

## OPINION

## GEOFFREY ROCK

## Rough road to alleviating housing shortage

**W**E READ with great interest the *Herald's* recent coverage of the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel's refusal of the development applications for 2000 houses at Minmi.

A significant factor for the refusal was the inadequacy of the road network, with the panel noting "the lack of a strategic transport solution and funding mechanism for regional transport upgrades is preventing the delivery of housing to the market".

Such regional road upgrades are beyond the responsibility of any one developer to resolve. This is not to say that developers shouldn't contribute proportionally to the cost of the upgrades but that the necessary upgrades, delivery timing and funding mechanism should and must be identified in the state's Regional Transport Plan.

The Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) NSW and our partners in the Hunter Planning Alliance (The Hunter JO, Business Hunter, Property Council and Committee for the Hunter) have been advocating for better integration of land use and transport strategic planning for some time to unlock more housing to accommodate the region's growing population, including the provision of affordable and social housing.

Connection to the Transport for NSW (TfNSW) state road network has been one of the Hunter's largest impediments to delivery of housing supply in recent years. Unfortunately, the Minmi refusal highlights the historic disconnect between the NSW Government's Hunter Regional Plan and Regional Transport Plan.

The NSW government identified the Minmi urban release area in 2011, and the road upgrades have been identified on the Hunter state infrastructure list since then, but we still haven't seen anything from TfNSW to prepare for this growth. The Hunter has a housing shortage and affordability challenge, and the backlog of regional road upgrades is a major contributor. More broadly, research by UDIA shows we have more than 40,000 new homes waiting in the region's development pipeline that are unable to come to market until the enabling infrastructure is delivered, including roads, water, sewer and power.

It is critical that a Hunter Growth Infrastructure Fund of \$500 million is established to clear this infrastructure backlog and tackle the Hunter's housing shortage.

Why are we facing this challenge?

1. Historically, there has been inadequate



Development applications for 2000 houses at Minmi have been rejected. Picture by Peter Lorimer

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planning of Hunter state road infrastructure upgrades at a scale that caters for population growth and new development in line with NSW government growth projections and strategic land use plans.

2. As a result, there have been few enabling Hunter state road upgrade projects defined and accounted for to inform NSW Treasury's capital planning process and funding decisions.

3. Consequently, there has been insufficient funding to deliver critical state road upgrades to support the delivery of key Hunter strategic growth areas identified for housing and employment.

4. Overall, there has been inadequate co-ordination of the provision of services such as sewer, water, electrical and road upgrades.

Hence, it has become increasingly difficult and, in some cases, impossible to achieve development consent for development projects of scale in the Hunter. Such projects generally require substantial upgrade of state road and service infrastructure to maintain the efficiency of the network, not only because of the impact of the particular development but to rectify existing capacity issues borne of a historic under-investment in the Hunter's road and service network.

The Hunter Urban Development Program Committee has been working for the past two years to achieve better service co-ordi-

nation of the region's growth. The Hunter Planning Alliance has also been engaged with TfNSW since 2020 on this issue. It is fair to say there have been some noticeable improvements since, but only case-by-case. The approach so far is inefficient for all involved and undermines investor confidence.

UDIA and our partners in the Hunter Planning Alliance will continue advocating for better integration of transport and land use strategic planning to ensure our region can accommodate the growth necessary to reach its potential.

Heading into the state election, UDIA believes any government serious about addressing the housing affordability and supply issue in the Hunter must invest in our region's enabling infrastructure. We are calling for a commitment to create a \$500 million Hunter Growth Infrastructure Fund to deliver the housing the Hunter needs.

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