

ARCHITEKTON

ARCHITECTS

WA

10 December, 1999

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to express my concern that there is a possibility that the architectural profession could be deregulated with subsequent unfortunate ramifications for the general public as well as Architects. I am strongly in favour of the retention of a system of registration of Architects for the following reasons:

1. QUALITY ASSURANCE

There has been a substantial push in Australia in the last few years to control the quality of a vast number of processes and services. The construction industry has been a focus of attention, particularly by the government departments responsible for procuring buildings. Architects have also become involved in the move to Quality Assurance and the Royal Institute of Architects has itself run professional development courses in this area for its members.

Registration is really another form of Quality Assurance for those needing architectural services. It ensures that anyone calling themselves an Architect has certain academic and professional qualifications. This must in itself maintain the standard of service provided by Architects and protect the public from practitioner's not having the requisite skills. After all, clients employing Architects are usually investing in the largest amounts of capital that they might ever invest in their lives. You cannot compare this sort of expenditure with other areas of commerce where products are easily defined and competition is on the whole beneficial. There is a difference between allowing competition at the point of sale and competition at a point further back in the production chain which might affect the safety and value of the purchaser's investment.

2. THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

It is my opinion that the reduction of design, for instance, to the lowest common denominator, that is, how much it costs, is one of the biggest factors in the deterioration of the Australian built environment. And it must be the result of unfettered competition, that the quality of our environment will be reduced even more as anyone wanting to set themselves up as "architects", could do so without training or formal qualifications. At least, at the moment, qualified and registered architects, whilst still competing with those outside the profession, are able to uphold some higher ideals. They do this at some cost, including a lengthy education, the need for ongoing professional development, the cost of professional indemnity insurance and currently, not much remuneration, because the climate in which they work is one in which the lowest common denominator is considered of prime importance. The public needs protection from incompetent and dishonest practitioners at the very least, but the public also needs a profession concerned about the quality of its built environment, and which is able to deliver the goods because the community expects it of them.

When a person submits a building proposal to a local authority for a building licence, one of the requirements for approval is that the design is certified by an Engineer. This is a

reflection of the fact that the community wants reassurance that the structure is designed to a certain standard and will not collapse. Does the commission visualise that the engineering profession should be deregulated so that anyone could certify design? I don't think so, because the community has been educated to understand what an engineer does. I would like to see a situation in which the community values educated architectural design where "its benefits to the community are seen to outweigh the costs...". The value of good design cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula; the aim of deregulation seems therefore to be in the realms of impossibility.

3. CONSISTENCY

Given the ongoing globalisation of our world and its effect in reducing differences between distant communities, given the increasing opportunities for Australian Architects to work in other than their home state and perhaps internationally, it seems silly to have different standards applying in different states. And yet, it is important for each individual's sense of worth and sense of place, to have some control. The tyranny of distance, especially when it comes to bureaucracies, will always apply. For instance, although we have a national building code, the BCA, it is administered at a local level through local authorities and state government Department of Local Government and this is seen as appropriate right around Australia.

For similar reasons I think that the most appropriate model for controlling the registration of Architects is through a uniform act across Australia but administered by Local, State or Territory boards.

In summary my points were"

- Registration is required to protect clients.
- Registration is required to protect design standards.
- Registration is best administered through national codes but at a local level.

Yours faithfully

(signature)

Ian Jeffrey
Architect