

MEDIA RELEASE

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A national approach to planning laws will increase competition

Former ACCC Chairman and current Dean of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government Professor Allan Fels AO supported the Bulky Goods Retailers Association's call for the relaxation of planning laws and a consistent approach between states in order to increase competition and ultimately reduce costs to Australian consumers.

"The performance of the economy and the level of prices and competition in retail is really a national matter affected by state planning," said Professor Fels at the BGRA forum held in Melbourne last week.

BGRA executive director Philippa Kelly says a consistent approach to planning is long overdue.

"There is a groundswell of support for the harmonisation of state-based planning laws. Bulky goods retailers operate nationally and having to navigate several different state government laws is a costly and time consuming process. Ultimately the customer pays for this," she said.

The BGRA is currently participating in retail planning policy reviews in five Australian states and is looking not only for a consistent approach to bulky goods but also a freeing up of permissible land on which the retailers can develop.

"There is no question that some planning regulation is necessary, however planning laws restrict bulky goods development in terms of what we can sell and where we can locate. Today's planning regulations need to recognise the specific nature of our sector and in particular that we can not be restricted to developing in and around centres," said Ms Kelly.

Professor Fels agreed, saying that his research shows that planning laws protect existing centres rather than consumers. "There are problems if you have an unduly restrictive, backward looking set of criteria governing planning decisions," he said.

"There seems to be intended restrictions on retail and I think that there needs to be some more thought given to what is in the interests of consumers. It's not necessary to go to big shopping centres which are often very congested... There is a case for changing the balance of planning so that you can go shopping where it suits you," he said.

"Bulky goods is an area where there is the prospect of dramatic price changes if you could get a bigger set of bulky goods retail developments than our present plans allow," he added.

The bulky goods retail industry has seen significant growth in recent years and latest figures from BIS Shrapnel show that the sector represents 22.6 per cent of all Australian retailing, a massive \$44.9 billion annually.

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