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Could City Deals be part of a National Settlement Strategy?

While the Commonwealth has typically shied away from developing a national policy for cities or settlements, contemporary political pressures around the management of population growth have seen a renewed interest in this policy agenda. The Planning Institute of Australia has now called for a National Settlement Strategy and the recently released report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities recommended a new Minister and Department for Cities and National Settlement and the creation of an Office of National Chief Planner.

This presentation argues in favour of a national policies for cities and settlements, to complement the widespread work of state and territory governments, local governments and ad hoc regional bodies, and to bring a much-needed national focus to debates about where and how our expanding population might live and provide a (potentially) useful national policy framework within which other policies can be developed.

In recent years City Deals, a concept imported from the UK, have been proposed as a significant policy intervention by the Commonwealth and might indeed be able to play such a role in the future. At present though, they cover a very broad spectrum of policy possibilities and there is little policy guidance from the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities about the rules of this particular game. This does not support the development of a comprehensive and coherent set of plans for towns, cities and metropolitan regions.

The presentation offers, therefore, a set of principles and prescriptions with the potential to transform the current City Deals policy regime into a more coherent framework that is capable of helping achieve a broader set of national urban policy objectives in a more cost-effective manner.