

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards

Melbourne—Tuesday, 15 February 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Ms Cindy McLeish

WITNESSES

Mr James McLean, Senior Policy Adviser, Natural and Built Environment, Municipal Association of Victoria, and

Ms Natasha Palich, Executive Officer, Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment.

The CHAIR: I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234. Thank you so much for joining us today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards.

On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us today. I also extend a welcome to any members of the public and the media that are watching us today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee is conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin I need to point out a couple of things to you. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. What that means is that you can speak freely here without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments you make outside this hearing, even if you are just simply restating what you said here today.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve, and corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report. Thank you again for taking the time to meet with the committee today.

Can I remind any members who are participating remotely to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise any electronic interference.

James and Natasha, welcome. I think to start with I will get committee members to introduce themselves, and then I will hand over to both of you. My name is Sarah Connolly. I am the Chair of this committee and the Member for Tarneit.

Mr MORRIS: I am David Morris, the Member for Mornington and Deputy Chair of the committee.

Mr HAMER: And I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill, and we will be joined shortly also by Danielle Green, the Member for Yan Yean.

The CHAIR: Over to you, James.

Mr McLEAN: My name is James McLean. I am a Senior Policy Adviser in the Natural and Built Environment at the Municipal Association of Victoria.

The CHAIR: Great.

Ms PALICH: Natasha Palich. I am the CASBE Executive Officer, also at the Municipal Association of Victoria.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. Now, James, I think you are kicking off with a 5-minute presentation and then Natasha, and then we will jump into questions and have a talk about things further.

Mr McLEAN: Wonderful. Thank you, and thank you for the invitation to appear here today. I also wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, and I pay my respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who might be here today or joining us online.

As I said just before, I am James McLean, a Senior Policy Adviser at the MAV, where my policy specialty is on urban and regional planning. I will take a few minutes for a brief statement, for some key points on apartment design standards from the local government perspective. Firstly, the MAV is the peak representative body for councils in this state. We advocate on councils' behalf on key issues that impact their local

community, including the range of planning and development challenges that can arise. This of course includes the design and function of apartment buildings.

I am joined today by my colleague Natasha Palich, Executive Officer of CASBE, the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment. CASBE is a group of 40 councils working across the state who are true thought and practice leaders in sustainable and regenerative built environment outcomes through planning policy, but you will be hearing more about that from Natasha in a few minutes.

The broad terms of reference in this inquiry allowed me to cover a wide range of issues in our submission that have been on the MAV's agenda for some time now. What our submission covered was some of the more broad themes and issues we see our sector facing. It needs to be said from the outset that MAV and councils are strong supporters of best practice of standards in apartment design. We therefore generally support the intention of the *Better Apartments Design Standards*, perhaps inaptly named BADS, and the recently gazetted updates to clause 58 of planning schemes in Victoria. Victorian councils have led the way in developing improved apartment design standards, and we have always encouraged the Victorian government to introduce higher standards that reflect best practice and improve the way we all live in apartments. For example, and as highlighted in my submission, Moreland City Council's *Moreland Apartment Design Code*, which dates back to 2015, really did set the benchmark for apartment design and planning policy in this state. It marked the beginning of a shift away from shoebox apartments, bedrooms with no windows, poor disability access and lacklustre environmental performance. I understand you will be hearing from Moreland, as well as other leading councils, later this morning, who can give you more detail on their experiences and how they developed local planning policy to address serious issues they saw in apartment design.

Numerous councils have been advocating for mandatory affordable housing mechanisms and inclusionary zoning in the planning scheme for some time now. All the while housing affordability has worsened, and as such it is expected that apartment living will increase in popularity. Councils and the state must continually work together to monitor and improve standards that meet a high level of environmental performance as well as delivering floorplans for an increasing range of diverse needs. This need has only been exacerbated through the pandemic, which brought into sharp relief disparities between those with access to a range of infrastructure and comfortable homes and those who did not. We hold the view that a performance-based planning system that enables design standards to be set, all while still allowing for some innovation, must continue, so when regulations are changed the living situation for apartment dwellers changes only for the better. Councils have understood this for a long time, and we can see the benefits already of how well-considered local policies and our state baseline apartment design standards have been applied successfully. Councils and the state must collaborate, as councils process the vast majority of planning permit applications for apartment development and therefore can identify the issues first.

