

**(1) The proposed Planning Act Amendment Bill to recognise the number of objectors:**

The Andrews Govt is honouring it's pre-election promise to improve planning decisions and the community's faith in the system by requiring councils and VCAT to recognise the number of objectors in the planning permit application process.

**But how effective will the amendments be? Unfortunately, not very.....**

**However, they could be tightened up – check out our analysis of the Bill on the SOS website and make a short submission to the Upper House Parliamentary Environment & Planning Committee.**

The Bill won't return to Parliament for further debate until after winter recess so now is the time to lobby for improvements: <http://sos.asn.au/planning-act-amendment-recognising-objectors-bill-2015/>

Note that the closing date for public submissions to the Committee is this Monday 6 July:

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/epc/article/2707>

The 8 members of the committee are listed here:

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members/committee/epc>

**(2) VCAT – exorbitant fees remain despite ALP pre-election criticism**

A media release on 24 June from Attorney-General Martin Pakula implies that a lower-than-planned annual increase in VCAT fees from July 1st will somehow "ensure low-cost justice for Victorians". The increases have indeed been limited to a maximum of 10% but come on the back of huge increases of at least 300% introduced by the former government in 2013.

Those fee hikes have seen a massive drop in the number of cases appealed to the Tribunal since mid-2013, but because VCAT has not published its planning case statistics since 2009 there is no way of confirming whether most of that fall is in objector appeals.

The press release also stated that the Labor Government was "committed to ensuring VCAT remains a quick, low cost and user-friendly alternative to the courts". Really?

See: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/massive-vcat-fee-hike-will-not-be-unwound-by-labor-20150623-ghvkeh.html>

**(3) Better Apartments – read the Discussion Paper and make a submission**

Survey responses and submissions are due by 31 July:

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at: <http://delwp.vic.gov.au/planning/policy-and-strategy/better-apartments?remap=delwp.vic.gov.au/better-apartments#sthash.6aTCF79U.dpuf>

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**(4) Need a speaker for your next meeting?**

SOS president Ian Wood can talk to your group about all aspects of planning and VCAT, subject to availability. Email your request to [info@sos.asn.au](mailto:info@sos.asn.au)