

Too many councillors slows the process of DA approval

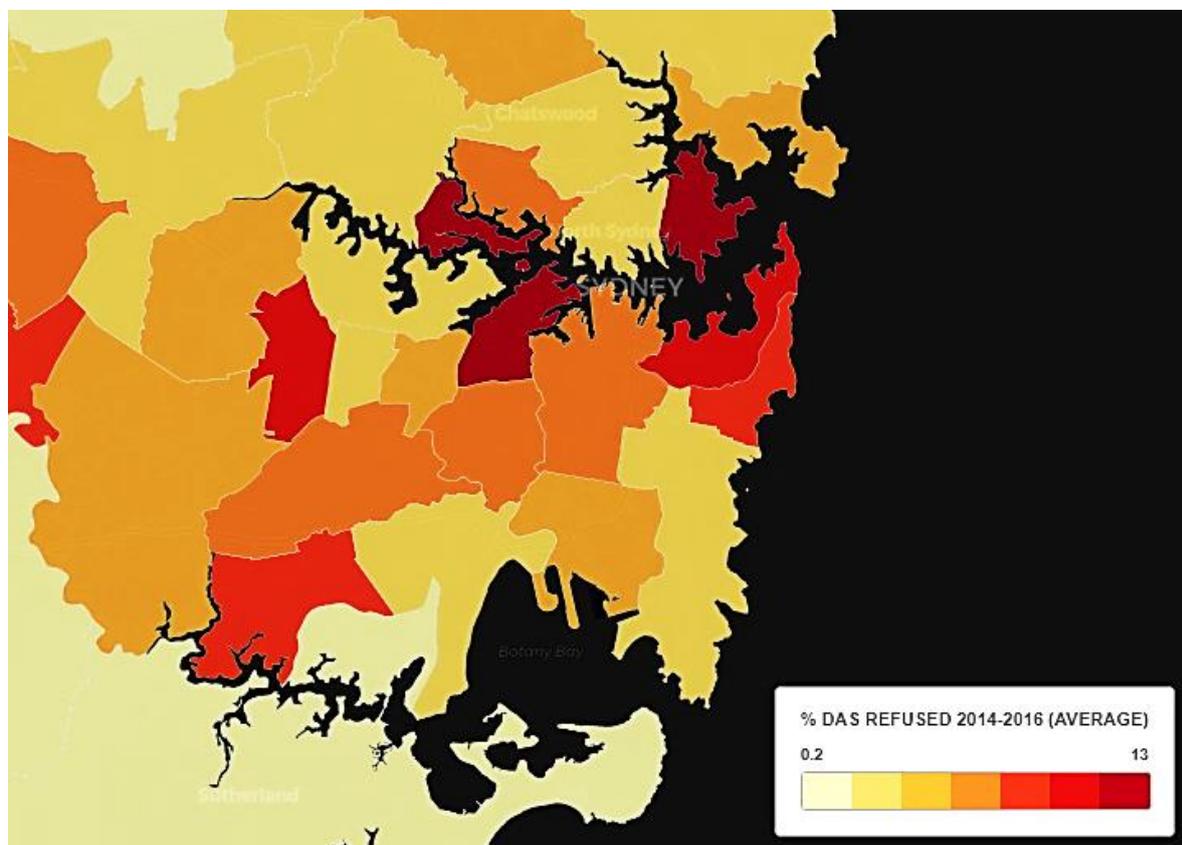
SMH 16 January 2018
Nigel Gladstone

Councillors choosing to vote on too many DAs has seemingly slowed the approval process at several Sydney councils, new analysis has revealed.

When a DA is submitted to council it is assessed by council officers who can approve it.

But if there are objections or issues with the application it may need to be determined at a council meeting where councillors vote for or against it. The other option is for the DA to be decided by an independent panel.

Botany Bay and Hurstville posted the slowest average times to make a decision on all DAs – 145 days and 126 days respectively – and they had the highest rates of councillors voting to determine the applications.



The councils where local politicians put up their hands to approve or reject more than 10 per cent of all DAs were the former Botany Bay Council (35 per cent), Hurstville (30 per cent), Woollahra (20 per cent), Ashfield (12 per cent) and Leichhardt (11 per cent).

Councillor involvement in too many development applications also creates a corruption risk, the Independent Commission Against Corruption [noted in 2007](#).

