

C.6 Costing of housing construction regulations

Purpose and scope

This appendix outlines how the Productivity Commission has estimated the total costs of regulation for new housing construction. We aim to highlight the cumulative burden of regulation in this sector to show the potential dollar benefits of reducing regulation.

We have estimated costs for each stage of construction of new houses and new units only on an annual basis. Other construction activity, including residential renovation, and commercial and civil construction, has been excluded. We have also not costed any welfare losses from existing housing stock being sub-optimally distributed as a result of inefficient regulation.

Nothing herein implies a value judgement about the regulations or the need for them. Quality and safety regulations are necessary and appropriate in many cases. The objective is simply to cost the regulatory burden. Actual regulatory savings would require identifying and reducing regulations that do not pass a benefit-cost test.

Method summary

Our approach was to complete a regulatory burden measurement costing according to impact analysis methodology published by the Office of Impact Analysis (2024).

The basic costing formula is:

$$\text{Annual cost of housing regulation} = \text{Unit cost} \times \text{Quantity}$$

Where:

- *Unit cost* represents the mean cost of regulation per dwelling constructed
- *Quantity* represents the number of new dwellings constructed per year.

Given the significant differences in the process and costs of construction of houses and apartments/units, we costed each separately and summed the total.

For verification, we compared our results to other estimates of the regulatory burden on new housing, and observed similar results (The CIE 2025; Urban Taskforce Australia 2025).

Results summary

Table C.11 summarises the results.

Table C.11 – Estimated total regulatory costs for housing construction

	Low estimate	Medium estimate	High estimate
Total regulatory cost per new house ^a	\$135,000	\$200,000	\$320,000
Total regulatory cost per new unit ^a	\$40,000	\$90,000	\$175,000
Economy-wide cost per year	\$17.9 billion	\$28.6 billion	\$47.5 billion
% of 2025 GDP	0.64%	1.03%	1.71%

a. Estimates rounded to the nearest \$5,000.

Source: PC calculations.

For houses, we estimate that by far the largest component (50-80%) of the regulatory cost comes from distortionary costs from restrictive zoning laws. Substantive compliance costs represent 5-20% of the regulatory cost, while delay and paperwork costs, while significant, make up a smaller proportion.

For units, as the price of land per unit is significantly lower than for houses, zoning costs are less significant, at 13-42% of the total regulatory costs. Paperwork (administrative and assessment) costs make up around 33-36% of the total regulatory cost for unit construction.

More detailed results are in tables C.14 and C.15 below.

Estimating quantity

We obtained data on residential building construction activity from the ABS (2025c). This allowed us to estimate the number of dwelling completions per year, divided into houses and units (table C.12).

Given the figures are relatively consistent year-on-year in the 2020s, we used the four-year average of completions to estimate annual activity.

Table C.12 – Annual dwelling completions 2021-2024, Australia-wide

Dwellings completed	2021	2022	2023	2024	Mean annual
Houses	110,062	114,897	115,535	112,026	113,128
Units	67,334	58,471	59,703	65,086	62,649
Total	177,396	173,368	175,238	177,102	175,776

Source: ABS (2025c).

Estimating unit cost

Theoretical framework for regulatory burden measurement

Under the regulatory burden measure, we divide unit cost into several sub-categories (OIA 2024):

Administrative costs: The costs of ‘paperwork’ – the costs of preparing, monitoring and lodging documents and carrying out procedures to demonstrate compliance with regulation.

These can generally be estimated by establishing the amount of time it takes to complete these activities per unit, and multiplying by the wage rate (including overheads) of the people doing the activity.

Substantive compliance costs: The costs of actually following the regulation – materials, equipment, capital and training, over and above the baseline cost that would have been incurred in the absence of regulation.

These are estimated as a fraction of the total resource costs for an activity that are attributable to complying with the regulation.

Assessment costs: These are the costs to government of administering the regulation – for example, assessing planning and development applications. While these costs are not formally included in the regulatory burden measurement framework, as they are costs to government rather than regulated parties, we have included them here as they represent costs to the economy as a whole.

For these costs, we use the government fees as a proxy, assuming governments set fees to efficiently recover costs and not as a revenue source.

Indirect/distortionary costs: The costs of changed decisions or economic activity foregone as a result of regulation.

These costs can be challenging to estimate, as they relate to foregone activity that does not always show up in data. As a result, we were not able to cost all potential activity foregone.

