

From: [REDACTED]
To: [State Development Infrastructure and Industry Committee](mailto:sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au)
Subject: Water Supply Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2014
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To the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
sdiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

I am writing to provide a submission for the inquiry into the Water Supply Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2014, specifically relating to Clause 44 of the Bill which will allow authorised, unlicensed persons to install/substitute water meters.

As a member of Queensland's plumbing industry, I am very concerned about the consequences of this proposed change, for the industry, the general public and the environment.

I began a 5 year plumbing apprenticeship in 1959, and continued my trade education with further courses as they were offered by Trade bodies, and remained in the trade until I retired and surrendered my Plumbers' & Drainers' licences in 2009. During my apprentice training and work as a licensed tradesman, I had a tradesmen's pride in my duty to maintain a safe and potable water supply. The introduction of properly trained licenced plumbers had a major effect in reducing the amount of waterborne diseases circulating in the community.

This was emphasised by my plumbing colleagues in the more than 40 years I worked for a Local Authority in Water Supply. During my years with the Local Authority I was responsible for the installation, repair and replacement of water services, pipes, and water meters, and became fully aware of the mistakes in work undertaken by unlicensed people.

One of the major concerns regarding unlicensed people installing water meters is the massively increased risk of contamination of water supplies. If a person without adequate training installs a water meter, it can lead to cross-contamination between potable and non-potable water supplies, or dirt or foreign materials entering the water supply. Incorrectly installed backflow prevention devices may also lead to backflow events, where the water supplies can be contaminated with sewage, dirty water or even poisonous chemicals.

An additional health and safety concern is that the person installing the meter can be electrocuted if they are not properly aware of the household or commercial premises electricity supply being earthed to the water pipe. In the case of an electrical short, the water pipes become a live connection and when the water meter is removed, you break the earth connection and sparking is not uncommon. Added to this, the power mains, whether overhead or underground, have a thick, unsheathed earth wire laid meters parallel with the water mains. When the water main is a cast iron pipe, it is not uncommon for the water main itself to become live.

A plumber's training, which includes extensive practical and technical experience, provides the qualified tradesman with the required skills and expertise to ensure that he can assess any risks that might be associated with his work, and also ensure that his work complies with relevant codes and Australian Standards. Without adequate training, there is no way an unlicensed person can be aware of the standards they have to comply with, which endangers public health and safety and the environment.

Plumbers' licences are essential for the community, as it provides an easy way of checking that a person meets all required training and qualification requirements to perform plumbing work safely. They not only provide peace of mind for consumers, but also ensure that the licensee is accountable for their actions. Currently, if a licensee breaks Queensland's plumbing laws or performs defective work, they may have to pay for the work to be rectified, receive official reprimands and fines, or have their licence suspended. An unlicensed person cannot be disciplined in this way which may lead to more repeat offenders and defective work not being brought up to standard.

Additionally, I understand it has been agreed that these changes will not allow unlicensed people to install water sub-meters, however this is not reflected in the legislation. The explanatory notes state that 'sub-meters for multi-unit complexes will remain plumbing work', however this may also exclude sub-meters for other types of buildings. It is essential that this matter is clarified, as while I do not support any unlicensed installation of water meters, the greater risks associated with more complex sub-meters would be even more dangerous for the community and environment.

I am very concerned that if these laws are passed, it will lead to more types of plumbing work being deregulated, which could be catastrophic not only for public health and safety, but for supplying these services.

I urge the committee to consider the possible ramifications of this change, and to ensure that requirements for trained and licensed people to perform plumbing work remain intact.

Yours sincerely

Leonard George (Len) Kann

