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State Planning Commission
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By email: DPTI.PlanningEngagement@sa.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Introduction and Information about the Author

My name is Carly Thomson, I am a thirty five year-old mother of four children and I am currently studying a Bachelor of Social Work at Flinders University and working with young people under the Guardianship of the Minister in out of home care across South Australia.

I have spent the most part of my career working with vulnerable individuals seeking legal assistance within a community legal organisation and have seen first-hand how vulnerable our ageing population is. I have worked with individuals who have lost or have had to access superannuation and have been forced to live out their retirements on government benefits which render them unable to support themselves with the rising cost of living. Issues such as elder abuse have caused serious financial consequences for our ageing population and with the rising cost of energy in an increasingly warm climate, they are more vulnerable than ever. For the purposes of this submission the focus will be the cost of electricity and the adverse effect this has on the health of our ageing population, with the issue of climate change at the forefront of this discussion.

I will be offering my feedback from a social justice perspective with the promotion of social capital within the elderly community at the core of my submission. A social justice approach to planning recognizes inequality and oppression and by promoting social capital in communities, urban development and state planning can better address broader social issues of inequity. As you may be aware, social capital is a valuable resource both for individuals in communities as well as for planners and can be used to promote community participation, trusting positive relationships, social inclusion, social cohesion as well as encourage social cooperation in communities (Thompson, 2012)

The draft policies I wish to offer my feedback on are as follows;

Summary of the Draft State Planning Policies for South Australia, July 2018

- I. **State Planning Policy 5: *Climate Change***
- II. **State Planning Policy 12: *Energy***

With respect to the proposed Climate Change policy, I believe that the issue of climate change, from a future planning perspective has been addressed well, in terms of the government's plan to make our external environment accessible and promotes positive outcomes and a positive plan to care for and protect our environment. I believe the plan to ensure a greener more environmentally friendly urban environment addresses issues of social inclusion and accessibility for most vulnerable groups and assists with access to public space.

I do not believe however that, the policy directly addresses the issues associated with the impact of climate change on the social determinants of health for vulnerable individuals in our community, namely the elderly. Australia is an ageing population. As you would be aware, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that the population of older Australians will increase by 84.8 percent between 2011 and 2031 as the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age. (APMRC, 2014). These statistics alone are enough to indicate the importance of addressing the effects that climate change is having and will have on our ageing population and the economic burden faced by the South Australian Governments in terms of the public health sector.

According to research conducted by the World Health Organization, climate change directly affects both the social and environmental determinants of health and is likely to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from various health issues, including heat stress, a serious issue faced by vulnerable groups such as the elderly (World Health Organization, 2018).

There has been significant research into the issue of climate change and how it relates directly to the health and wellbeing of the elderly. A study conducted by Rhodes, L., Gruber, J. & Horton, B. (2017) found that the elderly community is significantly at risk of serious health, economic and social implications due to the current and future effects of climate change. This research emphasizes the importance of community, economic and social support for vulnerable individuals when addressing issues relating to climate change and further suggests that participatory planning strategies which include engaging directly with the elderly from an advocacy perspective of planning would be beneficial in ensuring adverse consequences relating to climate change at the individual level are being addressed by the state government (Rhodes, L., Gruber, J. & Horton, B., 2017).

The proposed policy for Energy in South Australia directly relates to the issue of climate change and although this proposed policy addresses issues relating to a sustainable and green environment in an attempt to improve energy sustainability and supply and reduce the effects of climate change in the future, it does not address the issues our state's elderly persons and many others are already facing in relation to the affordability of energy and the negative health and social implications for elderly individuals who cannot afford their energy bills.

South Australia, since the deregulation of the energy sector on 1 February 2013 has experienced some of the highest household energy costs in Australia and this has had a significant impact on our ageing population (Escosa.sa.gov.au, 2018). This has resulted in significant financial strain on the weekly budgets of elderly South Australians and has resulted in elderly people opting not to use appliances such as heating and air-conditioning during instances of extreme weather, a more frequent occurrence in our changing climate. Not only does this have a negative impact on the physical health of elderly people in South Australia (Hansen, A., 2011) but, from a social perspective, it can have a devastating impact on issues such as social capital and community cohesiveness as financial strain in older individuals has a direct relationship with loneliness, a social determinant of health (Mullins, L., et al., 1996). Loneliness in

elderly populations has been consistently linked to poor emotional wellbeing, poor health and economic insecurity (Mullins, L., et al., 1996).

It has been argued that individuals contending with energy poverty suffer deprivation and social exclusion as a result (Chester, L., & Morris, A., 2011). The liberalisation of the energy market has had significant negative implications for the elderly through the deregulation and restructuring of the energy market which has resulted in an extreme increase in household energy prices with this issue being minimally addressed by Australian policy makers (Chester, L., & Morris, A., 2011).

In our increasingly warm climate the need for air-conditioning and therefore affordable and sustainable energy supply is increasingly essential. This is especially concerning for our elderly population as they are often individuals living alone, surviving on government pensions, do not have additional disposable income to contend with these high energy costs and have higher expenses in terms of healthcare and medication. It is widely discussed and accepted that climate change over the coming years will result in more extreme and more prolonged heatwaves in Australia and this will have a significant negative impact on our ageing population. From issues around the elderly being less likely to adapt their behaviour during instances of high temperatures in order to cool down to higher instances of elderly people with Dementia, a higher multicultural population with English as their second language and with the elderly population expected to dramatically increase in the coming decades to approximately one in four people aged over 65, making energy affordable to vulnerable groups in our community should be prioritized when planning for South Australia (Hansen, A., et al, 2011).

I would like to respectfully offer the following suggestions to improve the draft policies to consider the needs of our ageing population;

- Greater financial supplements for energy bills for economically vulnerable households as the supplements offered currently are not enough to relieve the financial tension and energy poverty experienced by many elderly South Australians (Sa.gov.au, 2018).
- Social support and meeting places to educate the elderly further on safe practices in terms of reducing risk during extreme weather conditions to promote social cohesiveness and social capital within the elderly community
- Engage and consult directly with the elderly community using an Advocacy model of planning to ensure accurate representation of problems and solutions and to ensure a more economically secure future for the elderly community and to reduce instances of loneliness and resultant poor mental health.

I appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback on this policy and thank you for taking the time to consider my submission.

Yours faithfully,

Carly Thomson

Individual Submission dated 13 September 2018

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