High-quality apartments can be delivered without substantially affecting development costs. The need to improve the design quality of new homes while also improving housing affordability has sometimes been framed as a choice between the two. The quality of new residential development, however, should not always be reduced to the lowest common denominator in pursuit of affordability or developer profit.

Other long-term benefits, both financially and as a place to call home, can be found in a well-designed apartment. Councils are supportive of planning mechanisms that deliver more sustainable, better designed apartments. Better designed homes of course only increase opportunities for people to live productive and fulfilling lives, no matter the kind of home they choose to live in, the location and what they can afford. Thank you, and I am happy to take any questions.

The CHAIR: Thanks, James. Natasha.

Ms PALICH: Thank you, committee, for the opportunity to present today. I also wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today or joining us online. My name is Natasha Palich. I am the Executive Officer of CASBE. I have been a practising architect for 25 years, and I have been working in the local government sector for the last 15 years. CASBE is an unincorporated governance structure auspiced by the MAV. It was formalised in 2009, but the councils have been working together since 2004. As James mentioned, our specific focus is on progressing sustainable outcomes in the built environment in the private sector and using the planning system to support and deliver those outcomes. While our membership is at

40 financial member councils, our informal network reaches more broadly across Victoria to more than two-thirds of our councils.

Our feedback on this inquiry will drill down into a little but more detail supporting what James has just said, and it mainly focuses on the second point in the terms of reference around livability. I will touch on three key points in my presentation: the importance of daylight in apartment design, the importance of thermal comfort and the very real opportunity for designing zero operational carbon outcomes in apartments.

I would also like to congratulate the state government for gazetting the revisions to the *Better Apartments Design Standards* last December; this is a welcome change. And I would like to emphasise a point we made in our submission that feedback from our members suggests that the apartment design standards have generally delivered improved apartment amenity and lifted the overall design of the new apartment developments. We also welcome and appreciate the applicability of the standards across the state, because we note that with a population shift to regional areas this typology will become more common in those areas but note that it is important to ensure that education and training is available for regional developers and planners where apartment typology is perhaps less common.

To my first point, the importance of daylight in apartment design to support healthy indoor environments. We conducted a study into the health impact of daylight in buildings. This report was undertaken by the University of Technology in Sydney in 2019 and aimed to identify evidence for the health impact of daylight in buildings. I would just like to distinguish between daylight and direct sunlight. This is about daylight; they are two different aspects and separate needs, actually. The findings of our report were that there is very clear evidence that exposure to daylight is significantly beneficial for a wide range of human health conditions and wellbeing. The exposure levels to achieve these health benefits are not clearly quantified in the literature. The clearest evidence that we can reference as a defensible basis for daylight recommendations is that exposure to a minimum of 180 lux for 1 hour a day provides a minimum desirable circadian stimulus. The idea is that that is 1 hour every day across the year, including every day in winter. Evidence suggests that exceeding this minimum will yield significant improvements in health outcomes.

So the existing standards in the design standards relating to building setbacks, room depth and windows are intended to address the issue of access to daylight; however, where elements such as building setbacks are reduced or deeper apartments are provided or any other daylight restrictions are included, like wing walls or privacy screening, daylight can be seriously compromised, especially with the use of light wells and light courts. Internationally we have an unusual typology of deeper apartments, so we would suggest that the standard relating to room depth in our standards is adjusted to ensure that each and every apartment is able to receive the adequate amount of daylight, including south-facing single-aspect apartments. This measure alone may not be sufficient to achieve these daylight outcomes. It may be that we will need to look at balconies and building separation as well.

I will turn to thermal comfort in apartments. As we know, thermal performance of apartments has an impact on the thermal comfort of occupants. We would argue that almost all apartment developments in Victoria are assessed through the planning process and include an assessment by either the BESS tool, which is managed by councils through CASBE, or the Green Building Council of Australia's Green Star tool. Data from our BESS tool indicates that over 80 per cent of the apartments assessed in BESS from 2019 to 2021 would meet the draft 2022 National Construction Code standards, which is a 7-star energy rating for the envelope. It is our view that the work by our member councils in seeking this early consideration of energy-efficient design from the apartment developer and the subsequent raising of performance has largely led to the higher NatHERS star rating for class 2 in Victoria that is shown in BESS data but also in independent industry data as well.