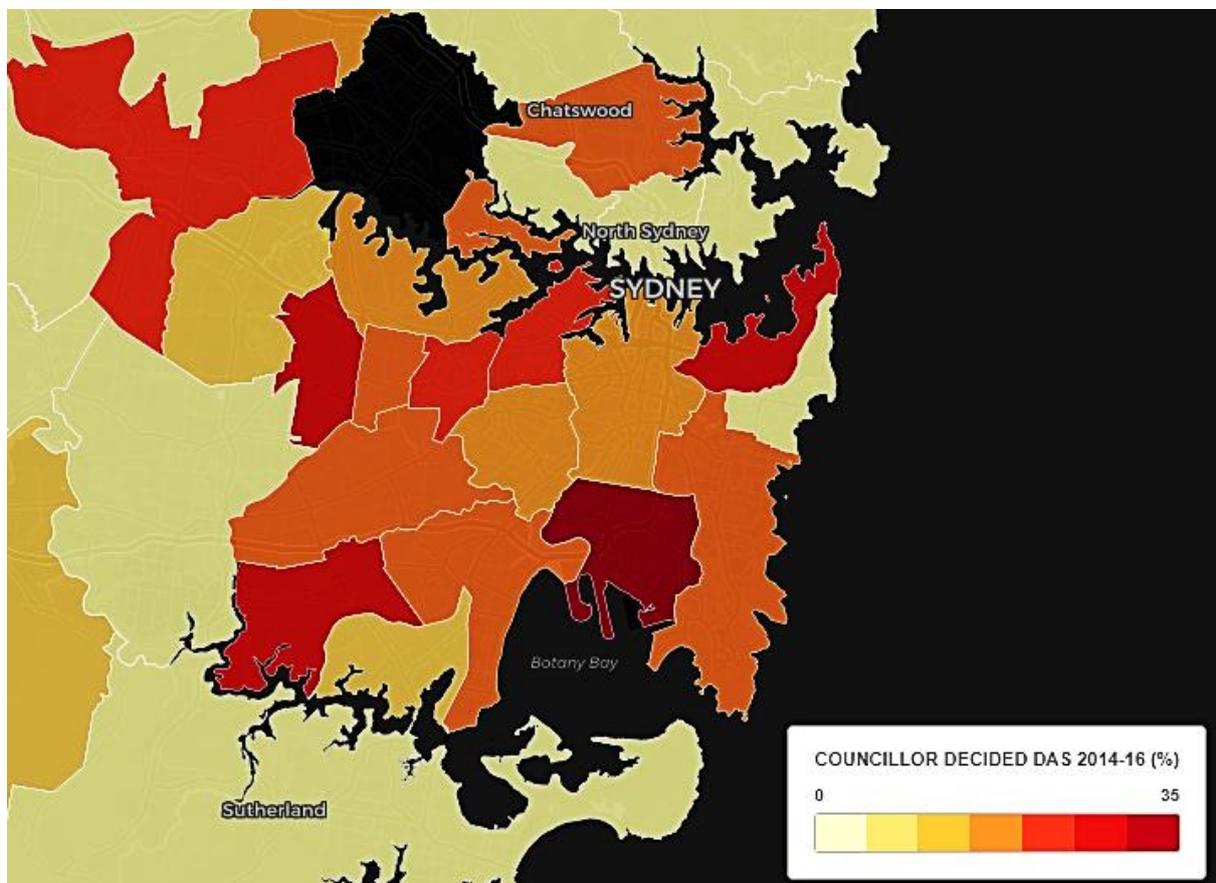
Former Leichhardt mayor and current Inner West Council mayor Darcy Byrne said he noted problems with the system at Leichhardt Council and he had introduced an independent panel of planning experts.

"I thought the level of political interference in determining DAs was wrong and a corruption risk," Cr Byrne said.

New local planning panels will be introduced for all Sydney councils in March to take most development assessments away from local councillors.

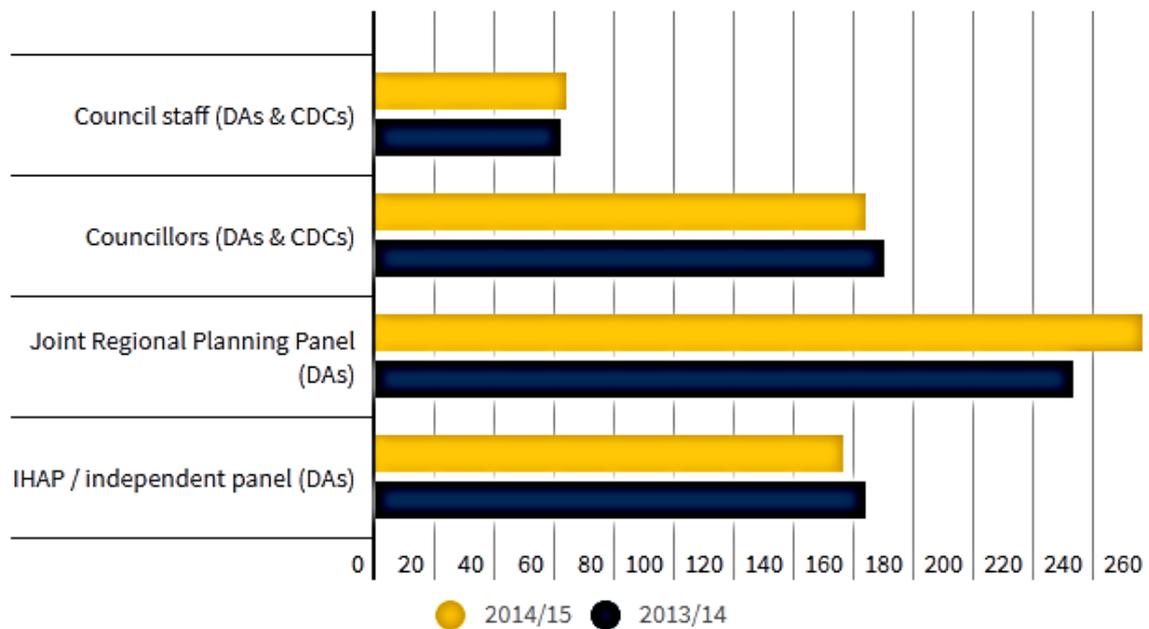
NSW Minister for Planning and Housing Anthony Roberts said that changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act would result in building community confidence in planning decisions and outcomes.

"Greater confidence and participation is essential to accommodating an extra 2.2 million people in NSW over the next 20 years," Mr Roberts said.



A NSW Planning department analysis of 205 decisions, made by seven regional planning panels already operating in Sydney, the Hunter and the Central Coast, found that they reflected the recommendations of the council in 200 of 205 cases in the last six months of 2017.

Average time (days) to decide Development Applications in NSW



Source: NSW Department of Planning > [Local Development Performance Monitoring](#)

The council planning panels will have four people on them with one expert chosen by the minister. Two experts chosen by the council from a pool established by the department of planning that has been pre-approved by the minister.

And one resident chosen by the council who will also be responsible for recruiting and appointing that person.

Councillors, property developers and real estate agents will be ineligible to be members of the panel, a rule that is aimed at depoliticising assessments.