



Submission to:-
Productivity Commission

MUTUAL RECOGNITION SCHEMES ISSUES PAPER

Submission by:-
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To The Productivity Commission

MUTUAL RECOGNITION SCHEMES – ISSUES PAPER –

INTRODUCTION

The Master Plumbers and Mechanical Contractors Association of NSW (MPANSW) is a registered employer organisation providing representation, training and extensive advisory services to a broad base of members in the plumbing, gas and mechanical services sector in NSW and the ACT. The principal activities of the Association are to provide business services, industry representation, training and advice on industrial relations and employment to the membership. Our members range from major contracting companies through to sole traders and are a highly reputable group to lobby government in support of various plumbing, business and environmental reforms and recommendations.

RECOGNITION OF SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS BETWEEN AUS AND NZ

One of the major obstacles to mobility is that an individual's qualifications and competencies may not be accepted between states and territories in Australia let alone another country such as New Zealand. There are some underpinning differences which impede the mutual recognition of qualifications and therefore licencing arrangements. Although the problem of transparency and equivalence between qualifications and the lengthy delays in their recognition has been known for a long time, progress towards finding solutions has been slow. The specific inability of Australian States and Territories to implement an industry recommended National Licencing arrangement is a severe impediment to Trans-Tasman recognition.

The absence of a national licencing system which is consistent for licencing outcomes, and the constant changes to all these are additional complicating factors. There remains many local and regional requirements to be addressed but more importantly New Zealand qualified plumbers would not be aware of or familiar with the BCA and PCA.

NET MIGRATION MOVEMENT

New Zealand has not traditionally been observed as a major source of plumbers seeking recognition.

Generally there have been higher flows of New Zealanders to Australia than the other way round. The number of New Zealanders present in Australia in 2004 was 445,000 with 57 per cent having been in the country for 12 months or more (DIMIA 2005). In comparison, Australian-born residents in New Zealand in 2001 numbered just 56,000 (New Zealand Immigration Service 2003). (Source; New Zealand Immigration Service 2003, Migrants in New Zealand: An analysis of the Census 2001 data, New Zealand Department of Labour, Wellington.)

MUTUAL RECOGNITION AGREEMENT (MRA)

Whilst the requirements for ASQA compliance accounts for a consistent educational outcome for qualifications, the MRA fails to the extent that each State and Territory retains the right to separately licence and define occupational licence definitions.

The basis upon which the MRA were entered into is seen as a reverse approach rather than a proactive one. The proactive approach would be to go about ensuring national consistency of registration requirements to facilitate labour mobility and minimise inefficiencies. The strategy instead of the reverse approach of passing legislation to recognise all registration requirements as being of equal value even though this foundation is unfounded. As a result, the ensuing process highlighted the ongoing inconsistencies among states and territories and possible problems with registration requirements in some states, the solution to the problem was to move to legislate for nationally consistent standards.

JURISDICTION SHOPPING

The issues paper sought comment on jurisdiction shopping. Whilst there is anecdotal evidence of this, there is a profound ability to have someone actually state that they have done it. What however is clear is that the local arrangements have a clear outcome as to what a licence actually covers and over time that knowledge may well be lost to the consumer as interstate or overseas mutually recognised persons perform work, which is covered by the reissued licence but covers skills not actually achieved in their actual training. It also runs the real risk that there is a significant risk that regulators would lose confidence in the arrangements over time and move back to narrow local licencing systems.

There is no doubt that there is ongoing discussions between the various Australian State and Territory licencing staff, but given their undermining of the previous attempts to achieve national licensing, then a move to widen the mutual recognition requirements appears doomed to failure.

Yours sincerely

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