



Australian Institute of Architects

18 April 2016

The Hon. Gary Nairn AO
Chairman
NT Planning Commission
GPO Box 1680
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Dear Chairman,

Re. Dual Occupancy in Zone SD – Discussion Paper

We thank you for the invitation to comment, and for the initiative shown by the Planning Commission in preparing the proposal for *Dual Occupancy in Zone SD*.

As you are aware, we have written numerous times in support of increasing the density of the Northern Territory's urban settlements. We also fully support the ongoing review of the NT Planning Scheme, in order to better facilitate the development of the Northern Territory and support it in achieving best-practice sustainable urbanism. For both these reasons, this proposal seems an important and obvious opportunity, and one that has been wanting for some time.

We provide the following comments.

1. General

We support the introduction of Dual Occupancy to SD sites, as a natural and sustainable response to our increasing urban populations. It is an effective planning instrument in reducing the sprawl of our urban settlements. Correctly implemented, we believe that a Dual Occupancy policy is able to facilitate the provision of additional housing opportunities in areas which are proximate to goods and services, and with existing levels of high amenity. We note however, that any policy development needs to be balanced by strategic planning to oversee its location. What we do not wish to see are isolated Dual Occupancy developments far separated from any existing services.

2. Lot size

While perhaps it is more palatable for Dual Occupancy subdivisions to be limited to larger scale lots, a study of the existing morphology of the Northern Territory's urban settlements presents a clear discrepancy at the 900m² mark. In the case of Darwin, for example, were we to limit Dual Occupancy to lot sizes equal to or greater than 900m² it would restrict any increase in density of this kind to the Darwin Mid and Inner Suburbs, with limited opportunities within the Northern Suburbs and Palmerston. If the ultimate goal is achieving sustainable built environments, we believe that the imperative lies with a broader increase in density.

We are therefore of the view that 800m² ought to be adopted as the minimum lot size for Dual Occupancy subdivision (within SD). We note however that it is entirely possible to achieve a successful Dual Occupancy development on much less than this, but within the market and cultural expectations of the Northern Territory, this seems to be a reasonable threshold.

With such a change we believe that an aging population will continue to have the opportunity to remain in the suburb they are familiar with, as well as have the opportunity for a second dwelling to provide either additional income, or a place for extended family members to reside in immediate proximity.

Such a lot size provides ample opportunity for the generation of various design solutions to accommodate two dwellings to a site, including:

- Maintaining an existing dwelling and locating an additional dwelling on the site;
- Renovating the existing dwelling in such a way as to accommodate two dwellings;
- Demolishing the existing dwelling and constructing two new dwellings, via a variety of possible arrangements (side by side, "battle axe" arrangement, duplex arrangement, etc.)

However the various permutations evolve, we are of the view that there must a relevant and responsive set of design control mechanisms in place.

3. Design controls

These design controls should take into consideration and be responsive to various issues, such as:

- Sites not to be overly built out (plot ratios of built area to open space),
- Impact to neighbouring sites and maintaining adequate privacy (overlooking to neighbouring properties and within, etc.),
- Site design, with consideration to orientation, breezes, and cross ventilation,
- Design-based arguments for setbacks, including opportunities for zero lot lines based on merit,
- Landscaping and screening elements,
- Neighbourhood character,
- Private open spaces,
- Garages and parking structures,
- Parking requirements. Currently the car parking provisions require a minimum of two per dwelling; as a means for maintaining character, this might be relaxed, with an allowance for more on street parking. In addition, carparking provisions should minimise the extent of hard surfaces. Shared driveways should be encouraged as a means of improving urban design,
- Setbacks (considering setbacks to habitable rooms with windows or doors), and
- Safe pedestrian and visitor access to all dwellings

4. Loss of the "Territory Dream"?

Our members, after attending the information nights and speaking with people, understand that many of the community concerns relate to the perceived threat that increased density poses to what might be called the "Territory Dream" - freestanding residences on large (800 - 1400m²) lots with ample landscaped buffering between properties.

Whilst the proposed amendments do involve some change, we do not believe that such change need necessarily equate with loss, and that with adequate design controls the "Territory Dream" of an outdoor lifestyle can not only be maintained, but enhanced.

Ultimately, our comment is that we support the concept, and urge the Planning Commission to continue the work of progressing these reforms to the Planning Scheme.

Yours sincerely,



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NT Chapter President
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This submission was prepared by Andrew Broffman (NT Chapter President), Rossi Kourounis, and Tammy Neumann, on behalf of NT Chapter Council.

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