One indirect cost that we did estimate is delay costs – where time taken to make a regulatory decision imposes a cost on a regulated party. In the context of housing development, a developer cannot undertake construction activity on land until approvals have been granted. The costs of maintaining an asset (development land) without being able to undertake any value-adding activity on it are ‘capital holding’, and can be estimated as follows (NSW DPC BRO 2008, p. 7):

$$\text{Capital holding cost} = \text{Unit cost} \times \text{Quantity}$$

Where:

- *Unit cost* represents the annual capital value of approvals multiplied by the estimate of percentage of total capital spent prior to approval multiplied by the annual interest rate, plus annual land and/or property taxes
- *Quantity* represents the average delay (in years) to gain approval.

We also estimated distortionary costs of land use regulation as reflected in the price premium for land zoned for residential use as opposed to other purposes – see below for more details.

Housing cost estimates

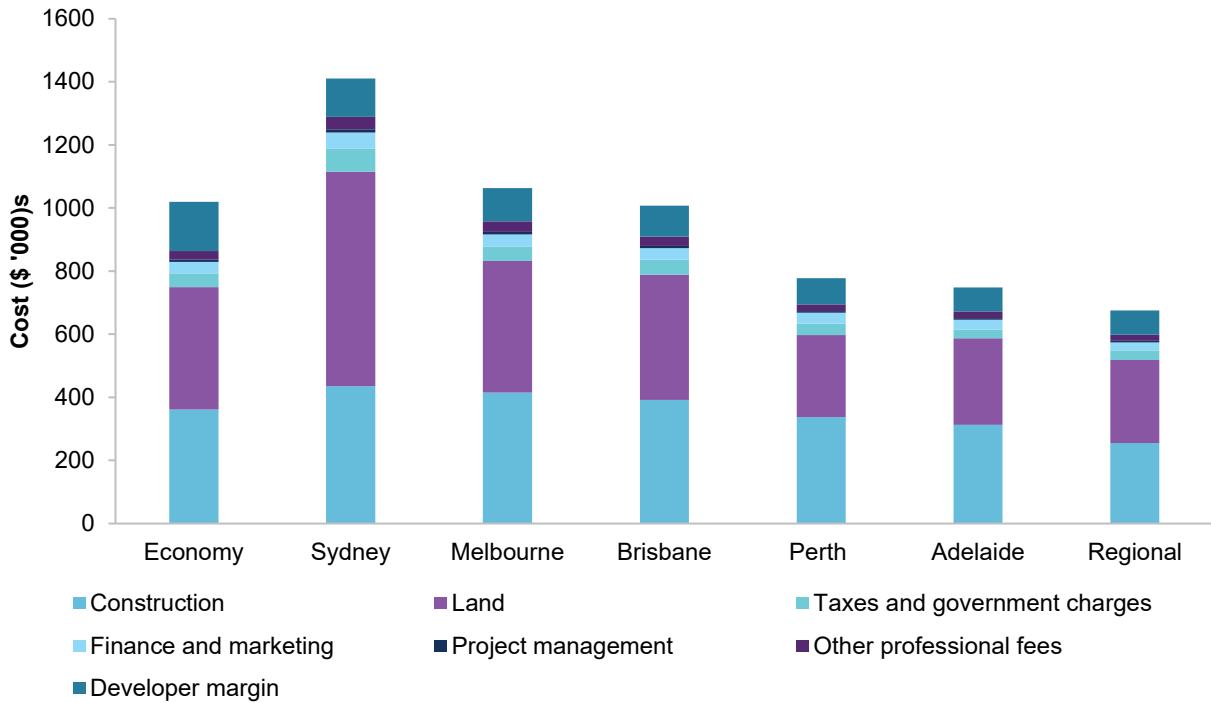
We compiled from existing literature sources a breakdown of the various component costs of constructing a house and unit in each of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, where necessary scaled for inflation (using the consumer price index) to 2025 dollars. The components are land purchase, construction costs, taxes and government charges, finance and marketing costs, project management, other professional fees, and developer margin (The CIE 2024, 2025; UDIA 2024; Urban Taskforce Australia 2025; Urbis 2011). These components were then summed to get an average total outlay to construct a house and unit in each city.

These estimates were then verified by comparing our summed component costs with actual average sale prices of new houses and units in each city (Cotality 2025).

We then created a ‘regional’ cost profile of a new house and unit by scaling the input costs to the value of the average sale price of houses and units outside the five big capital cities (figures C.5 and C.6).

