



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Tuesday, 15 April 2008

BUILDING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (5.58 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. While I acknowledge the member for Mansfield and others who made contributions about the significant provisions in this bill affecting boarding houses and student accommodation, I specifically would like to commend the Deputy Premier's amendments in relation to building surveying technicians. As many in the House will appreciate, the construction industry boom in Queensland has meant that our state is currently experiencing a serious skills shortage in a range of construction related occupations. In particular, the shortage of building certifiers is a very real concern to local governments and the construction industry. I note the member for Robina's contribution earlier and his understanding of these issues from a local government perspective.

I commend these amendments as an important initial step towards addressing this critical issue. Removing the current restrictions on local governments' building surveying technicians makes good sense. Also, allowing an accreditation standards body to set accreditation standards for building surveying technicians is a very sound reform, especially as reinforcing this level of accreditation may form a bridge for more people to attain the full building certifying qualifications.

The Building Act 1975 currently requires building assessment work to be undertaken by licensed building certifiers. Building certifying functions include such things as assessing building development applications, undertaking inspections of building work and giving certificates for building work. Three categories of building certifier exist: building surveyor, assistant building surveyor and building surveying technician. The first two categories are not affected by the amendments before the House.

Currently, section 154 of the Building Act limits the role of local government building surveying technicians in relation to the size and number of storeys of buildings they can perform certifying functions on based upon their level of accreditation and in relation to whether they are employed by what is determined by the act as a designated local government. For example, they can perform certifying functions for most domestic houses and sheds without the supervision of a building surveyor or assistant building surveyor but only within local governments that are not a designated local government. Currently, under section 154 of the Building Act these designated local governments are generally the less populous shire councils. Section 282 currently allows building surveying technicians in designated local government areas who were employed by a local government as a building certifier immediately before 21 October 2003 to continue performing building certifying functions until 20 October 2010.

Section 185 of the Building Act provides that the accreditation standards body for building certifiers must ensure that standards comply with the Australian Building Codes Board's national accreditation framework for building certifiers. The national accreditation framework for building certifiers has been adopted by all states and territories but has not been implemented by all states. Queensland has not implemented the national accreditation framework, as it does not recognise building surveying technicians as a third level of building certifier accreditation and would, if it was adopted, further limit the availability of certifiers.

Members might well ask what has initiated these changes in relation to this matter. Obviously with the recent local government boundary changes effected by the elections on 15 March 2008 some designated local governments will have combined with some non-designated local governments resulting in some building surveying technicians being able to perform building certifying functions in some areas within the new local governments but not in other parts, which is, of course, an impractical outcome. The Local Government Association of Queensland has also recently raised concerns in relation to the shortage of building certifiers.

Provisions within the bill before the House address these issues in two ways. Firstly, references to a designated local government have been omitted from section 154 to address the issue of some areas within those designated local governments combining with other areas that are non-designated local governments. A further amendment of section 154 and the consequential omission of section 282 will enable local government building surveying technicians to perform the same level of limited certifying functions based on size of the buildings and the number of storeys in all local government areas indefinitely as an initial step to respond to the growing shortage of building certifiers. Secondly, the bill achieves the removal of restrictions on the issuing of accreditation to a building surveying technician employed by a local government. A new subsection (3) of section 185 is inserted so that it provides that the accreditation requirement in section 185(2)(b) does not apply to a building surveying technician employed by a local government as mentioned in section 154(a) or to a person who has applied to be licensed as a building surveying technician and who will, if so licensed, be employed as mentioned in section 154(a).

These changes to section 185 clarify that an accreditation standards body can develop standards for local government building surveying technicians not currently covered by the national accreditation framework for building certifiers. The amendment of section 185 of the Building Act enables an accreditation standards body to not be bound by the national accreditation framework for building certifiers which had that restrictive effect as I mentioned earlier and would limit the career paths for building surveying technicians. This will enable the retention of a third level of accreditation and improved career paths for building surveying technicians.

There is a good policy rationale to tailor the tasks to be undertaken with an appropriate level of training. In this instance, the level of training undertaken by building surveying technicians is quite appropriate for local government building surveying technicians to approve houses and sheds. There is no need to insist on a higher level of qualifications. Requiring higher qualifications than is necessary for the task may increase costs for councils and certainly increase the costs to industry and therefore to people in the wider community. It will also reduce the number of persons willing to undertake the training. Conversely, recognising this entry-level qualification will make the building certification career path more attractive.

The amendments in relation to the building surveying technicians help to respond to the emerging critical shortage of building certifiers. Removing some restrictions in relation to the role and potential career path of local government building surveying technicians will help councils to provide much-needed services and it will help keep their costs down. All local government building surveying technicians will be able to perform the same level of building certifying functions irrespective of the local government area. Ongoing consultation with stakeholders will provide further policy options to respond to the continuing issue of the shortage of building certifiers, one that needs to be addressed across the length and breadth of Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.