We acknowledge the Victorian government has committed to a 7-star standard for new homes—we assume this includes apartments—but we are of the view that the Victorian development industry is actually currently close to achieving this target and that as such the draft national construction standards would deliver little improvement on top of that in building outcomes in class 2 in Victoria. So we recommend that Victoria takes that a step further and seeks a 7.5-star energy performance of the envelope of apartments through a Victorian variation to the NCC. I would like to acknowledge that there can be a tension between designing for adequate daylight and ensuring appropriate shading for our summer heatwaves. I think that the approach that was taken in the review of the design standards in recent years sought that design input to help inform the standards, and I think that that is going to continue to be needed to achieve a resolution to these sorts of tensions.

My final point relates to our work on elevating ESD targets in buildings. We continue to work with 31 Victorian councils on a project that aims to elevate ESD targets for new development. We are currently completing research with leading industry experts on how we can improve the sustainability of buildings and our response to climate change. This work forms part of an evidence base to support the next exciting stage of this project, which is to progress a planning amendment process. One focus of this project is on delivering net zero operational carbon outcomes. This net zero carbon goal is addressed under the 'Energy' theme of this project, and it focuses on delivering energy efficiency, avoiding fossil fuels, delivering onsite renewable energy generation and requiring offsite renewable energy purchasing.

Preliminary findings for the apartment typology were as follows: the energy-efficiency measures largely support those currently under consideration by the state government; no design responses regarding avoiding fossil fuels created insurmountable issues with regard to technical feasibility; the cost impact varies, but there is an avoided future cost of retrofit, which would be required to meet state and national carbon reduction targets; onsite renewable energy generation provides strong financial benefit to the occupant along with a corresponding carbon reduction benefit; a discretionary approach for apartment buildings is under consideration where there is conflicting roof space with an alternative use which has an environmental or social benefit or where an existing or an approved building will overshadow the roof space; and purchasing 100 per cent renewable residual operational energy has significant benefit in terms of carbon reduction and, in combination with the other strategies, is able to deliver the zero carbon outcome. We look forward to being able to share more about this project as our work progresses.

I would just like to acknowledge that this submission is prepared on behalf of all of our member councils. Thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Natasha. I will just acknowledge the Member for Yan Yean, Danielle Green—thank you.

Ms GREEN: Thank you. And I have been listening online, Chair—that has been very helpful—so I am prepared to ask questions.

The CHAIR: Look, I am just going to kick off, and this is a question for you both. I am really interested in discussing compliance and enforcement. We have had stakeholders to the inquiry talk about compliance and enforcement with the apartment design standards and that there are critical challenges for the planning and building systems. How does this impact councils, and in your view how could this challenge be redressed?

Mr McLEAN: I am happy to kick off. Compliance and enforcement is an issue not just in apartment design standards. It is something that councils really do struggle with across all elements of the planning system. For example, native vegetation removal is also another thing that comes to mind that MAV works really hard on with our compliance and enforcement networks—about how we improve knowledge and training for planning officers and enforcement officers in councils. Apartment design standards are no different. It comes down to the ability for councils to have enough resources to employ more enforcement officers and also about the relevant training. There is a finite number of planners in the state, and not all of them want to get into enforcement as well, so it is an ongoing struggle I think in planning to get that right and to get the right amount of staff in. Obviously larger, more well resourced councils—I am thinking of the inner-city ones—have much better ability to monitor and enforce things like how well new apartments are being built and their performance after, but the further out you get, the more difficult that becomes. So I do not have the answer today unfortunately, but it is certainly something on our agenda that we talk a lot to our members about, and it is something always discussed in the planning profession. Natasha?

Ms PALICH: Thank you. This is something that we are actively working on and have been for some time. We have amongst our members a couple of councils who have a dedicated ESD enforcement officer, in fact more than one, who proactively visits sites during construction to verify that the commitments that were made at the planning permit stage have been implemented. There is evidence of non-compliance with planning permits. We have a number of other councils who are doing desktop audits and also finding examples of non-compliance. So we are working on a process or a methodology for what councils are finding delivers the best outcomes with respect to achieving compliance so that this can be adopted by other councils. The main thing preventing them at the moment is having the resources and having those trained enforcement officers. But the programs where councils have actually dedicated resources are achieving outcomes in this area.

