



Summary

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) believes that establishing Government Architect positions within each State and Territory and Federal Government assists Australia to achieve a level of design excellence and sustainability performance in the built environment that will enrich the lives of all Australians and place Australia in an international design leadership position.

Background

Architecture helps define a society and in this context Governments play a vital role in shaping our built environment. Most of the important buildings within our environment are key social and institutional buildings that are, by and large, built by Government eg, parliaments, town halls, museums, schools, hospitals, courthouses etc. The onus is on governments to lead by example through support of high quality design outcomes.

Where Government Architect positions don't exist, the defining characteristics of public architecture procurement can include political expedience, departmental reviews and steering committees consisting of inadequately skilled staff. These types of problems hamper and inhibit good design, and demonstrate a general lack of understanding about the value of design and what design seeks to achieve for our everyday lives.

Without Government Architect positions in place, Governments have limited access to high level design advice and there is no avenue available to Departments for design leadership.



The Institute believes that the principle objective of the Government Architect position is to assist Government to achieve high quality design outcomes through:

- Providing strategic advice to Government about architecture and urban design,
- Assist Government to better understand building design and delivery,
- Promote the value of good design both in the Government and wider community- to support the process of making great buildings, spaces and sustainable urban environments, and
- Promote best practice in the built environment.

Through this role, the Government Architect aims to encourage high quality buildings and public spaces that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and culturally rich.

The Institute believes the position should entail:

- generating support for a quality built environment,
- encouraging innovative design of public buildings and spaces,
- assisting architects in undertaking government work,
- ensuring quality is a key factor in government projects,
- encouraging the development of regional design,
- assisting Government in its commitment to public art in buildings and spaces, and
- promoting awareness about how good design can make great living places and urban environments.



The Institute does not view the role as:

- an initiative to recreate the former Department of Australian Construction Services or State Departments,
- duplicating the role of current Government resources,
- adding additional steps to the planning process, nor as
- an advocate for the Institute.

While New South Wales has continuously maintained an office of Government Architect, over the last decade Queensland, Western Australian, Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania have established new Government Architect positions - these initiatives have been welcomed by the Institute.

The Institute's position on establishing a Government Architect position within the Australian Government has received support from;

- (i) the Australian Construction Industry Forum which passed a resolution in 2007 calling for a Government Architect role to be created within the Australian Government, and
- (ii) the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories' Inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority (NCA) July 2008, which recommends establishing a Commonwealth Architect position to deliver independent strategic advice to the Commonwealth Government with the aim of achieving high quality, sustainable design outcomes.



What Governments need to do

In accordance with the NCA Inquiry recommendation, the Australian Government should create a Government Architect position within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, allowing access to key Ministers and advisers, enabling a key contact across all Departments, and offering a 'whole' of Government approach. A responsible role with the NCA and the Australian Heritage Council is also supported.

The Governments of South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory should establish Government Architect positions within their respective central agencies.

What Institute Members need to do

Through the Institute or individually, advocate to Government representatives on this issue.

Support the roles of existing Government Architects through the promotion to Governments of their value to the community.

Institute Initiatives and Activities

Recently the Institute has successfully advocated for the establishment of Government Architect positions in Queensland, Western Australia, Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania and helped develop role and function descriptions as well as in some instances being part of the selection process.

The Institute is actively engaging with the Australian, South Australian and Australian Capital Territory Governments to promote Government Architect positions.

This policy formalises the Institute's position.



Further Information and Links

(i) CABA – Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
(UK) www.cabe.org.uk

(ii) The Institute has developed the following outline for the Government Architect position it would like to see adopted by State/Territory and Federal Governments:

- Provide strategic policy advice to the Prime Minister or Premier/Chief Minister, Ministers, government departments and agencies
- Provide design expertise advice to all government agencies responsible for delivery of public buildings and infrastructure projects
- Advocate for achieving better design outcomes for the Nation's built environment
- Take the leading role in Governments' sustainability agenda for the property sector, particularly in regard to the performance of existing and future Australian Government buildings and infrastructure in achieving minimum greenhouse gas emissions
- Communicate the value of good design in Government buildings and infrastructure for the benefit of all stakeholders
- Assist with design competition processes for major government building projects



- Establish and manage a Government Architects office providing design and pre-construction advice in the areas for architecture, building engineering, urban and landscape design, heritage conservation, adaptive reuse and quantity surveying
- Share information on best practice for procurement of sustainable and high quality design in public buildings and infrastructure through cooperation between all Government Architects.