

Building Ministers' Meeting

Communiqué – 27 November 2020

Building Ministers met in November to discuss the important work the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) is undertaking to support building and construction sector reform. Ministers agreed to the next steps to take this work forward.

Ministers acknowledged the impacts COVID-19 has had on the building industry and commended the sector for continuing to work through an economically challenging and uncertain time. Ministers agreed the sector will have an important role in Australia's economic recovery. Ministers noted promising signs of improvement in the sector and were pleased to see government measures to stimulate building and construction had made a positive impact.

Ministers noted that the building industry is committed to providing safe and high quality buildings which support Australia's diverse communities. Building Ministers noted the importance of maintaining momentum on proposed reforms to support safety and quality and improved compliance with the National Construction Code (NCC). Ministers are mindful of potential impacts to industry during a difficult economic time and will continue to work closely with industry to minimise these impacts where possible.

Ministers noted their condolences on the recent passing of the Hon John Fahey AC GCSC. Mr Fahey contributed significantly through his decades of public service including as Premier of New South Wales and later in federal politics, and served as the Chair of the ABCB.

Ministers welcomed the appointment of Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM as the new ABCB Chair for the next two years.

Building Confidence National Framework

With these reforms in mind, Ministers agreed to prioritise the Building Confidence National Framework outcomes that deliver the greatest benefit, including the National Registration Framework and safeguards for more complex buildings.

To support the ABCB's work on safeguards for complex buildings, Ministers endorsed a building complexity definition. The ABCB will include the new definition in the NCC 2022 public comment draft. Ministers noted this would provide the foundation for state and territory regulators to deploy safeguards according to a building's level of complexity, taking into account factors such as the number of vulnerable occupants and whether the building is located in a natural disaster prone area. Using this definition to target interventions will contribute to safer buildings, without unnecessary compliance burden for less complex buildings.

Ministers endorsed a final model code of conduct for building surveyors and an agreed minimum list of powers for jurisdictions to draw on to enforce compliance with building regulations.

National Construction Code

Ministers agreed work on key policy objectives for the built environment—accessible housing and energy efficiency—should continue. Ministers noted that work on these areas will need to consider potential impacts across the sector and respond to these accordingly.

Ministers acknowledged that a shortage of accessible residential housing in Australia has implications for the 4.4 million Australians living with disability, older Australians and their carers and families.

Ministers noted the ABCB has made significant progress towards examining this issue. This work will inform governments' deliberations on whether to include minimum standards for accessibility in the NCC. Ministers emphasised that they expect to consider both quantitative and qualitative analysis, including the lived experiences of people affected by inaccessible housing, in their deliberations. Ministers committed to settling a position on the inclusion of minimum accessibility standards early next year.

Ministers agreed to continue to prioritise work on the safety of early childhood centres that are located in high-rise buildings.