

15 September 2014

Plumbing Review Team
Building Commission
Locked Bag 14
CLOISTERS SQUARE WA 6850

Sent via email to: plumbingreview@commerce.wa.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Adopting the Plumbing Code of Australia: Administration of Alternative Solutions

Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the amended proposal for adopting the Plumbers Code of Australia (PCA) in Western Australia.

MEA is a dynamic and modern trade association representing electrical contractors. Originating as the Electrical Contractors Association in 1937, we are the leading voice of the electrical and communications industry throughout Australia. The organisation's website is:
<http://www.masterelectricians.com.au>

MEA supports the proposed implementation strategy to adopt the PCA in Western Australia. Introducing more flexibility and allowing those tradespeople with the appropriate level of skill and experience to make decisions on the most suitable plumbing solutions is an ideal way to boost productivity and efficiency in the plumbing industry. This will ultimately benefit industry as well as the general public.

While MEA operates primarily in the electrical industry, there are instances in which there is a crossover between the work of plumbers and that of electricians. Accordingly, we believe this proposal also presents an invaluable opportunity to incorporate other changes to the regulation of plumbing work in Western Australia that would allow electricians with the appropriate level of skill and experience to disconnect the plumbing on a hot water system.

In WA, licensed plumbers can obtain a restricted electrical licence from Energy Safety which enables them to disconnect electric hot water systems so they may be replaced. However, there is no reciprocal arrangement in place which would allow licensed electricians to obtain a restricted plumbers licence to disconnect the plumbing on a hot water system. This means that electricians undertaking maintenance work must engage the services of a plumber to complete a job, whereas a plumber can perform all of the work themselves at a significantly reduced cost and can pass on these savings to customers. The outcome being that electrical contractors are effectively being priced out of the market, as they cannot match the lower prices offered by plumbing contractors.

In 2005, the Plumbers Licensing Board (PLB) did introduce a Restricted Plumbing Permit scheme which enabled suitably trained and experienced electricians and gasfitters to perform limited plumbing work associated with like for like hot water unit changeovers. These licensed electricians and gasfitters were granted a restricted plumbing permit by the PLB on the basis of their experience with hot water unit replacements and having undergone specialised training. According to the PLB's website a possible second phase of the scheme, which could provide the opportunity for all qualified electricians to undertake like for like hot water unit changeovers, is in development. However, seven years have now passed since the introduction of the scheme with nothing to indicate that these promised developments are going to occur. The PLB has also indicated they will not be issuing any more Restricted Plumbing Permits as part of this first phase.

Clearly, safety is not the motivation behind the delay in extending Restricted Plumbing Permits as in 2005 suitably qualified electricians were deemed competent to perform this work and it was the intention of the PLB to broaden this authorisation. Further, the licensing requirements of the PLB and EnergySafety in Western Australia are equally stringent in requiring specific skill, business and financial criteria to be met in order for a licence to be granted. The reasons behind the PLB's decision to cease issuing the permits are unclear and electrical contractors are paying the price.

We believe that WA's Restricted Plumbing Permit scheme needs to be re-instated as a priority and extended to include electrical workers in order to ensure electrical contractors can benefit from the same reciprocal arrangements as their plumbing counterparts who are permitted to disconnect electric hot water systems.

A streamlined licensing regime is sorely needed in Western Australia in order to attract and retain high quality tradespeople and to guarantee continued growth and prosperity in the economy.

We call on the Western Australia Government to review the operation of the Restricted Plumbing Permit scheme and enable hard working electrical contractors to do their job and compete fairly in the market place.

Yours sincerely,



Tony Mancini
State Manager – Western Australia