The CHAIR: This is just a question on really what you think: do you think the public expects the councils to be sending out well-equipped compliance and enforcement officers to check these properties? One of the concerns that I have is that once you build these apartments they are there for very long periods of time. And I can see you talked about—James may have talked briefly about modular apartment design; I think it was in yours—the ability to change the apartment up as you need to, but what we know is that once a lot of these apartments are up, they are very difficult to change if you are not getting it right in the first place. What do you think the public’s view is? Do you think they would expect proper compliance and enforcement?

Mr McLEAN: I think absolutely the public would expect that. It is such a high-profile issue, and I think also it undermines confidence in what is being built. And perhaps speaking from a little bit of recent personal experience here, when you are out apartment hunting it is something in the back of your mind. So, absolutely, the public want all levels of government I think to really step up the game on this issue. I am aware that the Victorian government has been really working on this, and councils are absolutely supportive of being able to get more resources and more staff and to be able to monitor once it has been put up, because obviously the issue is that if something is of a poor-quality design, ultimately the rectification ends up on the owners of those apartments. I think most people would agree that that is quite unfair, and those rectification costs are obviously so incredibly prohibitively expensive for many people. Councils, I understand, rely often on the public reporting potential breaches—you know, not complying to the endorsed plans on a planning permit or post construction, all of those sorts of things. So if we can be more proactive, prevent issues before they happen, then that is absolutely where we want to get to.

The CHAIR: And what would you say that state government needs to do to ensure that council is able to roll out enough compliance and enforcement officers who are trained well and able to sort of cover the municipality? What could state government do?

Mr McLEAN: I would like to think the state government could work with councils more to fund more building inspectors and compliance officers within councils. I think there is a community expectation in that sense. For a long time there we did have a shift away to that sort of private regulation system, which clearly has not worked in many cases. But I would like to say that I have colleagues at the MAV who have done a lot more work in this space, so I am happy to take that on notice and give a bit more of a detailed response than what perhaps I could give today back to the inquiry committee, if you would like that.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. Thank you.

Ms PALICH: I would like to pick up on one of the points that James made with regard to that point of transfer of ownership from developer to owner. Once you get past that point it is really hard to achieve compliance, so what we are finding with councils is that the site visits during construction are essential to capture things as they are happening and to provide the developer with time to rectify the situation before the property is transferred to the owners.

And to your point about do the owners expect government to support this, I certainly do not think they expect to end up with a new apartment with the council chasing the non-compliance issues to say that it does not comply with the planning permit conditions, which is what we are seeing at the moment.

To go to your point about what can state government do, our councils are trialling ESD-specific enforcement measures and strategies—methodologies. Off the top of my head I think that a funding program, not dissimilar to the current regional hub funding program for regional planning but dedicated to enforcement officers, would be advantageous, along with internal support. I would just like to make this point in this public forum—what we are hearing from councils at the moment is that we have an unprecedented crisis in the planning system, because the workload is so enormous that planning managers are unable even to find the time to recruit officers because they are lurching from critical issue to critical issue. When they do find time to employ and engage junior planners, for example, the junior planners are not staying because they are unable to get the support around them to enable them to end up in an enjoyable workplace. It is a crisis. At the moment we are trying to run several trials, innovative trials, and we are struggling just because of the resourcing issue within the councils. And so what I would suggest is that, alongside that funding opportunity, you have staff dedicated to helping them actually apply for the funding. I think that it would make a difference.

And just on that, building inspectors, yes, but planning enforcement officers have a direct connection to the planners that issue the permit to the ESD officers who assess the permit, so they are able to provide that follow-through, which is often missing in the Victorian planning and building system, (from planning permit to the as-built outcomes) because they are literally located in the same space, or have the potential to be located in the same space and work alongside the people that originally understood the project. There is a big advantage to that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. They are really good points. David, I will hand over to you.

