

To the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee

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Submission no. 066

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11.1.15

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 persons to install water meters.

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

I have been a plumber for 40 years, and I believe it is essential for water meter installations to be performed by an appropriately qualified and licensed person. Incorrect installations can lead to cross-contamination and backflow events which may seriously harm the health and safety of residents and also affect water supply networks. In addition, leaking water meters or meters installed backwards may lead to customers being charged incorrectly for their water usage.

Plumbing work which has been performed by an unlicensed person can be a danger to the community. I have been required to rectify defective work performed by an unlicensed person, which involved a house drain. Due to the lack of fall in the drain, I had to re-lay the entire system to ensure it was compliant with relevant codes and standards.

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 accidentally cut electrical lines which run alongside water meter installations.

As a plumber, in order to get my licence I had to complete a four year plumbing apprenticeship with extensive technical and practical training components. This training has provided me with the required skills and expertise to ensure that I can assess any risks that might be associated with my work, and also ensure that my 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 persons 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 the plumbing trade as a whole.

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

Stewart Lemon