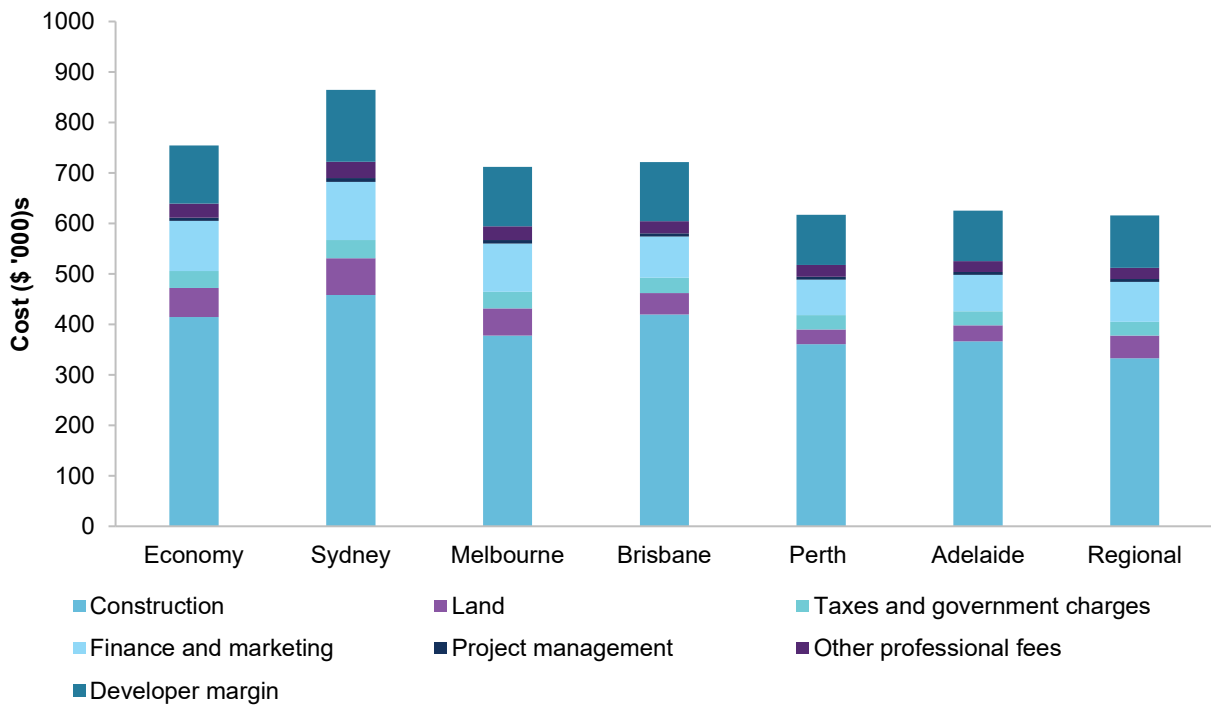
Finally, we compiled an economy-wide ‘average’ cost profile for a new house and unit by taking an average profile for housing completions across the five big capitals and our regional profile, weighted for the number of annual completions in each location (ABS 2025d).

Figure C.5 – Cost breakdown for new houses



Source: PC estimates.

Figure C.6 – Cost breakdown for new units



Source: PC estimates.

Regulatory burden at each stage of housing construction

Overview of the stages of construction

We broke housing construction down into five key stages, with several regulatory processes within each stage. Figure C.7 illustrates the breakdown.

Figure C.7 – Stages of housing construction and the associated regulatory burden

Stage	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Zoning and land purchase	Development approval	Building approval	Construction	QA, certification and titling
Regulatory burden	Zoning rules, subdivision delays	Prepare application, approval delays	Prepare application, approval delays	Material and labour premium due to rules	Inspection costs, approval delays

Source: Certlane (2025); PC (2025d, p. 25); Permitpoint building surveyors (2025).

Applying the framework to housing construction

Each stage of the housing construction comprises a number of steps. For each stage of the construction process, we identified the steps that involve a regulatory burden. We then undertook a bottom-up estimate of the regulatory burden cost of each step, and summed them together to estimate the total regulatory cost of each stage. A summary of the steps and how we costed them follows in table C.13. We did a separate costing for each step for houses and units. Additional information on certain steps follows.

