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## Enough is enough: Penalise slow-moving councils

Victoria's peak body for building designers is proposing a combination of financial penalties and incentives to help improve Victoria's planning approvals process among councils.

The Building Designers Association of Victoria (BDAV) says councils who do not meet deadlines or "unnecessarily" refer planning decisions to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) should be made to pay costs.

A recent survey of BDAV metropolitan and regional members found that in the past 12 months, there was less certainty around submitting planning approvals and that processing of applications was taking longer.

BDAV executive officer, Mr Brian Morison, said delays in granting simple planning approvals were causing "enormous grief" among BDAV members and their clients.

"Enough is enough," Mr Morison said. "Something has got to happen and that State Government should be taking a leading role to fix this problem.

"After undertaking our survey, BDAV voiced our concerns to Planning Minister Justin Madden and Local Government Minister Richard Wynne. We will also be making a formal submission to the Bell Review into VCAT.

"We don't want to overhaul the planning system. What we are saying is there needs to be a greater level of accountability among councils.

"Too often, panicky elected members vote to send applications to VCAT to avoid making what could be an unpopular decision. This is another drain on the system. We think there is merit in giving VCAT the power to award costs against un-successful VCAT appeals.

"It is manifestly unfair that people making a planning application should be compelled to incur further costs simply because a council has determined not to make a decision or takes an unreasonable amount of time to process the application.

"Conversely, where a council approves applications on or ahead of time, there is merit in introducing an incentive-type fee structure that will give councils a better - and potentially larger - income stream."

According to the BDAV survey, members are becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of continuity among local government planners who are regularly lured to work for the private sector.

"When a planner leaves, invariably applications get delayed and that costs money to builders, designers and of course the people who want their home built," Mr Morison said.

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“Applications then get referred to a new planner, who has to review the file and often go through the same assessment process, which means even more waiting for the consumer.

“While we recognise the need for due process in planning matters, it is time for inefficient councils to be penalised and for the good ones to be rewarded for their efforts.”

**\*\*Copies of the BDAV survey of members are available on request.**

The Building Designers Association of Victoria is a not-for-profit body that acts for building design professionals. The association has more than 1100 members and is committed to advancing the profession of building design by offering cost-effective, quality, membership services and benefits to meet the needs of the building industry. Building designers carry out a broad range of roles in the design process including pre-design services, site analysis, schematic design, design development, contract documentation and contract administration. **For more information:** [www.bdav.org.au](http://www.bdav.org.au)

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