

# MEDIA RELEASE

**Saturday 12 October 2024**

## **Master Builders ACT announces eight key election priorities**

With a week to go until the 2024 ACT Election, Master Builders ACT has identified eight key priorities to build Canberra and the ACT region.

Master Builders ACT Chief Executive Officer Anna Neelagama said that the ACT was at a critical crossroads, with the incumbent government in power for 23 years.

"We have a sector that is facing many economic and businesses challenges, with critical ongoing support required from the ACT Government.

"The biggest loser is actually those that live and vote in the ACT, who feel the crunch with cost of housing, cost of renovations, cost of new builds and even the cost and delay of delivering major projects with instability in the building sector."

Ms Neelagama said that with the ACT set to fall short of National Housing Accord targets, and with consumer confidence down, a boost to the building sector is urgently needed.

"The latest Master Builders Australia estimates show that new dwelling starts in the ACT will reduce by 15.6% by the 2025-26 Financial Year.

"We have outlined eight 'do now' priorities which will strengthen the building and construction sector in the ACT, and ultimately deliver for Canberrans who vote and pay tax here."

The eight key ACT Election 2024 priorities for Master Builders ACT are:

### **1. A major boost for apprenticeship and training support for trades**

A focus on people, training and growing our trades is urgently needed. There is a chronic lack of funding to support apprentices and trainees, including employer incentives.

Jobs and Skills Australia lists all 18 construction trades in the ACT as being in shortage. Master Builders ACT is calling for political parties to substantially increase support for apprenticeships and training and has welcomed the move by the ACT Labor Party to increase the training subsidy available for apprentices in the ACT to 90%.

## **2. Back Canberra builders and subcontractors on Territory-funded projects**

Changes need to be made to ensure that Territory-funded works are being completed, where possible, by ACT-based construction businesses.

In particular, the introduction of the Secure Local Jobs Code in 2019 led to a 26% reduction in construction companies being eligible to tender for ACT Government contracts.

Master Builders ACT has also identified that the Secure Local Jobs Code places a preference on 'union-led' contractors. Clauses 14, 15 and 16 of the Code must be amended to level the playing field for ACT's local contractors and suppliers.

## **3. Deliver the right kind of land and planning**

Affordable, available and shovel-ready land is urgently needed now so that more homes can be built in the ACT to address the housing shortage and meet National Housing Accord targets. Additionally, a variety of different land types should be identified and made available for development and varied use.

The latest land release program comes after one of the lowest releases in years, at 1,883 dwellings for the 2023-24 financial year.

Master Builders ACT recommends that a fast-tracked planning process for small building projects is needed, which is geared toward meeting National Housing Accord targets.

## **4. Continue to clean up the unions**

Unions act as a conduit for important matters relating to a worker, such as industrial relations, health and safety. However, with recent revelations about alleged nefarious conduct by the CFMEU across all Australian states and territories, it is evident that significant, lasting change is needed.

Master Builders ACT does not condone behaviour such as bullying, coercion and other unlawful conduct by unions, and applauds the Federal Government for its swift placement of the CFMEU into external administration.

## **5. Review the Reviews**

Recommendations from Building Reviews conducted in 2010, 2015 and 2018 are yet to be implemented in a substantive way for the building and construction sector in the ACT.

Master Builders ACT supports those recommendations that have resulted in changes occurring, such as the announcement to introduce trade contractor licensing in the ACT.

Master Builders ACT continues to call for those outstanding recommendations to be implemented, including compulsory professional development for ACT builders.

## **6. Turbocharge public infrastructure projects**

The ACT Infrastructure Plan is a good start, but we need to be more ambitious for the ACT.

Master Builders ACT recommends that a longer-term infrastructure plan that sets out a range of small, medium and large projects is needed. This will provide a solid pipeline of work for local construction businesses, deliver much-needed infrastructure for Canberrans and help sustain the industry over the next 20 – 25 years. The plan must include projects for ACT businesses of all sizes, and can draw on both ACT and federal funding.

### **7. A business support package for small and family-owned businesses**

There has been a remarkably high number of builder insolvencies in recent times, and this has included some high-profile building companies tasked with delivering critical ACT Government projects.

It is essential to stabilise the sector with a dedicated support package to assist the sector navigate the volatile economic conditions, with a particular focus on supporting small and family-owned businesses in the Territory.

This should include financial and cashflow management advice and specific development programs for family-owned builders.

### **8. Protect our builders by reviewing and removing nominee liability**

The current level of personal liability being placed on licenced builders has gone too far.

This needs to be urgently reviewed so builders can enact retirement plans and transfer liabilities with businesses, not individuals.

### **ENDS**

*Authorised by Anna Neelagama on behalf of Master Builders Association of the ACT.*

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