

# Tiny tiff over flat standards

Larry Schlesinger

Influential lobbying group the Property Council of Australia has denounced a proposal by the Victorian government's architecture arm to introduce minimum apartment standards, saying the move would increase red tape.

The proposed design standards, prepared by the Office of the Victorian Government Architect for Planning Minister **Matthew Guy**, are based on NSW design guidelines known as SEPP 65, introduced in 2002. Under proposed changes, apartments would have a 37-square metre minimum size.

Nick Proud, the executive director of the PCA's residential development council, said SEPP 65 (State Environmental Planning Policy 65) had not worked. "The SEPP 65 rules' original intent was to improve apartment design and amenity – instead it has become an onerous policy that reduces

housing affordability because time delays and red tape have pushed up house prices for consumers.

"Victoria has an enviable reputation as one of the most affordable apartment markets in Australia, and rules like SEPP 65 will push home ownership out of reach for many home buyers."

Mr Proud said the NSW rules had not kept up to date with emerging building practices and local governments had applied standards over and above those outlined in the policies. "This has had a very real impact in worsening the housing affordability problems already faced in Sydney," he said.

Apart from apartment size, the proposed standards also seek to impose regulations around the provision of natural light and ventilation, the proportion of a site set aside for communal areas, balcony depths and lift-to-apartment ratios.



A 24-square-metre 1936 Cairo Apartment in Melbourne, redesigned by Architecture Architecture.

Jeff Provan, design director at Melbourne developer Neometro, said there were some good measures in what the OVGA was proposing, but some were too restrictive.

"The public needs to be more educated about what constitutes good design and what is inappropriate," Mr Provan said. "But the bottom line is that if its poorly designed or too small, don't rent or buy it." Mr Provan said there

were examples overseas of very well designed small apartments. "It comes down to how much time and effort is put into the design."

Speaking on ABC radio on Wednesday, Mr Guy said letting the market determine the type of apartments that should be built was a "fair premise" but there needed to be some indication "via guidelines" as to what the minimum standards should be. Mr Guy criticised

some developments approved by his predecessor, which he said had no natural light in bedrooms and relied on borrowed light from stairwells and from adjoining rooms.

"These are proposals," he said. "We will take a look at them. We will probably test them with the market and the industry. They are at a first stage and I am happy to have a look at what the government architect is proposing."