

# DA tracking system tops Rudd's list

Author: Robert Harley  
Date: Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2007  
Publication: The Australian Financial Review

Federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd has committed a Labor government to work with the states and local councils to reduce the red tape and delays in the development application process. "These delays add unnecessary cost burdens to Australian home buyers," he said yesterday. Mr Rudd will take a number of proposals for reducing the costs of red tape to his housing affordability summit in Canberra on July 26.

A top of the list is a national web-based system that would allow councils and applicants to track the progress of development applications. Mr Rudd said such a scheme, similar to the application-tracking online service at Sydney's Pittwater Council, would save councils time and money. "In addition, there needs to be a streamlining of the processing of complying applications for minor projects such as extensions for an extra bedroom, single dwelling home and pergolas," Mr Rudd said.

Many states, including NSW, have already attempted to streamline the process. Mr Rudd also pointed to the use of development assessment forums- independent panels that assess developments according to council plans and strategies- a reform that is strongly advocated by the Property Council of Australia and already being trialled in South Australia.

In NSW, delays in the approval process can add up to 15 per cent to the cost of a project- an additional \$4 billion to the state's property users- according to the NSW Urban Taskforce. The chief executive of the Urban Taskforce, Terry Barnes, welcomed a national, uniform approach to an issue that needed "urgent attention," and would help local councils, the property industry and "mums and dads".

The executive general manager for AV Jennings in NSW, Bruce Harper, said council approvals in NSW took twice as long as other states. "A standard project home, one that Jennings has built hundreds of times before, will take 7 ½ months to get approved in NSW," he said. According to the Property Council, an improved development assessment process could save \$1 billion nationally. Genia McCaffery, the president of the NSW Local Government Association, and the Mayor of North Sydney, welcomed Mr Rudd's emphasis on working with the local government.

"The planning process is complex and he may have heard just the property industry side of the case," she said. "I think it is misplaced to say councils are adding costs". "It is a complex process and every time we try to reform it we end up making it worse." Cr McCaffery pointed to the use of independent certifiers as a so-called reform that had created more, not less, delay.

"I would love to find a way of making the process simpler but it is not easy; you can please the development industry and upset the local community," she said.