Table C.13 – Effect of regulation and costing method for regulatory burden for each stage of housing construction

	Effect of regulation	Regulatory burden	Method to estimate
Zoning and land purchase	Limitations on land use for residential construction	Indirect – market distortions due to artificially constrained usable land supply	Zoning premium for residential compared to non-residential land
Development approval (also known as planning approval in some jurisdictions)	Understand development regulations, heritage rules etc. to determine if development permitted	Administrative – developer must spend time to understand requirements	Time to perform due diligence x wage rate
	Develop, submit and receive government approval for a complying development application	Administrative – developer must prepare and submit a complying application	Time to prepare application x wage rate
		Assessment – government approval of application	Government fee
		Indirect – holding costs for approval delays	Delay time x ((sunk cost x interest rate) + tax rate)

	Effect of regulation	Regulatory burden	Method to estimate
Building approval	Develop building plans that must comply with the National Construction Code (NCC) and local regulations	Substantive – plans must meet all regulatory requirements	Time spent on plans to ensure they meet standards x wage rate
	Plans are assessed for compliance with regulations and NCC before construction can start	Administrative – developer must prepare and submit a complying application	Time to prepare application x wage rate
		Assessment – government approval of application	Government fee
		Indirect – holding costs for approval delays	Delay time x ((sunk cost x interest rate) + tax rate)
Construction process	Building construction process and materials must comply with NCC and local regulations	Substantive – building materials, processes must meet requirements.	Costs of materials and labour incurred due to the rules that would not otherwise have been incurred
	Work health and safety rules and requirements must be followed	Substantive – all processes must comply with safety rules, equipment required	Costs of safety equipment and processes incurred due to rules that would not otherwise have been incurred
	Construction workers must meet minimum standards for training and licensing	Substantive – each worker must complete training and meet licensing requirements	Total lifetime cost of training and licensing per worker averaged per project over career x number of workers per project
Quality assurance, certification and titling	Construction site must be inspected at various stages to ensure plans are being followed and rules observed	Administrative – developer must ensure inspections are carried out and rectify defects	Time taken by inspections x wage rate
	Final inspection before dwelling can be occupied to ensure it satisfies all regulatory requirements and certificate issued	Administrative – developer must ensure inspections are carried out and rectify defects	Time taken by inspections x wage rate
		Indirect – holding costs for delays to issue certificate of occupancy	Delay time x ((sunk cost x interest rate) + tax rate)
	Where multiple dwellings are constructed on a block, subdivision and titling required before sale can occur	Assessment – government must process subdivision	Government fee
	Indirect – holding costs for delays to issue titles	Delay time x ((sunk cost x interest rate) + tax rate)	

Source: Certlane (2025); PC (2025d, p. 25); Permitpoint building surveyors (2025).

Data sources and notes

For each of the cost lines in table C.13, we estimated the regulatory burden using the methodology outlined. We used a variety of literature and internet sources to obtain estimates for the various input data. We calculated three outputs: a 'low' estimate, calculated from the lowest credible value we could find for each input, a 'high' estimate from the highest credible value we could find for each input, and a 'mid' estimate representing our best estimate of the 'typical' scenario across the range of sources we used.

For several estimates relating to units, we were able to source figures and costs on a 'per project' rather than 'per unit' basis. We apportioned costs from these sources according to the average number of units per development (Jenner and Tulip 2020, table 4).

Wage rates

We obtained estimates of hourly wage rates for different sectors of the economy from the ABS (2024), adjusted for inflation, and applied the relevant wage rates to each line. Hourly wage rates were scaled by 1.75 to account for overheads, in line with the regulatory burden measurement framework (OIA 2024, p. 12).

Activity and delay time estimates

We took estimates of times to complete each step of the process from literature sources including reports, developer websites, and guides for buyers of house and land or apartment packages. This included estimates of time taken to obtain approvals after applications are submitted. Sources are in the reference list.

Government fees, land and property tax rates

We estimated typical government fees and land and property tax charges from official government websites from each state, and where appropriate took a weighted average according to construction activity in each state. Sources are in the reference list.

Interest rate

We used an annual interest rate of 5.3% based on a survey of mortgage interest rates for investment and construction lending from major banks and lenders in August 2025 (Canstar 2025).⁶⁸

Sunk costs

We estimated sunk costs at each stage assuming that land costs are fully incurred before any approval activity or construction takes place, while construction costs are incurred only within the construction phase. Other costs and fees were assumed to be incurred proportionately over the project timeline.

Zoning premium

We used the methodology Kendall and Tulip (2018, table 3) to estimate the zoning premium – the additional cost of land when it is zoned for housing construction compared to its marginal cost. We used estimates for each of the major capitals from the paper, and scaled for other areas in proportion to the value of land.

