on infrastructure. Land for at least another 45,000 homes is expected to be rezoned in the near future.

All of it is located in and around Bankstown, Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Penrith, Pittwater, Warrimah, Hills shire and Wyong — between 29km and 100km from the CBD.

The Baird government has repeatedly claimed there is "pent-up demand" for 100,000 new homes because of a previous lack of investment in the infrastructure needed for new homes.

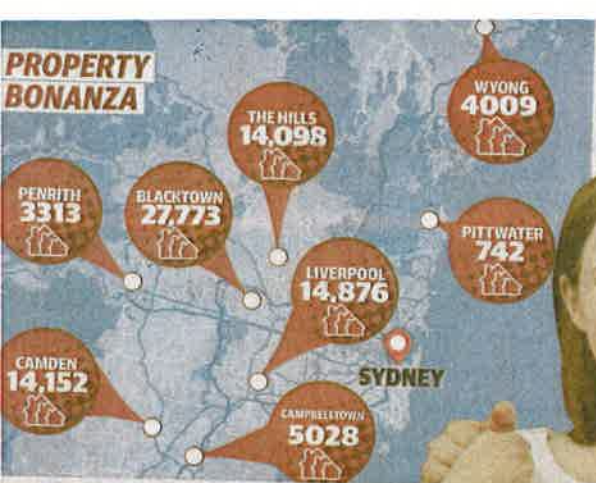
It recently set a target of 185,000 new properties over the next five years, a claim that appears attainable.

Experts believe about 725,000 new homes are needed in Sydney over the next 20 years to keep pace with population growth but there is increasing concern that councils are adding to the housing affordability crisis by taking months or even years to approve new homes.

Mr Stokes (pictured) announced draft laws this week allowing the government to strip red tape out of the NSW planning sys-



PROPERTY BONANZA



Emma, 26, and Jeremy Wynn-Jones, 25, pictured at their Kellyville home they built.
Picture: Toby Zerna

tem, which the Property Council branded the "worst in the country", to fast-track development.

He particularly took aim at councils dragging their heels on development applications, with new powers to override their decisions and those taken by other government agencies that approve developments.

A planning department spokesman said: "The NSW government is committed to putting home ownership within reach of more people by creating a more efficient planning system to support increased housing supply."

More homes being built more quickly means a more affordable housing market

NSW Property Council boss Jane Fitzgerald

Urban Taskforce boss Chris Johnson said the amount of land available for new homes will "help significantly" and said Sydney needs about one third of its homes in the suburban outskirts, one third from units near public transport and one third medium density housing, such as terraces or townhouses.

There is demand from

buyers for new homes on greenfield sites in the suburban outskirts but Mr Johnson believes they are increasingly focused on units closer to the CBD.

"Increasingly people are trading off location for size and preferring smaller apartments closer to jobs and amenities," Mr Johnson said.

Premier Mike Baird said

this week that buyers must look to the outskirts if they want a house with a yard, while Opposition planning spokesman Michael Daley suggested first-time buyers must go further afield, even to Bathurst, to get on the ladder.

"If you build additional infrastructure there is additional opportunity for more land to be released," Mr Baird said.

Mr Daley wants significant portions of new housing built on Crown land to be ring-fenced for "affordable" properties.

"Crown land must be used to maximum benefit for affordable housing and not be

flogged off by Mike Baird for maximum profit," he said.

Emma and Jeremy Wynn-Jones recently built a new three-bedroom house in North Kellyville. The couple, in their mid-20s, had a quick turnaround putting their plans to Baulkham Hills Shire Council and moving into their new home with a granny flat six months later.

The Wynn-Jones admit they are fortunate enough to have families in a position to contribute financially.

Jeremy's parents paid the deposit on their home and the couple are using the rent from the flat to pay them back.