

Better urban planning

Draft report at a glance

August 2016



Terms of reference

“Identify, from first principles”, the most appropriate system for allocating land use.

“The review should look beyond the current resource management and planning paradigm and legislative arrangements”.

The inquiry evidence base

- 52 submissions
- 80+ face-to-face meetings
- Council survey
- The Commission’s previous inquiries
- Academic literature and government reports
- Leading practices from overseas regimes and engagement with international experts

Urban planning is important for:

- regulating negative spillovers arising from land use
- providing and funding local public goods
- providing and managing essential infrastructure services

The current system has some strengths...

- Quick processing of consents for lower-risk developments
- Relatively enabling zones
- Evolving capability to recognise Māori interests & engage with Māori stakeholders

...but the system has serious weaknesses - both in design...

- Unresolved tension between environmental/socio-economic needs
- Lack of clarity and focus – ambiguous goals
- Slow processes do not respond to changing conditions
- Incomplete infrastructure funding toolbox

...and implementation

- Unproductive interaction between central & local govt.
- Unduly restrictive rules – overreach in many policy areas
- Capability gaps in environmental science and economics
- Not enough guidance on environmental priorities

Changes are needed:

- Clear distinctions between the built & natural environment
- More effective national guidance, clearer priorities
- Infrastructure provision should be more responsive, enable cost recovery and better procurement
- More restrained use of land use regulation
- Stronger capabilities within councils and central government

A future urban planning framework should...

- favour development in urban areas, subject to clear environmental limits;
- articulate clear priorities for the natural environment through a Government Policy Statement;
- provide greater external scrutiny of land use rules;
- respond faster to new information and changing social conditions;
- make spatial plans a formal part of the planning hierarchy;
- remove legislative barriers to wastewater and road pricing, value capture;
- narrow access to appeals and tighten notification requirements;
- require more representative consultation;
- use a broader range of policy tools to manage urban spillovers; &
- Build on the evolving capability to recognise and protect Māori interests.

...yet changing legislation will not be enough

For good planning outcomes, planning culture should:

- place a strong emphasis on robust and evidence-based decisions;
- value continuous learning and feedback;
- empower staff to “speak up” & challenge existing practice; &
- acknowledge & respect the boundaries of planning’s influence.

A more productive relationship between central and local government is crucial, both depend on each other for success.