The paper breaks down costs into just construction and land, and attributes all of the price of a new dwelling that is not construction or marginal value of land to the zoning premium. Our model attributes some of this

⁶⁸ While interest rates can vary, sensitivity analysis indicated this does not significantly affect the results. A change in the interest rate of 2.5% is required to change the 'mid' estimate of regulatory burden by \$5,000 for a new house build.

additional price to other costs (Housing Cost Estimates, above). We subtracted these costs before attributing the remaining additional price of land over its marginal value to the zoning cost.

Construction – materials and labour premium

We used published impact analyses for changes to the NCC over the last seven years to obtain estimates of the increases in costs to build a new house and a new unit as a result of those regulations (ACIL Allen 2022; DCWC 2018; The CIE 2021). We assumed older changes to the NCC had a negligible marginal additional cost in 2025, as the features they mandate would by now be standard design features on all new builds regardless of regulation. We note that in some cases the costs were contested by some stakeholders (Bleby 2024; Elmas 2025). For those disputed costs, we also reviewed other modelling and estimates where available to arrive at a range, which in some cases we note had considerable uncertainty (AGWA 2024; Buildi 2023; Mitchell Brandman 2025).

Work health and safety costs

We obtained estimates on the average annual spend by construction firms on safety training, equipment and procedures (Safe Work Australia 2015, pp. 15–18). We converted this to a ‘per project’ spend by estimating the number of full time equivalent workers on a typical construction project, and the number of projects a worker will complete per year, and the average size of a construction firm in Australia (HIA 2024, p. 2; PC 2025d, p. 26).

Training and licensing costs

We estimated the costs for construction workers to become licensed to work as the sum of formal qualifications, on the job training and government charges, with a scale factor to account for the fact that some necessary training would take place in the absence of regulatory requirements.

Formal training costs were estimated from a survey of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course fees for relevant qualifications (Holmesglen Institute of TAFE 2025; Melbourne Polytechnic 2025; TAFE NSW 2025), plus the ‘opportunity cost’ of training due to wages foregone during study. Costs of ‘on the job’ training were estimated as the difference between the wage rate of construction apprentices and the minimum wage as a proxy for the cost to the trainer and trainee in the aggregate (as the counterfactual is the trainee could earn minimum wage for their untrained labour) over the course of an apprenticeship (Fair Work Ombudsman 2025). Government charges and requirements were estimated from official websites (Building Commission NSW 2024b, 2024a; QBCC 2021, 2025; VBA 2023, 2025).

We apportioned the training and licensing cost per worker per project assuming an average career of 30 years, and dividing the costs of a worker’s training across the projects they would be expected to complete in that time (above).

We estimated annual licensing renewal costs from government websites, and again apportioned costs on a ‘per project’ basis according to the number of full-time equivalent workers per project, and the number of projects a worker will complete per year.

Results

Table C.14 – Regulatory cost estimates for new housing construction

	Regulation costing	Low estimate	Mid estimate	High estimate
Zoning and land purchase	Land value premium due to zoning regulation	\$115,000	\$140,000	\$165,000
Development approval (also known as planning approval in some jurisdictions)	Due diligence costs	\$140	\$760	\$3,400
	Preparation of development application	\$3,900	\$8,300	\$22,000
	Government approval of development application	\$750	\$1,500	\$3,300
	Holding costs for development approval delays	\$2,500	\$3,400	\$32,000
Building approval	Cost to ensure plans meet all regulatory requirements	\$2,900	\$8,800	\$22,000
	Preparation of building approval	\$3,700	\$11,000	\$18,000
	Government approval of building application	\$960	\$2,000	\$3,000
	Holding costs for building approval delays	\$1,600	\$4,200	\$7,100
Construction process	Costs of materials and labour due to the rules that would not otherwise have been incurred	\$3,600	\$18,000	\$33,000
	Costs of safety equipment and processes due to rules that would not otherwise have been incurred	\$310	\$2,000	\$6,100
	Worker training costs due to regulation	\$200	\$590	\$2,000
	Worker annual licensing costs	\$130	\$410	\$1,100
Quality assurance, certification and titling	Cost of ongoing compliance inspections	\$840	\$1,200	\$2,000
	Costs of final inspection for certificate of occupancy	\$250	\$490	\$1,100
	Holding costs for delays to issue certificate of occupancy	\$300	\$1,200	\$2,100
	Government processing of subdivision	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Holding costs for delays to issue titles	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total per dwelling^a		\$135,000	\$200,000	\$320,000
Annual dwelling completions		113,128	113,128	113,128
Economy-wide annual cost^a		\$15.4 bn	\$22.9 bn	\$36.4 bn

a. Totals do not sum exactly due to rounding.

