



17 July 2019

**Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Bill
New Zealand Institute of Architects at the Environment Select Committee**

NZIA representatives:

Teena Hale Pennington, Chief Executive

Richard Harris, NZIA Distinguished Fellow & Past President

[Teena]

Tēnā koutou

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity for the New Zealand Institute of Architects to address the Environment Select Committee on this Bill. I am Teena Hale Pennington, Chief Executive, and I am joined by architect Richard Harris.

Richard is a Distinguished Fellow and Past President of the Institute of Architects. He has more than 30 years' experience in the design of large-scale projects around New Zealand, including community and regional centres, transport and retail facilities and multi-unit residential developments.

Richard has chaired the government's Urban Task Force and has served on both city centre and residential design panels in Auckland and Tauranga. He has considerable knowledge of all the issues affecting urban development.

I'll start by saying that we agree with the Government that change is needed if we are going to improve the well-being of current and future generations.

We understand the rationale for splitting the Bill, but caution against unnecessary expediency given the importance of clearly defined roles, responsibilities and powers.

We urge the Committee to ensure the second bill is developed in partnership with industry. We also urge the Committee not to underestimate the importance and significance of the first bill. It must generate the leadership, vision, ambition and scope that will animate a new Crown Entity.

Today we would like to address the Committee on three issues we see as fundamental to the Bill. Richard will make our points.

[Richard]

Thank you, Teena, and I too would like to acknowledge the committee, and thank you for your time.

LEADERSHIP

1. The first issue I want to discuss is leadership.

This Bill must clearly recognise the important leadership and legacy role of the entity it will establish – and must set some aspirations and expectations for the realisation of its goals. This is a generational opportunity which must be acted upon now. It cannot be left to someone else or for another time.

We would expect the Bill, which is establishing a whole new agency, to be exacting in its expectations and to be reasonably explicit in its depiction of both desired results and the means of their achievement.

In light of this, it is surprising that the Bill is characterised by a tentativeness that indicates a reluctance to aspire to real innovation in the quality of housing and the shaping of communities, or perhaps it suggests a hope that such outcomes may somehow emerge in the future.

The language used throughout the Bill seems to indicate that its authors are unsure about the ambitions or discretion of Kāinga Ora. For example, “Promoting good urban design”, which is one of the stated goals of Kāinga Ora, positions the new entity as a cheerleader for good design, rather than as an agent and setter of benchmarks. In the Bill, there are many uses of “promoting” and “supporting” when it comes to the realisation of goals – this suggests a remarkably passive mindset.

Surely Kāinga Ora should demand more of itself, and of the huge government investment for which it will be responsible?

Leadership must be ambitious: it must establish a vision for towns, cities and neighbourhoods across New Zealand. It seems to us that in this Bill that vision is not clearly articulated, and nor are the means for its realisation convincingly conveyed.

The leadership that is required to achieve the results described in this Bill must effect cultural and behavioural change in the bureaucratic system and the relationships within the wider bureaucracy, and with agencies and organisations, communities and industry. The well-being of current and future generations must underpin, decisions, priorities, investment, partnerships and performance expectations.

The Government Policy Statement is critical to this leadership. It must demonstrate leadership and set high expectations. The ambit of the Policy Statement be wider than homes and communities. It must recognise the complexity of the issues; it must be underpinned by strong evidence and research.

DESIGN & CAPABILITY

2. The second point we want to make concerns the treatment of design in the Bill. Or rather, the absence of a coherent vision, clear expectations and design leadership in the Bill.

Again, the vision is not set high enough: design – at the level of buildings and the level of cities – hardly features in the language of the Bill. When it comes to the formation and shaping of the built environment a lot is being left to chance. It is not at all clear how the Bill envisages that design quality – a desired intent of the Bill – will be achieved.

To effect the changes desired under this Bill, a ‘reset’ is required in regard to design. The Bill appreciates that. But someone, somewhere in the bureaucracy, has to own the responsibility for providing design leadership. At the moment, and in the future envisaged in this Bill, this ownership is absent.

We think it would be more than helpful – it is essential – that there be a secure place in or around Kāinga Ora for high-level design advice, for the creation and dissemination of such advice, for the provision of design expertise.

At present such a role does not exist in the bureaucracy. It does on other countries: this is not new thinking. Models can be found around the world; some exist close at hand, just across the Tasman.

In New Zealand, design knowledge and skills have been progressively eroded and lost across Government. The role of Chief Architect has gone: there are no design skills within the executive team of HUD. This situation is a real restriction to the chances of Kāinga Ora making a difference, and making the most of the effort dedicated to its establishment, and the investment it will deploy.

The first Bill is too timid in regard to its expectations of design. Is Kāinga Ora to be a leader, or a promoter, or a supporter?

Design and consideration of the built environment seems too small a part, too small a part of the vision. In creating houses and communities you are creating places – the design lens not as strong as it should be.

The Institute is clear that design leadership is what is needed. If help is required to get it, the Institute is most willing to offer its help.

PEOPLE & PLACE

3. The third point we want to make is on the subject of people and place.

Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities must be about more than homes or urban development. In the scale of its investment, Kāinga Ora is about making places, and its purpose is to make better places.

The Bill must recognise Kāinga Ora's purpose as being about people and places – our cities, our towns and our neighbourhoods across New Zealand. Creating better places for people must be the ambition.

In this respect, we wonder how the two purposes of Kāinga Ora – public housing landlord and urban developer – fit together. The Bill places these roles, potentially, at odds. A more coherent approach would be to take an holistic approach to community or urban development. Public housing is a component of such development, not an adjunct to it, or a separate issue.

By not taking a place-based approach, the perverse result of the Kāinga Ora bill may be the marginalisation of public housing – and the people who live in public housing.

To engage in housing at scale is to engage in city making, place making and urban design at scale. All these need to be brought together.

There is an opportunity with Kāinga Ora to transcend the existing quo thinking and transactional processes of Housing New Zealand, HLC and KiwiBuild and really make a difference: produce cities, towns and neighbourhoods. Better places.

[Teena]

CONCLUSION

This Bill offers a generational opportunity to influence the well-being of current and future generations. It has the potential to be inspiring, empowering and one of enduring legacy. A legacy where equity, design and a better quality of life are accessible to all.

We would urge the Committee to 're-assess' the Bill against our three key issues of **LEADERSHIP | DESIGN & CAPABILITY | PEOPLE & PLACE**

We ask that in your deliberations, the Committee reflects on these questions:

- **Does this Bill provide the necessary leadership (vision and ambition) for our cities, towns and neighbourhoods?**
- **Does this Bill require design leadership to ensure the well-being of current and future generations?**
- **Does this Bill create equitable outcomes and security of tenure for all?**
- **Does this Bill provide clear and enduring outcomes for people, place and the planet?**

We would like to thank the Committee once again for this opportunity today to present on the Bill. If the Institute can assist the Committee or officials further, please do not hesitate to contact us.