



Professionals

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February House Prices

The median cost of a home in regional Australia in the three months to the end of last year was \$420,000, according to RP Data-Rismark, the Australian property information and analytics provider.

In the capital cities, the median dwelling price was \$475,000.

Price watchers found Sydney was the most expensive capital city with a median home price of \$525,000.

Canberra followed with \$510,000, then Melbourne (\$505,000), Darwin (\$481,000), Perth (\$465,000), Brisbane (\$435,000), Adelaide (\$387,000) and Hobart (\$325,500).

Based on more than 357,000 sales in 2010, RP Data-Rismark Hedonic Home Value Index reported a modest 4.7 % growth over the 2010 calendar year across Australia's capital cities.

Melbourne was the best performer last year with house prices rising by 8.4 % along with Sydney where they went up by 6.6%.

The worst performers were Perth where house prices dropped by 2.3%) and Brisbane, down 1.0%.

In the 'Rest of State' markets, which cover the approximately 40% of homes not located in the capitals, dwelling values rose by a lowly 0.8% last year.

According to Senator Barnaby Joyce who hails from the Queensland town of St George, house prices in 20 towns across the Murray-Darling basin fell by an average of

10.5% after the release last October of the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Senator Joyce blamed concerns about the possible economic impact of the plan and said if government policy inflicted house price falls of 10% in Sydney "there would be a riot in the street".

Rismark managing director Christopher Joye said regional housing markets were more vulnerable to adversity because any fall in demand was not resisted by a shortage of housing, as in the capital cities.

Mr Joye said the capital city housing market peaked last year in May and the RBA's four interest rate hikes topped up by a fifth from the banks, conspired to snuff out capital growth during the remainder of the year.

He said the flat-lining in Australian home values since early 2010 was an encouraging sign from a valuation and fundamentals perspective.

"We are seeing rapidly rising household disposable incomes combined with no house price growth over an extended period of time," Mr Joye said.



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Flood Recovery



Property owners across Australia are still working to restore normality following this summer's floods and cyclones.

It could be some time before all flooded homes and businesses have dried out completely, according to Archicentre.

Archicentre is the property and building services division of the Australian Institute of Architects.

A spokesman said it was important to recognise flood damaged buildings could take several months to dry out.

"The natural tendency for people to renovate and redecorate as quickly as possible can lead to mould growth and the work having to be repeated," he said.

Living in a damp building can pose health hazards to occupants, especially those pre-disposed to chest or respiratory infections or disorders.

Mould spores are believed to be a major health concern for long term well being.

This means if your home is damp, it would be best to stay elsewhere until you can be sure your home is thoroughly dry, including the floors and walls.

Wet plaster is renowned for harbouring mould spores. Plaster behind a cupboard or cabinet will suffer more than a standard wall with ventilation on both sides.

In some buildings water damage will mean having to replace all particle board cupboards, doors and plaster work especially if water penetrated the house and insulation in walls became water logged.

Concrete slabs can soak up more water than might be expected.

Ventilation is the best solution to combat the mould created by damp concrete, especially fans.

Evaporative coolers are not useful as they will add moisture and while reverse-cycle air-conditioners can help, they may suffer from ice build-up in the process.

Archicentre believes it is critical to have an independent structural engineer establish extent to which the structure or foundations of a building have been affected before undertaking major repairs.

If the structure of the building was sound, repair could be considered, the spokesman said.

However if the building was considered unsound, there would be little point in progressing with the clean up until further decisions were made.

"No decisions should be made regarding the repair of the building until independent, written advice has been provided by a registered structural engineer," he said.

Permablitz

Losing your beautiful garden to flood, fire, storm, cyclone or other disaster can seem like a tragedy at the time but it isn't necessarily all bad.

Starting from scratch can be the excuse for doing things differently.

And taking a step towards self sufficiency, with a little (or lot) of help from friends you didn't even know you had can't be bad.

A movement called Permablitz is sweeping Australia. It's a voluntary scheme which aims to help people set up their own permaculture way of life.

Permaculture is a design system which helps integrate people and places in ecologically harmonious ways to provide a good portion of the people's needs - such as water, vegetables, fruit, and eggs.

Permaculture systems work more like natural systems such as forests than industrial agriculture. They don't need artificial input and produce no waste.

With fruit and vegetable prices set to soar, this could be a good time to set up your own backyard fruit and vegetable supply.

A Permablitz is a one-day project when a group of volunteers turn out to create or add to an edible garden at someone's home.

They are fun, free events open to the public where participants learn a lot while being useful, working as part of a team.

Each Permablitz has the input of someone with a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC), the most basic permaculture qualification.

Once you have taken part in three or so Permablitzes you are eligible to hold one at your own home.

Your nearest Permablitz group will help connect you to a volunteer or professional permaculture designer, plan your blitz, promote it and co-ordinate it on the day.

And it's all free.

Permablitzes began in Melbourne in 2006 and are now held in cities and towns across Australia as well as in other countries including the US, and Canada.

For information just google Permablitz or check with your local community house or council.

