

Title: **Debating Tall: Melbourne's New Skyscraper Guidelines: Too Restrictive?**

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Melbourne's New Skyscraper Guidelines: Too Restrictive?

A new amendment to Melbourne's local planning scheme imposes limitations on tower setbacks and introduces floor area ratio (FAR) restrictions in the central business district. Debating Tall asks parties on both sides of the issue, "Are the new skyscraper guidelines for Melbourne too restrictive?"

NO

Larry Parsons

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Until now, Melbourne had not comprehensively reviewed its central city built form controls in 30 years. In the last five years, there has been a surge in high-rise development. Central Melbourne currently has nine towers over 200 meters and another 24 towers of over 200 meters are either under construction or approved. FARs have recently averaged 35:1, with some over 50:1. The new planning controls seek to guide this transformation, without setting any specific limit on the total height of tall buildings on suitable sites.

Central Melbourne has a historic street grid core, but planning controls declare 63% of the Hoddle Grid and adjoining Southbank to be General Development Areas where high-rise development is strategically encouraged. The new controls focus on FARs, which enable a trade-off between bulk and height, therefore encouraging flexible design approaches, while meeting fundamental requirements.

Tower setbacks from site boundaries must be five meters or 6% of total building height to protect the amenity of neighbors and public spaces. However, the setback rules allow a designer to justify modification of a tower floor plate in terms of shape and

location, to suit site context and avoid serried rows of boxes.

The new base FAR of 18:1, based on total above-ground gross floor area, is relatively generous by Australian and international standards. Additionally, the "floor area uplift" provision can award extra floor area, so long as other controls such as setbacks are met, and a commensurate public benefit is provided. This benefit is transparently costed and might consist of appropriate public space, affordable housing, or strategically favored uses, especially offices.

The new controls protect and enhance the public realm by bringing moderation and certainty to a dynamic Melbourne high-rise market, while maintaining flexibility for designers to respond to context and continue building tall on appropriately sized sites.

DISCLAIMER: The opinions expressed are those of the author, not the State Government

YES

Danni Addison

Victorian Chief Executive, Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA)

Melbourne's central city has experienced significant growth over the past 20 years and is preparing for this to continue in the coming decades. Melbourne's CBD is home to more than 314,000 jobs and 67,000 residents. If we

are to grow into a truly global city, our built form must remain flexible enough to accommodate these increasing numbers.

While UDIA supports the Victorian Government's aim to maintain and improve Melbourne's livability, we are concerned that many of the recent development policies are too prescriptive and will constrain innovation, limit the number and feasibility of developable sites, and increase housing prices.

The pressure is on our industry and on government to keep up with the unprecedented growth in population, and we simply must be able to increase the housing stock across our city to do this. New apartments will be essential for us to meet the needs of Melbourne's growing, diverse communities. We therefore need policy that enables creating quality apartment products across a range of prices. We definitely do not need rigid regulation that limits the viability of developable sites.

We see a fear of density in Australia's major cities. With a population growing as is Melbourne's, density is inevitable, but if addressed appropriately, it is not a bad thing. The UDIA is a champion of Melbourne's livability, but we also look for a balance between advancing the built form and public amenities of our central city, and enabling the supply of new housing at an affordable price. For this reason, UDIA continues to advocate for a clearer focus on good design outcomes, rather than prescriptive structural outcomes.

