

Frequently asked questions about the draft Planning Policy Framework

March 2014

The purpose of these questions and answers is to provide further information in a way that both guides people as they begin to read the redrafted State Planning Policy Framework document and which addresses matters likely to arise as people consider the draft.

Consultation to date and what's to come:

Q1: What has the SPPF Review Advisory Committee been asked to do by the Minister for Planning?

The Terms of Reference require the Committee to review the present State Planning Policy Framework “*to ensure all state policy matters align with the key strategic directions and strategic maps that have been identified in the newly developed Metropolitan Planning Strategy and eight Regional Growth Plans*”.

Later, upon its release as a draft document, the Minister for Planning responded to the initiative in *Plan Melbourne* calling for a consistent format for municipal strategic statements, by amending the Terms of Reference for the Committee to investigate “*a revised structure for MSSs*”.

Q2: What consultation has occurred?

Between September and December 2013, the Committee held targeted consultation with government departments, statutory authorities, municipalities, industry and advocacy groups as well as people thought to have an opinion on the present role, purpose and function of the SPPF. The results helped the Committee produce a revised State Planning Policy Framework document -

- with an improved structure for better navigation, grouping of themes and joining of like with like;
- that is policy neutral albeit with different ways of expressing policy;
- but which is a policy catch-up version that includes references to legislation and other policy changes that never found their way into the SPPF.

Feedback on the revised structure was encouraging.

Q3: What consultation is planned?

Consultation to trial a version of a Planning Policy Framework that integrates State, regional and local policy is underway from now until Friday 23 May 2014.

Following the publication of information about the work to date and the draft Planning Policy Framework document, consultation sessions are programmed to allow all councils the opportunity to attend metropolitan or regional meetings.

Consultation opportunities are also available for members of the wider planning community, and the general public.

Q4: Can anyone have input into the review?

Yes. However, because of the nature of the SPPF and planning policy makes for a specialised document, the consultation programme is aimed more at the planning community and local government in particular.

Q5: What's the response date and what then?

The closing time for comments is 4.00pm on Friday 23 May 2014. This timeframe allows municipalities the opportunity for thorough consideration of the integration version of the PPF and to respond if they choose.

Any written comments and those conveyed in the consultation session will help the Committee prepare a report to the Minister for Planning. After that, the Government will then consider the Committee's recommendations before determining a response. Of course, the Government has the final say on what the Committee the recommends.

Q6: Where can I learn more?

The Advisory Committee has a section on the DTPLI website where there is general information as well as a copy of the integration version of the PPF.

Information sessions are planned across the state with local government with the assistance of DTPLI's regional offices. Industry groups are also expected to arrange sessions to inform their members.

Members of the public and people who cannot attend other sessions are welcome at a meeting to be held on Tuesday 1 April 2014 at 1 Spring Street Melbourne.

About the revised SPPF:

Q1: The new set out looks confusing? Why the change?

When the Committee began, it posed a series of questions so it could understand

1. Who are the customers or users of the SPPF, and for what purpose do they use it?
2. What legal requirement exists for a SPPF section?
3. What is the role and purpose of the SPPF? Is it required?
4. How could the structure of the SPPF be improved?
5. What content of the SPPF is most important and referred to? What's missing? What could live elsewhere in the scheme?
6. Who owns the SPPF, and who is in charge of maintaining its relevance and integrity?

The responses from the consultation with practitioners and experts told us that the current SPPF was outdated, that the language was often vague and ambiguous and that it was difficult to follow and find relevant policy.

The revision focuses on the user to represent the order in the document; to tighten the language and to use numbers for every provision rather than dot points. On the whole, the document is easier to navigate and more logical.

Q2: But this version is longer than the current version; how can that be if the aim was to simplify the document?

There are literally hundreds of pages in documents with new government policy, initiatives and actions from *Plan Melbourne*, the eight regional Growth Plans and other legislative changes. Condensing them to something over 100 pages means the document is larger than present but the current version is nowhere near the size it would be if everything was thrown together.