Mr MORRIS: If I can follow up on that discussion—there are a whole lot of details that I want to ask about later on but just to pursue that thought for a minute. There seems to me to be two potentially conflicting threads in the arguments being put. One is the need to allow individual councils to have control of their own destiny effectively and not rely on a common code right across the state. The other is this issue of pressure on the planning system. I have been around long enough to have been a member of the Western Port Regional Planning Authority in the old days before we went to performance-based planning schemes, so when we had prescriptive schemes, and we had literally a fraction of the number of town planners working in the system and it flowed a lot more quickly. Of course the argument that was put to move to a performance-based scheme was to give greater flexibility and avoid these rows of streets: we had 6-metre setbacks right along the street and everyone was right on 6 metres and all that sort of thing. The objectives were laudable, but it seems to me that we now have an incredibly complex system that is not delivering either certainty in terms of the development process or the outcomes that were intended. Given the strong case, which I totally support, of local government basically controlling development in their own area, what are your thoughts on those two potentially conflicting areas?

Mr McLEAN: Look, it is obviously a tension we have in the planning system, but the reality is that the system is made to allow councils to tailor their planning schemes to meet local individual needs. Obviously Victoria is a really diverse state geographically, economically and socially, and therefore the ability to tailor a planning scheme to local conditions and to local needs we at the MAV believe is important. It is quite right that different conditions should meet different kinds of planning controls. But in saying that, councils do support strong baselines for a myriad of issues—apartment design standards, ESD of course—because by having those baselines councils that are perhaps less progressed or do not have the resources to innovate, to create really tailored planning schemes, they allow them to fall back on that. I am thinking of our rural and regional councils and rural cities as well that for apartment design standards, for example, have not had that for a long time and now we are beginning to see that with that move to the regions and regional cities, I guess, evolving and maturing in that space.

Getting the balance right is always going to be a tension. The Victorian planning system, I guess, is built on those sorts of tensions. But also by having councils being able to innovate it enables councils to lead, to come up with new ideas, and sometimes what one council might see as a local issue could actually end up being applied statewide, and that is a good thing. ESD and planning policy is the classic example here where a group of councils noticed a gap in Victoria's planning system, worked together and now the state government is rolling out its own environmentally sustainable design road map. The same happened with apartment design standards.

Yes, I absolutely understand what you are saying, David, and I know that the development industry pushes hard about 'It's confusing and difficult moving from one jurisdiction to the next'. Absolutely. But the planning system is actually there for communities as well to ensure that we have a sustainable, well-designed, environmentally healthy state.

Mr MORRIS: Look, I agree entirely, and I take the constant commentary about red tape with a grain of salt, you know. But I guess, while agreeing totally with what you are saying about the flexibility necessary to allow communities to determine what happens around them, I am wondering if part of the problem is the lack of prescription built into our planning schemes, full stop, and whether provided that you retain that flexibility between councils, a more prescriptive scheme might solve some of the issues for the construction industry, for the development industry and for local government.

Mr McLEAN: I would actually quite agree with that point, just thinking about before I was at MAV as a planner appearing before VCAT and having wishy-washy words to kind of argue over 'Is there an appropriate

height for the area?', you know, 'What is an appropriate height?'. So greater prescription would be useful, I think, to councils in many instances. You know, getting back to apartment design and community expectations, building height is always an ongoing issue and councils often do want to have ability to be a bit more prescriptive, but the state policy and the approach of the department of planning are to not be overly prescriptive in many matters. So the ability to be more specific in language would be useful in many instances.

Mr MORRIS: But part of our role as a committee is to inform development of that policy.

Mr McLEAN: Yes. Thank you.

Mr MORRIS: Natasha, did you—

Ms PALICH: Yes. I would like to draw on my background as an architect. It is really hard to pinpoint and tabularise and define good design, and we experience that with our focus on sustainability, because you have got a technical outcome that you are trying to assess and measure, you know, in the myriad of scenarios that present themselves. This is I think one of the challenges that your team had in developing probably the original ones but certainly the review of the apartment standards: just how do you define requirements that will produce good design each and every time? And you cannot, because there are conflicting requirements. I support a baseline of prescriptive standards, and then I think we need to have the performance standards to enable outcomes where the prescriptive standards cannot be met each and every time, and of course that is where the expertise of the planner comes into play.

As our level of knowledge and sophistication and understanding of building design, safety and amenity increase decade after decade after decade and our expectations increase, the procurement process necessarily becomes more complex. But it is a tension. I acknowledge it is a tension. It is certainly a tension that we feel with our focus on sustainability.

