

12.08.2024

To: grannyflats@mbie.govt.nz

Re- Submissions on proposal to exempt minor dwellings from consent requirements

The below feedback is provided by the Association of Hydraulic Services Consultants Australia – New Zealand Branch (AHSCA-NZ)

Hydraulic services consulting is a specialised discipline concerned with the flow and conveyance of, water, sewer, stormwater and gas services.

Hydraulic Services, and the design of these services, help maintain a minimum level of public health standards throughout the developed world, and it helps prevent the spread of disease.

Just like builders need architectural plans to construct a building, Plumbers, Drainlayers and Gasfitters need a set of hydraulic drawings to ensure liquids safely go where they need to.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has produced a document, Health Aspects of Plumbing, which “examines the microbiological, chemical, physical and financial risks associated with plumbing”. If minimum standards are not followed, there can be dramatic effects on worldwide health. The WHO estimates that approximately 3.1 million people die per year because they do not have access to safe drinking water and sanitary systems.

Hydraulic Services in New Zealand is the design and documentation of plumbing, drainage and gas services including, but not limited to:

Sanitary/Sewer plumbing and drainage.	Potable Hot, cold, and warm water supply.
Onsite wastewater treatment including grey water and black water treatment systems.	Hot water generation plant.
Trade waste.	Non -potable water supplies.
Pumpstations, sewer and stormwater.	Natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supply.
Backflow prevention.	Laboratory Gases (not all Hydraulic consultants cover this).
Stormwater systems, including downpipes (excludes water proofing).	Medical gases (not all Hydraulic consultants cover this).
Syphonic rainwater systems.	Fire protection (not all Hydraulic consultants cover this).
Stormwater treatment systems.	Expert Witness services (not all Hydraulic consultants provide this)
Rainwater and stormwater reuse.	Peer reviews and Site Observations

The New Zealand Association is made up of members based in different parts of New Zealand, almost all the members have come from a plumbing, drainlaying and/or gasfitting background where they have eventually moved away from day-to-day hands on work and into Hydraulic Consulting and Design, therefore have a wide and varied range of skills, knowledge and experience to be able to comment on the proposed to exempt minor dwellings for a building consent.

Members have provided feedback; this has been summarised as below.

Overview:

The Government has proposed amendments to both the Resource Management Act (RMA) and the Building Act (BA) to allow certain buildings (specifically dwellings) to be built without the requirement of either a Resource or Building consent. MBIE have used the terminology “Granny Flat” as opposed to the word Dwelling.

It will be a condition of this exemption that the building must still meet the requirements of the Building Code and certain other restrictions outlined in both the RMA and various District Plans.

The justification given appears to focus on savings in both time and money.

Given the lack of inspections and compliance checks, the main method of reducing the risk of non-compliance is the proposal that certain aspects of the construction must be undertaken by suitably qualified people. This is in turn based on the principle (or wishful thinking) that those people qualified as such are not likely to undertake work that is considered sub-standard, or what is often referred to in the trade as rough or dodgy.

One only needs to review the prosecutions from the plumbers’ gasfitters and drainlayers board (PGDB) to understand that there is sub standard work countrywide, well work that is complained about anyway, there is no doubt a large amount of substandard work that goes on unreported and under the radar.

Members Observations:

With respect to site inspections, our members are engaged in construction monitoring and attend site inspections on a regular basis, they cover all aspects of the trades, domestic, commercial industrial and civil works, the consensus of members is the skill sets and knowledge is noticeably diminishing onsite, especially with the newer generations coming through the industry, in particular over the last the 5-6 years, potentially from constant apprenticeship training disruptions dues to numerous reasons.

Without proper inspection and construction monitoring regimes to pick up and highlight in adequate work one can only imagine the poor sanitary conditions that may be in place if left unchecked.

Members are aware of a strong drive from many areas to allow plumbers and drainlayers to self-certify. Currently the members’ view is the training system is inadequate to enable public confidence

in self-certification. New qualifications are required, to provide the correct tools for plumbers and drainlayers to self-certify. Money savings must not be the main driver here, the health and safety of the general public must be at the forefront of decision making.

Members are also engaged in investigations, expert witness cases and numerous disputes with substandard plumbing and drainage works.

The worry is that sub standard work currently falls through the cracks, if the cracks are allowed to become even larger with the proposed exemptions, then who will bear the brunt of the shoddy work? It will be the homeowner and in many cases the neighbors due to cross connected stormwater/sewer connections, diverted stormwater to neighboring properties, cheap imported plumbing pipework, tapware fittings etc, no doubt high in lead content in some instances.

The other issue members see are fire compliance issues with buildings being built too close to the boundary, poor/inadequate passive fire solutions (if required properties especially in Auckland are getting smaller by the yea, how do you fit a minor dwelling onto a section with minimal room without some form of non-compliance and shortcuts to save money, ultimately everyone wants the cheapest possible job.

Cross connections of water supplies are also a concern, only takes one bad connection to create a contamination event.

Stress on existing infrastructure has also been highlighted by members, especially stormwater infrastructure which is now widely known to been severely impacted by years of under investment and now climate change events inundating the already at capacity stormwater systems.

Auditing Regime, Infringement Fines, and Insurances:

Noted in the proposal that the owners are “meant to notify council” before construction and at completion of construction. What measures will be put in place to deter business and homeowners alike from non-notification and substandard work?

An audit system is recommended for Plumbers and Drainlayers, with any non-compliances found, either minor or serious that a fine system is put in place, this may form part of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act.

Fines realistically need to be of a sum that provides a deterrent, starting at \$5000-10,000 minimum up to \$100,000 for serious offences.

This ensures that shortcuts and poor work will not be tolerated.

Making things easier also allows dubious practices easier.

Insurance has been noted with respect to a Master Builders guarantee, that is great if the builder belongs to that membership organization, same applies for the master plumbers, thus raises the question, where do practitioners who do not belong to membership organizations fit in with respect to mandatory insurance cover and guarantees to match?

In closing The Association can see the benefits of trying to implement this new regime, however the identified risks need to be broken down further to ensure a robust decision-making process has been evidenced.

Ultimately the Association firmly believes the health and safety of the public should be the driver, not promoting shortcuts to save a dollar, this can only lead to potentially poor sanitary conditions leading to disease and sickness in respect to Plumbing and Drainage systems.

The Association will watch with interest to see how this proposal progresses.

12.08.2024

Regards



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President AHSCANZ



Website: [Home - AHSCA](#)