

Howzat! Smaller blocks will put squeeze on budding sport stars

by Mike Bruce
chief reporter

AUSTRALIA'S quarter-acre paradise is dead. The Allan Borders and Matthew Haydens of the world will be a thing of the past.

And forget about room for the pool, the boat, the caravan – or even the trailer.

That's the grim analysis of Gold Coast property forecaster Bill Morris, who says revised population density figures from the State Government spell the death of the great Aussie back yard, with Queenslanders consigned to living on 300sq m postage stamps.

In its latest version of its Southeast Queensland Regional Plan, the Government has upped the number of homes needed by 2031 in the region by 28 per cent – from 575,000 (in its 2004 plan) to 735,500 homes in the 2008 version.

To accommodate the increase, Mr Morris says the Government is pushing higher-density living, with a proposal to build 15 dwellings for every hectare.

“The Government's target will see newly-developed lots sizes reduce to 300sq m to 400sq m, with no back yard,” said Mr Morris. “From a social point of view, that's quite significant – there's no room for a pool, no room for a caravan, boat or a trailer and you'd certainly not get



Bill Morris

a cricket pitch in there. The Steve Waughs of this world will be a thing of the past.”

Mr Morris said the latest revision of the regional plan continued the trend of shrinking block sizes over the past 10 years from the traditional 1000sq m, or iconic quarter-acre, to 600sq m-700sq m.

“Queenslanders have long cherished the quarter-acre block in Residential A subdivisions. While this has whittled down ... there is no evidence that Queenslanders want to go any further in reducing block sizes,” he says.

Housing Industry Association chief executive Chris Lamont said lot sizes nationwide had fallen steadily since the 1990s as land became less affordable and governments pushed for higher-density living.

HIA data shows that land prices in capital cities have

increased from less than \$100 a square metre in the early 1990s to more than \$300 in Brisbane and \$464 in Sydney in 2008.

“We are seeing in other parts of Australia such as Sydney and Melbourne, lot sizes of 350sq m becoming more common,” he said.

“But if someone is prepared to pay more for a larger block, we don't believe they should be forced to a smaller lot.”

Mr Morris said while Melburnians and Sydneysiders, ‘due to their mixed ethnicity’, were more used to apartment and unit living, Queenslanders hankered for a detached house and a back yard.

“The proportion of Queenslanders currently living in detached housing is 72 per cent, a figure which hasn't changed over the past 15 years. Hence, there is no trend toward attached, denser housing as is being implied in the Government's plan,” said Mr Morris.

While the Government predicted the Gold Coast would need 137,500 new dwellings, the plan made no provision for new growth areas here.

“The Gold Coast is bereft of any new growth areas (in the plan) outside its current town plan which hasn't been changed since 1994,” said Mr Morris.

“This will require further modification to the plan to provide for the inevitable attraction of the Gold Coast over other metropolitan areas.”