

# Media Response/Op Ed

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RE: Urban Planners say community consultation system blocks affordable housing.

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<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-13/community-consultation-housing-developments-held-up/104928202>

## Engagement is the foundation for better decision-making and stronger communities

IAP2 Australasia, the peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector, has followed with interest as the commentary on public consultation in planning decisions played out in recent media.

Most striking is the notion that public consultation in planning decisions is simply a vote for or against a project. It is in fact a crucial element for successful public or private projects, and the evidence backs this.

“Public engagement is not a roadblock to progress—it is the foundation for better decision-making, stronger communities, and more effective governance.” Says IAP2 Australasia CEO Marion Short.

Qualified planner, engagement expert and Fellow of IAP2, Leisa Prowse, emphasises that engagement must occur at the planning and policy level—not as an afterthought or a way to exempt projects from scrutiny.

“Planning and project teams need qualified engagement professionals who can work with stakeholders and communities to gather insights that inform projects and programs,” she states.

“Only when experienced professionals facilitate local connections with the right people at the right time and with a clear purpose can decision-makers have all the information they need to act responsibly.”

Proper engagement is defined by the industry’s peak body as “an intentional process with a specific purpose of working across organisations, stakeholders and communities to shape the decisions or actions of members of the community, stakeholders or organisation in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome”.

The frustration of planners is not unfounded. Get it wrong or attempt shortcuts and the results can be dire.

The Institute for Infrastructure in Society (I2S) at the Australian National University has studied the impacts of engagement and social licence on project outcomes since 2017 and has found more

than \$30B in infrastructure projects have been cancelled, delayed or mothballed that have experienced stakeholder opposition.

However I2S co-founder, Kirsty O'Connell, said it would be a serious error to infer that this means community consultation is causing project delays.

"This is akin to saying that smoke detectors cause fires. The evidence we've developed with more than 150 leading infrastructure organisations and more than 7,000 community members is unequivocal - best practice engagement is one of the most powerful tools to prevent the costly delays and re-work that occur when projects fail to get the social piece right," she said.

Research from the Australian Infrastructure Audit stated that better-functioning cities and towns could contribute an additional \$29 billion to GDP in the long term.

And, communities expect to be engaged. Of Australians surveyed as part of the Australian Infrastructure Audit, 80% believe it is important for governments to consider community views when planning or investing in major infrastructure.

When engagement is delivered by experienced professionals, the outcomes for government, for community and for the broader economy are supported as seen in the research.

As a leader in community and stakeholder engagement, IAP2 Australasia is actively working to see engagement clearly defined and embedded into legislation and regulatory frameworks. The organisation provides professional tools and standards that support the professionalisation of engagement as a practice.

"As the peak body for the community and stakeholder engagement sector, IAP2 Australasia believes that engagement, when done well, improves social, environmental, and economic outcomes and increases trust in the democratic process," says Ms Short.

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## About IAP2 Australasia

IAP2 Australasia is the peak body for the community and stakeholder sector. We are a member association incorporating almost 16,000 individuals and organisations that are involved in community engagement. IAP2 Australasia believes that engagement, when done well, improves social, environmental, and economic outcomes and increases trust in the democratic process.

We advocate for all communities to be authentically engaged in decisions that affect them to improve social, environmental and governance outcomes. [iap2.org.au](http://iap2.org.au)