Source: PC calculations.

Table C.15 – Regulatory cost estimates for new apartment construction

	Regulation costing	Low estimate	Mid estimate	High estimate
Zoning and land purchase	Land value premium due to zoning regulation	\$17,000	\$20,000	\$24,000
Development approval (also known as planning approval in some jurisdictions)	Due diligence costs	\$0	\$20	\$60
	Preparation of development application	\$7,400	\$13,000	\$22,000
	Government approval of development application	\$200	\$830	\$1,500
	Holding costs for development approval delays	\$2,900	\$10,000	\$33,000
Building approval	Cost to ensure plans meet all regulatory requirements	\$370	\$1,100	\$2,800
	Preparation of building approval	\$3,700	\$11,000	\$18,000
	Government approval of building application	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200
	Holding costs for building approval delays	\$390	\$1,200	\$2,300
Construction process	Costs of materials and labour due to the rules that would not otherwise have been incurred	\$3,300	\$8,100	\$11,000
	Costs of safety equipment and processes due to rules that would not otherwise have been incurred	\$1,200	\$9,200	\$28,000
	Worker training costs due to regulation	\$780	\$1,600	\$4,400
	Worker annual licensing costs	\$520	\$1,100	\$2,600
	Quality assurance, certification and titling	Cost of ongoing compliance inspections	\$840	\$1,200
	Costs of final inspection for certificate of occupancy	\$250	\$490	\$1,100
	Holding costs for delays to issue certificate of occupancy	\$230	\$910	\$1,600
	Government processing of subdivision	\$20	\$4,200	\$10,000
	Holding costs for delays to issue titles	\$0	\$5,100	\$10,000
Total per dwelling^a		\$40,000	\$90,000	\$175,000
Annual dwelling completions		62,649	62,649	62,649
Economy-wide annual cost^a		\$2.5 bn	\$5.7 bn	\$11.1 bn

a. Totals do not sum exactly due to rounding.

Source: PC calculations.

References

Timeline and professional cost estimates

Multiple stages

Delcon (2019); Farmilo (2020); Hindley (2024); Lofty Building Group (2021); Pressley (nd); Savills (2024); Sharma and Bryant (sub. 194); The CIE (2024).

Development applications

NSW DPHI (2021).

Building applications

Stoneybark (2025b).

Compliance and occupancy inspections

Building Institute NSW (2024); Buywise Inspections (2025); Owner Inspections (nd); Star Building Inspections (2021).

Government fees and charges estimates

Development applications

Brisbane City Council (2025a); NSW DPHI (2024); SA DPTI (2020); Sutherland Shire Council (2024); Victorian DTP (2025a).

Building applications

hipages Australia (2025); SA DPTI (2024); Stoneybark (2025b, 2025a).

Certificate of occupancy

ACT Government (2023); CodeHQ Building Consultancy (2025); Mitchell Shire Council (2024).

Titling

NSW DPE (2025); NSW DPHI (2024); SRO Victoria (2025a); Titles Queensland (2025); Victoria DTP (2025b); WA Government Landgate (2025).

Land and property taxes

QRO (2024); Revenue NSW (2025); RevenueSA (2025); SRO Victoria (2025b); WA DTF (2025).

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACE	Allowance for corporate equity
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICD	Australian Institute of Company Directors
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ANU	Australian National University
APS	Australian Public Service
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
BAS	Business Activity Statements
BIT	Business Income Tax
BLADE	Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment
CAPEX	Capital Expenditure
CFT	Controlled Foreign Tax
CGE	Computable general equilibrium
CGETAX	Computable general equilibrium Tax
CIT	Company income tax
DDD	Triple difference in difference
ESD	Event study design
EU	European Union
EY	Ernst & Young
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNI	Gross National Income
GST	Goods and services tax
IA	Impact analysis
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MFAA	Mortgage and Finance Association of Australia

MRRT	Minerals Resource Rent Tax
NCC	National construction code
NCT	Net cashflow tax
NPV	Net Present Value
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIA	Office of Impact Analysis
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
PC	Productivity Commission
PDF	Portable document format
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PRRT	Petroleum Resource Rent Tax
PRT	Petroleum Revenue Tax
qr	Questionnaire response
RBA	Reserve Bank of Australia
SoE	Statement of expectations
TAFE	Technical and further education
TOFA	Taxation of Financial Arrangements
TTPI	Tax and Transfer Policy Institute
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
VURMTAX	Victoria University Regional Model with Tax detail

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