

MEDIA RELEASE

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Performance Audit Report Single Dwelling Development Assessments

ACT Auditor-General, Dr Maxine Cooper, today presented a report on **Single Dwelling Development Assessments** to the Speaker for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

In 2013, concerns were expressed publicly about the probity of the ACT's planning system, particularly relating to the development of a senior Public Servant's home. This catalysed a performance audit to provide the Legislative Assembly with an independent opinion on whether the Development Application exemption and Development Application approval processes for single dwelling developments are open to improper influence.

Audit Conclusion

Dr Cooper said 'there was no evidence of improper influence being exerted on, or by, the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate's assessing officers, for the seven case studies examined as part of this audit'.

'Nevertheless, the safeguards for mitigating improper influence in the Development Application exemption and Development Application Merit Track assessment processes for single dwellings need to be strengthened in accordance with the recommendations made.'

The Audit Office found an 'important safeguard missing is the Directorate's auditing of the fundamental decision made by a certifier on whether or not to exempt a development'.

'Safeguards are important as the ACT's complex planning framework and discretionary decision-making powers provide the opportunity for improper influence to occur.'

Recommendations

The audit, available at www.audit.act.gov.au, made fourteen recommendations, including two high-priority recommendations.

Dr Cooper recommended that 'the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate should improve its auditing of Development Application exemption assessments'. She recommended that this should be achieved by 'continuing to develop and implement a system for targeting audits' and 'including audits to determine if a certifier's decision to assess a development as exempt is correct' (Recommendation 7).

Dr Cooper also recommended that the Directorate 'improve the transparency of its decision-making, by requiring that assessing officers document their considerations against key mandatory roles that a single dwelling Development Application is assessed against' (Recommendation 12).

The Director-General of the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate was consulted regarding the audit.

Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General's Office website, www.audit.act.gov.au, and the Office (please phone 6207 0833 or go to 11 Moore Street, Canberra City)