

SA

December 17, 1999

Productivity Commission
Architects Inquiry
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Commissioners,

Re review of legislation regulating the architectural profession

I wish to submit the following information to the Commission's inquiry. I do so from the standpoint of someone who has been involved at a senior level for half a century in the architectural profession, engineering, project management and related construction activities. In 1992 I retired from employment with Australian Construction Services as Principal Architect in its SA office, having spend a lifetime with that organisation and its predecessors. However, I remain actively involved in the profession of architecture through the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and, as Chairman of the Complains Committee, SA Chapter of that Institute, I am afforded a unique insight into the health of the profession and the quality of services to clients.

Doubtless, the inquiry will seek to evaluate the benefits which flow to the community form legislation which regulates the architectural profession. You may find the following observations to be of some relevance.

When I joined he Commonwealth Department of Works in 1949, the requirements for employment as an architect did not prescribe any academic training or professional practice experience. As a consequence, a significant proportion of the Department's architectural staff, including many in senior positions, lacked any formal training in design, building science, engineering or contract law. What skills and knowledge they has accumulated had come from working in builders', quantity surveyors' and architects' offices, with perhaps a modicum of tuition at a sub-professional level. Their competence at a professional level had never been formally assessed.

These architectural amateurs – for that was effectively what they were – in general possessed a sound knowledge of construction techniques, but their lack of specialised training exposed huge deficiencies in the critical skills of design and planning. As a consequence, the work produced by the organisation was, by and large, well built but sadly lacking in design quality.

The situation changed once the Commonwealth Public Services Board reviewed its criteria for professional appointments, and required accreditation for all staff classified as architects. Over time, as trained professions gradually assumed control

of architectural output, its projects changed from stodgy and ill conceived to the recipients of national awards. If any evidence is require to support this claim, reference a need only be made to the RAlA publication, *Australian Government Architects*, compiled by Professor Neville Quarry in 1988.

For quality or architecture, innovation and service to the community, there can be no substitute for formal training and assessment. The public interest is best served by legislation which ensures that those who purport to offer services to professional standards are properly equipped for this important role.

It would be of further benefit to the public if the current, somewhat disparate, State registration Acts were to be consolidated into uniform national legislation. In such a process, I would commend further action, which goes beyond prescribing who may call him/herself an Architect, to the regulation of the practice of architecture, as it is this which ultimately delivers services to clients.

Finally, I would like to recount an experience which highlights the necessity of skilled input into even basic building projects, in order to protect consumers from serious errors, oversights and possible negligence. The community needs to be made aware that the various contributors to the construction industry vary in their skill levels and that registration as an Architect is indicative of a capacity for the highest level of input.

The house in which I now live, an attached dwelling, was erected in 1990 to apparently good standards of design and construction. However, detailed examination revealed a critical lack of fire separation from the adjoining dwelling, which posed a serious danger to the lives of occupants. Investigations disclosed that the design was in flagrant breach of building regulations; whilst details of these breaches were clearly shown on documents submitted for approval to the local authority, they went undetected; a fire authority which was consulted for fire safety compliance also ignored the breaches; and the builder compounded these errors by further non-compliant construction. Not one person involved in the chain of building processes was sensitive to fire safety requirements. None were professionally trained.

I believe that this serious, life-threatening error would not have occurred if the building process had included professional input. This is not to be little the contribution of sub- and non-professionals, nor to claim that architects are infallible. (The provisions within the RAlA and the SA Architects Act, for breaches of their respective codes on conduct, infer that they are not.) However, he long and thorough tuition which architects undergo provides a rigorous preparation for practice as well as acting as a siting porches, both of which offer greater assurance of service quality.

The community needs to be able to distinguish and choose between such service providers and others less rigorously trained in architecture.

For this reason alone, there is the need not only to retain existing State Acts which regulate use of the title 'Architect', but to move to national legislation which provides for control of the practice of architecture.

I hope that the inquiry finds these observations to be of assistance to its review.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

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