



MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

**Municipal Association of Victoria**

**PLANNING BANK**

**November 2006**



This paper prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is in response to a growing concern within the local government sector about the shortage of (statutory and strategic) planners in Victoria, particularly in regional and rural areas.

The MAV is the statutory peak body for local government in Victoria, representing all 79 municipal councils within the state. This discussion paper has been prepared by MAV staff following consultation with a number of councils from metropolitan, regional and rural areas as well as external stakeholders.

While this discussion paper aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.

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## Content

In recent years there has been a growing concern within the local government sector about the shortage of planners. A number of studies have been undertaken by organisations such as Planning Institute Australia, by both their Victorian and National offices, and PPK Environment & Infrastructure Pty Ltd. This work, and the findings of these reports, has been again tested recently through a review undertaken by an external consultant on behalf of the MAV.

The results of these reviews are all similar to the extent that it is agreed there is a shortage of planners in the local government sector generally, and regional and rural Victoria in particular. Further analysis confirms that the issue is not one affecting local government in isolation, but also other major employers including private consultants and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

As part of its “Moving Forward: Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest” package of initiatives, the State Government has specifically recognised the shortage of skilled planning staff. Regional Development Victoria (RDV) has agreed to support local government through the MAV to address this issue by providing funding to support the creation of a “planning bank” in order to resource councils, particularly in regional and rural Victoria.

The scope of the project to create a Planning Bank is to:

- Improve the planning capacity of local government in Victoria, particularly regional and rural councils
- Enable access to skilled and expert knowledge within the sector
- Provide career development and enhancement for local government planners
- Identify a revenue stream that is able to be re-invested into research and development in local government planning

The planning system in Victoria is a critical part of many council activities and presents both opportunities and challenges for elected representatives (and the planning professionals who work within the system). The planning system contributes towards sustainability objectives, economic development, heritage and environmental conservation, as well as, guiding development for long term community benefit. It is therefore important that the number and experience level of professionals working within the system know and understand the operating environment, relevant legislation, roles and responsibilities so that they can adequately perform their functions.

Given this background, the MAV has undertaken a more extensive analysis of the shortage of planners and is working with government departments and tertiary institutions to develop a holistic approach to finding workable solutions.

The major initiatives identified by this review include:

1. The creation of a “planning bank” to provide resources to local government and in particular regional and rural councils to address the shortage of town planners.

2. To work in partnership with key Educational Institutions to develop an Education and Career Framework for Local Government Planners.
3. To work collaborately with Department of Sustainability and Environment to define and promote the role of state and local governments as a major employer of planners.
4. To seek support from the local government sector for initiatives such as resource sharing partnerships, cluster management arrangements and cadetships/traineeships.
5. To investigate the feasibility of developing an Overseas Professionals Program.

## **Conclusion**

The reviews that have taken place over the past few years by various parties have clearly established that there is a shortage of planners and the consequences of this have been felt more harshly in regional and rural Victoria. This view has been further supported by the work recently undertaken by the MAV through an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders.

In order to move this issue forward it will be desirable to work closely with government departments, in particular the Department of Sustainability and Environment to ensure we adopt a co-ordinated approach on behalf of local government in particular and the planning system in general to ensure economic activity is sustained.

The initiatives identified above will be progressively implemented with the Planning Bank to be the first stage of this program.