Mr MORRIS: Can I just ask one quick specific one, Natasha, on the 7.5 stars. I could talk to you for hours about sunlight, but it is just a temptation—I think the submission is pretty good on that. But on the 7.5 stars, two points: it talks about the stage 1 report on daylight. If you would be able to provide that to us in confidence, I think we would be pleased to have a copy of that in confidence.

Ms PALICH: Yes, we can.

Mr MORRIS: But secondly, going back to the 7.5 stars, in any parliamentary committee, no matter how ambitious we are in an environmental sense as individuals, the overriding thing we have got to think about is housing affordability. Taking the MAV point about that debate, which I certainly do not disagree with, is there any indication of—given it is at 80 per cent or at 7 stars now—what it is going to cost going to 7.5?

Ms PALICH: I will have to take that specific question on notice, but I note that the state government has done work on increasing the star rating from 6 to 7 stars, and so we draw on the work that has been done for that in our argument. But from 7 to 7.5 stars, I will have to get back to you on that with some references.

Mr MORRIS: If you were able to provide that information, that would be useful. Thank you.

Ms PALICH: Yes, no worries.

The CHAIR: Okay, I will go to Paul.

Mr HAMER: Thank you. My point is coming out from something that you said, James, but it might apply to both of you, so I would appreciate an answer from both of you. You touched on housing affordability and also on a high-quality apartment not necessarily being directly related to the cost or to an increase in cost. I guess I would just like to explore that a bit more. I think that in theory that would be a fantastic outcome, particularly if we can increase housing affordability. I would just like your views on some practical steps, some practical recommendations, for how those outcomes could be achieved, because they are often in tension.

Mr McLEAN: Yes. Look, obviously it is an ongoing discussion around these sorts of things, and I think other people who have appeared before this inquiry have talked about a similar theme, but affordability of a home is more than just the outright cost. It is obviously about how much it costs to run it, to maintain it, all of those sorts of things. The more energy efficient we can make a home, the less likely you are to be putting your

heating or cooling on. The better built it is, the less likely you are going to be putting up new cladding or replacing windows or rectifying water—all of those sorts of things. That is sort of the angle we are taking on. Obviously the more it costs to build something, the more likely it is to be passed on to the consumer, but as we go on and improve standards, improve environmental performance—ensure that homes have windows to their bedrooms to ensure that living spaces are actually functional—then perhaps that extra cost would be factored into buying land and it becomes part of that sort of system. As regulation changes so must the market, and that is our approach to that as well.

Ms PALICH: As I mentioned, we are doing work on elevating ESD targets in buildings, and that includes a number of strategies that will improve the livability of projects. We have almost completed stage 1, which comprises three technical pieces of work: one looking at the technical feasibility of the proposed standards, one looking at the cost-benefit analysis and one looking at the planning implications. We anticipate that these will be publicly available before your committee work concludes, so we will share those reports with you.

Mr McLEAN: Am I able to add one more thing, if you do not mind? We are living in a climate crisis as well, and so as we move into the future, in terms of overall cost to the economy and those sorts of things, we need to be building a lot better than what we have done in the past and what we are doing now. So it would be great if the inquiry could sort of consider that angle as well, because of the cost to retrofit, to repair buildings in what is going to be a hotter, drier and in some instances wetter climate for Victorians. The earlier we can build more resilient, regenerative buildings, particularly apartments as we densify our city more, I think that is going to be an important conversation around affordability for not just apartment dwellers but all of society.

Mr HAMER: Thanks, James. Can I ask another question?

The CHAIR: Sure.

Mr HAMER: Natasha, this might be related to David's request. The research that you undertook into the daylight requirements and particularly the benefits that come with that—does the research go to a level of quantification, almost like as a cost benefit in terms of that overall benefit that it is providing to the individual, or what sort of, I guess, level of quantification does that come up with?

Ms PALICH: It did not define an overall benefit. It was looking at the health benefits to an individual and the daily requirements of daylight to achieve certain health outcomes and trying to quantify what that is in a measurement that could then be applied, which is the second stage of our project—we are just trying to kick that off now—which is to then look at whether our existing standards, both in the Victorian planning system but also in the work that CASBE councils are doing, achieves that level of daylight. So it is more about a personal human health benefit—individual benefit, each person.

Mr HAMER: But it is something that then could be quantified, even at an individual level—

Ms PALICH: Absolutely, an individual health benefit, yes—does this place of potential work and living provide you with adequate daylight if you were to spend each and every day in there working?

