

Hon Samuel (Sam) O'Connor

Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Youth

housing@ministerial.qld.gov.au

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The implementation of the ABCB Standard for Livable Housing Design in Queensland

We refer to the implementation of the ABCB Standard for Livable Housing Design (as part of the Modern Homes Reforms) through the Building Act 1975: Building (Queensland Development Code) Amendment Regulation 2023. We understand the housing industry is advocating for these reforms to be revoked.

We ask you to retain this reform, and we seek a meeting with you to clarify any issues you may have regarding this request.

The objective of the ABCB Standard for Livable Housing Design (the Standard) is “to ensure that housing is designed to meet the needs of the community, including older people and those with a mobility-related disability”¹. The Standard ensures that a dwelling is designed so that it is:

- easy to enter;
- easy to navigate in and around;
- capable of easy and cost effective adaptation; and
- responsive to the changing needs of occupants.

This reform has been a long time coming. The housing industry peak bodies agreed in 2010 to implement this reform into all new homes by 2020². By 2015, it was clear that less than 5% of this target would be reached without government regulation³. The Standard was therefore included in the National Construction Code in 2022, and implemented in Queensland in 2023.

We put forward the following arguments why this reform should be retained:

1. The Standard is within established building practice and will incur minimal cost to better-quality builders

Queensland builders have used an equivalent access standard in social housing since 1991, Access to Premises Standard since 2011, and Specialist Disability Accommodation since 2017. All of the features are within established building practice, particularly of the better-quality housing companies.

History has shown that voluntary approaches do not guarantee the quality or consistency of these features. There is now a serious lack of accessible housing in Queensland. The implementation of the Standard now provides reliability of access for buyers and renters of new housing.

For the companies needing to improve their building practice, the ABCB, the Queensland Government and others have provided ample information and opportunities for training. (See Appendix A for a list of information and training opportunities.) Further, the Queensland Government is continuing to consult with the industry to understand the challenges for builders and to improve these opportunities.

2. The benefits of the Standard outweigh the costs

We acknowledge the ABCB Decision Regulatory Impact Statement found that the costs of implementing the Standard outweighed the benefits. That cost was estimated at \$3,874 per dwelling⁴.

The RIS is subject to scrutiny because the analysis failed to consider the full breadth and depth of benefits⁵. If all the costs are counted, then all the benefits should be counted, commensurate with principles of the Office of Best Practice Regulation⁶. This failure suggests an inherent and under-acknowledged bias against building code reform. Sadly, this bias continues to fuel the call by housing industry peaks for this reform to be revoked.

Nonetheless, in 2021 the Building Ministers⁷ took into consideration the feedback from all sectors of the community, and decided that a regulatory solution will result in significant and lasting benefit to Australians who need access to homes with accessible features.

3. Governments have imperatives to implement the reform

Recent recommendations outlined by the Disability Royal Commission⁸ in 2023 urged State and Territory governments to implement the Standard for all new dwellings if they have not done so already. Queensland led the way demonstrating this State's economic foresight and commitment to the human rights of all Queenslanders.

The Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme⁹ identified a critical shortage of affordable and accessible housing in Australia, which simply cannot be met through the costly Special Disability Accommodation program. To address this, the Review recommended that all jurisdictions to implement the Standard. Queensland, again, led the way to solve this problem.

The Royal Commission on Aged Care Quality and Safety¹⁰ found that the lack of accessible housing impacted directly on the quality of life of older people and there was a clear link between the quality of housing and premature entry to aged care. By 2063, the number of people aged 65 and over will more than double and the number aged 85 and over will more than triple. Population ageing will be an ongoing economic and fiscal challenge for the health, community and aged care responsibilities of this Government¹¹.

Given that most people wish to remain in their own homes, the report supported the construction of new housing and adapted existing stock to meet the needs of older people and their carers.

4. The Standard has a positive impact on supply and productivity

We applaud the Queensland Government's focus on the housing industry, to increase supply and to improve productivity. The following points suggest that the implementation of the Standard will have a positive impact on both:

- (a) A nationally consistent approach to building has generated significant productivity benefits to the construction industry through breaking down inconsistencies between building standards across state and territory borders¹². Given that six States and Territories have implemented the Standard with WA and NSW currently expected to follow, Queensland can expect increased productivity in this area.
- (b) Implementation of the Standard requires minimal extra building materials within established building practice¹³. Further, prices generally have now stabilised at around 1.0%¹⁴.
- (c) The entrenched causes of housing construction inefficiencies remain complex and difficult to address. These include the vagaries of supply and demand, the interdependence of the many suppliers and contractors, and poor quality of work requiring call-backs on defects¹⁵. The implementation of the Standard has little to do with these inefficiencies, other than increasing the quality of building.

In summary, we ask you to retain the Standard in Queensland's building legislation. To revoke the Standard may satisfy the self-interests of the housing industry peak bodies, but will have significant negative impacts on individual builders the current and future residents of Queensland.

We seek a meeting with you to state our case and to answer any further questions you may have.

Yours Sincerely,



Karen Walsh
CEO, National Shelter



Stuart Jobling
COO, Q Shelter

References

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Appendix A List of information and training opportunities available for the housing industry in Queensland

The Australian Building Codes Board has prepared:

- Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) Livable Housing Design Handbook
- [ABCB NCC 2022 Webinar Series: livable housing](#)
- [ABCB Livable housing design webinar questions and answers](#)
- Centre for Universal Design Australia: [Livable Housing Design course](#)
- [HIA Guide to NCC Livable Housing Provisions](#)

The Queensland Government has prepared:

- [ABCB Livable Housing Design Standard: Implementation of step-free entry provisions \(PDF, 2534.69 KB\)](#)
- [Case Studies \(PDF, 5878.66 KB\)](#) demonstrating practical implementation of the National Construction Code 2022 provisions and exemptions
- [QDC 4.1 \(PDF, 371.03 KB\)](#) and [QDC 4.5 \(PDF, 1135.29 KB\)](#) to tailor adoption of the Modern Homes standards for Queensland
- Building and plumbing newsflashes addressing:
 - [621 - QDC 4.1 - Sustainable buildings and QDC 4.5 Livable dwellings and grading to floor wastes \(PDF, 107.05 KB\)](#)
 - [622 - requirements for grading floors to floor wastes \(PDF, 100.09 KB\)](#)
 - [628 - Energy assessments for new residential dwellings and use of accredited software \(PDF, 353.22 KB\)](#)
- a [new guideline \(PDF, 241.36 KB\)](#) to assist building certifiers in applying transitional provisions under [section 37 of the Building Act 1975](#)
- a new [Form 77 Variation to building assessment provisions \(PDF, 114.92 KB\)](#) to assist building certifiers to document decisions made under [section 37 of the Building Act 1975](#).
- a [webinar on the Modern Homes standards under the NCC 2022](#).