



Matters relating to a Committee inquiry

Statement pursuant to Standing Order 246A

Mr Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning relating to its inquiry into the Missing Middle Housing Reforms.

On 2 December 2025, in response to a statement informing the Assembly of the Committee's adoption of the Inquiry into Draft Major Plan Amendment 04 – Missing Middle Housing Reforms, the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development made a statement by leave containing remarks to which the Committee has agreed to respond.

One remark related to submissions to the inquiry. Minister Steel told the Assembly that 'I think it is reasonable to shorten the length of some of the processes that the inquiry needs to undertake... given the extensive consultation that has already occurred and given that many of the submissions, I understand, being made to the inquiry are saying that there should be either a shortened inquiry or no inquiry at all'.

While the Committee has now published 25 submissions to the inquiry, when Minister Steel's statement was made, the Committee had received two submissions and had published none. Neither of these submissions contained remarks about the potential length of the Committee's inquiry or stated that it should not be happening. Indeed, one of these two submissions, published on 18 December 2025, contains a detailed critique of the draft amendment itself and the ACT Government consultation process.

Public statements by the responsible minister that this inquiry should not be happening could affect the conduct of the inquiry. Stakeholders hearing such commentary could conclude that DPA-04 is essentially a *fait accompli*, and that their input to the inquiry is pointless. The Committee notes that it has only received 25 submissions on this inquiry, which is unusual for a major planning inquiry that will affect the zoning for all of Canberra. Other inquiries this term received between 12 and 109 submissions, with those matters affecting more people typically receiving more submissions. The Committee cannot know what it is never told, and

with such commentary in the public domain, the Committee may never hear from some of those who have something to say on this issue.

The Committee has deliberated on whether Mr Steel sought to influence the evidence to the inquiry and falsely reported its proceedings. We decided to bring this matter to the attention of the Assembly, as per standing order 259.

On 2 December 2025, Minister Steel further noted that he ‘had written to the inquiry twice, requesting that they undertake their inquiry into the missing middle housing reforms as soon as possible’, and that the Committee ‘had decided to undertake the inquiry in the maximum timeframe possible under the Planning Act – that being six months’. In closing his statement by leave on 2 December, Minister Steel said that he hopes the Committee ‘can report back to the Assembly that they intend to do an inquiry in a shorter timeframe’.

This statement came after the Committee’s letter of 6 November 2025 informing the Minister of the inquiry. This letter states both that the Committee will seek to report as expeditiously as possible, but also that this may necessitate the full six months afforded by the referral and the relevant provisions of the Planning Act.

As noted by Minister Steel on 2 December 2025, in making the referral he did not make use of the provisions in the Planning Act to determine a reporting date between three and six months. In doing so, pursuant to statute the final date for the Committee’s report automatically becomes 30 April 2026. If the Minister needed or wished to have the inquiry conclude earlier than 30 April, he had the statutory ability to make this happen. He chose not to do this.

The Committee has come to the view that it would not be prudent to make guarantees regarding a specific date ahead of 30 April, as the Committee is still gathering evidence with hearings due to take place on 10 and 12 February 2026. We do not know what we will find, until we find it. We do not know what stakeholders have to say about this major reform, until they say it. Making firm commitments to guarantee reporting ahead of the statutorily defined reporting date could preclude public input and participation.

The Committee has deliberated on whether Mr Steel has sought to interfere with the free exercise of its authority and decided to raise this matter in the Assembly, as per standing order 259.