Mr HAMER: Yes. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Okay. I am just going to head over to Danielle.

Ms GREEN: Thank you. James, you referred to the wicked problem of climate change. I am going to ask you a question about the other wicked problem, the pandemic. What do you consider some of the key lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic for Victoria's apartment design standards—you might need all day—and how have councils responded to this challenge?

Mr McLEAN: What a great question, and I think it has been something on everyone's mind including, as I hinted before, I was apartment hunting as well, so those sorts of things were at the forefront of my mind personally. Obviously we are all working from home so much more often. That is something that is not going to change, I think. I think it has been proven that getting that balance between office life and home life has been one of the few wins, if you could call it that, in this instance. So having apartments that can facilitate that is important—space for home office, you know, second bedrooms being used a lot more for that purpose. And obviously having the kids home a lot more often I think has brought into sharp relief that we need more

apartments to cater for all types of people in our community and people at all different stages of life. So it is things like living areas that are of a shape and design to make sure that you can have the kids doing remote learning while you are in the home office a little bit down the corridor, and again having decent balconies as well—not too far out that you end up blocking daylight and those sorts of things, but having that ability for fresh air and ventilation to come through.

That is really important, but also having apartments and new homes located in areas and provided with the necessary wraparound infrastructure. I have been lucky during the pandemic that I have lived close to abundant open spaces—parks and gardens. It is obviously planning policy in local planning schemes across the state that you provide more dense housing with good access to parks and gardens, but I think having the ability for councils in new developments to provide those open spaces and good transport access and all that has been brought into sharp relief. The BADS I think have enabled more recent apartments to facilitate the sorts of things I have discussed now, but I do feel for those who were in apartment towers in Southbank with no daylight in their bedrooms and small living spaces—those sorts of things. Does that answer your question, Danielle?

Ms GREEN: Yes. Maybe a bit more about shared spaces too and I suppose infection management and control too. You were sort of talking about livability but—

Mr McLEAN: That is a bit of a tricky one as well. I understand that a lot of shared spaces in apartment buildings were actually closed during the pandemic—access to pools and gyms and all of that.

Ms GREEN: But I am even talking about hallways and things like that.

Mr McLEAN: Yes. Hallways, communal laundries and lifts as well. Really big challenges. But I talked before about ventilation—how we can design apartments for a bit better cross ventilation. We see examples like that. I know this particular group gets mentioned all the time, but Nightingale and other developers such as Neometro and that they try and design their apartments to have a bit more airflow in communal spaces.

Ms GREEN: What was the second one? You said Nightingale and—

Mr McLEAN: Neometro and Milieu. They are sort of the leading ones in design. They do not do the big towers; they do more mid-rise sort of stuff, and those sorts of ones allow for more ventilation in communal areas and common property. I think that also speaks to, as we try and densify our cities—you know, make sure we are making the most of the resources we have—it is going to be the more mid-rise, so that four, five, six-storey sort of stuff, that we are going to need to see more of, and that is the sort of development that I think communities might be a bit more accepting of as well in their local neighbourhoods. It does come back to the design and the requirements we have in our planning scheme to facilitate that.

Ms PALICH: If I could comment—it is very specific about daylight. We have had a different consideration of daylight for living areas and bedrooms, and I think it has brought that into question. And also in hindsight, looking back at the bedrooms in apartments that we have got with no windows and just how they have performed during this pandemic. If I can just add a comment to that, I wonder whether at this very moment in time we are at that point when we can change things so that we are not looking back in 10 years time going, ‘Jeez, I wish we hadn’t created those apartments that meant that people had to move out for a certain number of days during a heatwave because they were just too hot’.

Ms GREEN: I just think about the impact on children too; they are the second bedrooms.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am just mindful of—sorry, David.

Mr MORRIS: On the open space and changing requirements, the committee has just tabled a report on environmental infrastructure which addresses many of those issues.

Ms PALICH: Yes, absolutely.

Mr McLEAN: Great report.

Ms GREEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I am surprised you have read it.

Mr McLEAN: I did.

Ms GREEN: Lots of time at home. No time to go out so you read parliamentary reports. Well done.

Mr McLEAN: Yes, in my hot apartment with no air conditioning.

The CHAIR: Natasha and James, thanks for your contribution today.

Witnesses withdrew.