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Faster, Simpler & Cheaper to build in Tasmania

Opinion Piece – By Guy Barnett, Minister for Building & Construction

Building in Tasmania will be faster, simpler and cheaper, thanks to recent legislative changes from the Tasmanian Government.

On 1 January 2017, changes to the *Building Act 2016*, the *Residential Building Work Contracts and Dispute Resolution Act 2016* and the *Occupational Licensing (Building Services Work) Regulations 2016*, commenced in Tasmania.

The package of legislative changes removes a significant regulatory burden across the building sector and balances the rights and responsibilities of parties involved. The changes also reduce unnecessary regulation and streamline and improve processes to ensure that the building and construction industry continues to be a significant contributor to Tasmania's economy.

This means that building works are much easier to schedule as the time waiting for permits are reduced. Obviously, any and all building work must comply with the local council planning scheme, and high-risk projects, such as commercial buildings must still go through a full council building approval process.

A key outcome from the changes has been greater clarity. This includes greater clarity between the planning and building stages of development as well as greater clarity to the responsibilities and definitions within the building legislation and regulations.

Importantly, the package provides balance to our building regulations by introducing significant protections for consumers and builders by creating a minimum standard for residential contracts.

The Department of Justice's Consumer, Building and Occupational Services has also provided advice and support to Tasmanian designers and architects through the provision of annotated 'best practice' sample designs to ensure that their vision is realised.

Comprehensive consultation with local government, industry associations, including Engineers Australia, individual practitioners and consumers was undertaken prior to introducing these changes and a significant program of training, education and awareness was conducted to ensure that council staff, building surveyors and other building practitioners had sufficient time to adjust to the new processes. Consultation and information sessions are continuing in 2017.

Like any new change, some fine-tuning has been required and the Department's Consumer Building and Occupational Services has demonstrated a willingness to listen and act when feedback has been received, including clarifying points and organising additional training. Again, Engineers Australia has assisted with this through hosting information sessions on the new legislation earlier this year.

I am confident that these changes will go a long way towards kick-starting the industry; where for too long projects have stalled because the approval process was seen as too onerous in relation to the size of the project.

Tasmania is leading the way with this risk-based approach to building approvals, and other states, including Western Australia, are watching closely with a view to introducing a similar model.

These changes will ensure that Tasmania's building legislation is modern and fit for purpose now and into the future.