The restructure has signposts to other parts of the planning schemes to draw attention to particular provisions, background and incorporated as well as policy and strategic documents that sit outside of schemes. The applied approach is to make sure that users are aware of the material without necessarily including it holus bolus. For example,

- Attention is drawn to particular provisions in Clauses 52, 54, 55, 56, 57 and elsewhere to alert users that there are policy provisions likely to affect a proposal;
- Background documents are listed to inform users that there is information to explain why a policy has been drafted in a particular way.

Q3: What's the status of Background Documents and Incorporated Documents?

In the PPF, Background Documents have no statutory weight but serve as information documents. This is similar to how Reference Documents currently apply in the LPPF. Incorporated Documents, because they are part of the planning scheme have to be considered as relevant to the decision being made.

Q4: How will local policy fit the PPF?

The new format of the PPF has an order of State, then regional, then local policy one after the other. The sequence places all relevant policy in the one section where no item can be missed. No one piece of policy will have more prominence than another.

Q5: What if an existing local policy fits more than one theme?

Where there may be an overlap, the answer lies in reshaping the policy. For example, one council's policy about Affordable Housing and Housing Density had better expression as policies in sub-themes under the main theme of Housing in the redrafted PPF. Similarly with liquor and gaming policy, each was better included under Economic Development to cover the commercial and retail policy and Community Development under Gaming and brothels for gaming.

Q6: Is the Committee proposing to rewrite local policy?

The Committee is not writing any policy. The Committee is preparing the PPF so that local policy can be adapted to fit the new structure but there is no intention to go further. Instead, local government will have time to do its own review and amendments to policy to adapt to the new format.

Q7: Is there a sample of how the Committee sees local policy being reshaped?

The Committee has published a template to guide municipalities as they review MSSs and LPPFs. This will help road test policy rewrites.

The template applies a suite of verbs that the Committee anticipates being used in the redrafting of policy for the PPF and later to introduce new policy. The use of these verbs would ensure consistency of language to overcome a major criticism of present policy in the SPPF and local sections of planning schemes.

Q8: What happens with MSSs and LPPFs?

Under the revised structure proposed by the Committee there will be no need for an MSS or LPPF. Based on the outcome of the consultation the Committee will form a view on how this might work and provide advice to the Minister for Planning.

Q9: So what is in the PPF?

Work by the Committee has edited the words and expressions of policy but everything included in the PPF is approved policy – approved government policy or contained in the council adopted regional growth plans. The first principle used by the Committee to determine what goes into the PPF was that the policy under consideration must be adopted policy. Interim policy, ideas intended to be policy one day or matters being thought about as proposed policy did not pass the first hurdle.

Q10: Is Plan Melbourne in the PPF?

As *Plan Melbourne* has not yet been adopted by government, the policy content in the draft PPF is taken from *Plan Melbourne* as published in October 2013.

Q11: And the Regional Growth Plans?

Each of the 8 Regional Growth Plans have been adopted by the relevant group of councils. The Committee have interpreted the policy content and included it within the PPF. The Minister for Planning will finalise how the RGP policy will be reflect in the planning scheme.

Feedback wanted:

Q1: The Committee wants your advice – some feedback questions

There are some key areas where the Committee seeks advice. The ability to respond will depend upon individual perspectives; for example, local government officials will view the draft with an eye for clarity and practicality; planning practitioners will look closely to see if there is a logical layout and that everything is joined up; strategic planners will consider what guidance the revised structure gives to work directions; statutory planners and permit applicants will look to see that policy is clearly expressed and complete.

From those positions the Committee asks -

1. Are there errors or omissions in the PPF?
2. What change is needed to accommodate local policy in the proposed structure?
3. What further changes could improve navigation?
4. Are there other specific regions or thematic areas (such as coastal areas) that should be identified for separate policy?
5. What maps could be included and is there a logical place for them?