

17 February 2020

Building Ministers' Forum

AAC remarks to the BMF meeting – Professional Standards Schemes

Thank you for inviting the Association of Accredited Certifiers to address this forum.

I acknowledge Minister Karen Andrews and State and Territory colleagues.

The Association of Accredited Certifiers

By way of background, the AAC represents Accredited Certifiers in private practice and employed by local governments in NSW.

Our organisation was established in 2003 to represent the interests of professionals actively participating in the certification of building and subdivision works in New South Wales.

Central to this is providing practical support to Accredited Certifiers through education and advocacy, which ultimately deliver better outcomes for consumers.

Growing industry body playing an active role

The AAC represents 973 members across NSW and we have seen our membership increase by 23 per cent on average each year.

Our growth highlights a desire from our members to professionalise and play a more active role in the development of policy that affects them and the public.

In recent times, issues surrounding our built environment and the regulatory environment we operate in has reached a flashpoint.

While the building industry has been thrown into the spotlight during this period, the issues we are finally confronting at a political level have persisted for decades.

For the last 15 years, our organisation has been calling for the registration or accreditation of all industry practitioners, including ensuring all practitioners are mandated to be covered by professional indemnity insurance.

The simple premise being: if practitioners are accountable for the work they produce, this will drive better outcomes for consumers.

But we also recognise that driving these reforms is not just a matter for government. Industry must do its fair share and that is what our organisation has been focussed on.

Lifting standards, improving the culture and ensuring consumers are put front and centre.

Professional Standards Scheme journey

A central pillar of this effort has been the development of a Professional Standards Scheme (PSS).

This forum has expressed, through its December 2019 communique, the desire from Ministers to see industry associations develop these schemes as a matter of priority.

While the AAC has welcomed this, we have not been waiting for this direction from governments. In the middle of last year, we set in motion the process of establishing our own Professional Standards Scheme.

The Board of Directors of AAC voted unanimously to pursue the implementation of a scheme in consultation with the Australian Property Institute Valuers Limited.

The AAC believes a PSS is in the best interests of AAC members, their clients and the general public.

A PSS will enhance and improve the professional practices of AAC members and elevate the standards in the delivery of members' services to their clients.

A scheme will also help the AAC expand and enhance our already proven education services for members to ensure they remain informed of best practice and customer care.

The AAC Scheme will be a legal instrument that will also provide eligible members of the AAC with an opportunity to cap their liability to a predetermined limit, while still providing protections for consumers.

We are now in the process of undertaking the application process to establish a PSS. Part of this process involves surveying all AAC members. This survey is extremely detailed and comprehensive, allowing the AAC to collect 10 years' worth of claims data from our members to inform the development of our PSS.

We are working closely with the Professional Standards Councils on this to ensure we meet the requirements of a PSS and finalise and lodge our application as expeditiously as possible.

We are of the strong view that this Scheme will lift standards of our members, ensure the ongoing viability of the profession and ultimately result on better outcomes for consumers.

Conclusion

I close by saying this is one part of a much broader effort that is needed, not just from industry, but from across governments.

In that spirit, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to directly tell this forum, that the central issue impacting on certifiers in NSW is the lack of affordable and compliant professional indemnity insurance policies available.

For several years now, the AAC has been advocating for a more comprehensive accreditation or registration scheme for all building practitioners, which mandates insurance coverage, and therefore spreads liability and lifts accountability.

A Professional Standards Scheme will work towards addressing the issue of insurance availability, but it is not a silver-bullet and we are now looking to this body to urgently deliver a sustainable solution to an issue that has the potential to grind the broader industry to a halt.

Yours sincerely

Jill Brookfield

Chief Executive Officer