

New building code is welcomed

The new Victorian Building Code, set to go before Parliament later this year, has been welcomed by both sides of the political fence.

However the State Opposition's support for the code is dependent upon retention of the exemption system which has been practised in the state for many years.

The Department of Planning and Housing's policy project manager, Mr. Lex Borthwick, told The Independent that a vast amount of work is required to bring the code to draft legislation stage.

"The aim is to bring it before Parliament later this year, but The Model Building Act, upon which the Victorian legislation is based, was only released in January, and there is a lot to do in the meantime," Mr. Borthwick said.

Liberal spokesman for Planning, Mr. Rob McClelland, told The Independent that the Opposition fully supported the regulation reform, providing the exemption system continued.

"We have had a very successful exemption system for many years covering all sorts of areas - metric and imperial measurements, density regulations, planning aspects and so on," Mr. McClelland said.

uniform

"It is likely this would still operate under the new code, but we will make sure that was the case before giving the bill our support in Parliament.

"Otherwise, we welcome the move towards uniform regulations. Previously there have been ridiculous situations arising in differences in legislation between states.

"We have a national industry, and regulations should be uniform throughout the country.

"The party has given assurances to those in the working party for the draft legislation that their work is not being wasted - we fully support and will co-operate with the move towards a uniform building code," he said.

Mr. McClelland said the Opposition particularly welcomed the introduction of private building certifiers - spreading the responsibility for giving building approvals, inspecting work and giving of occupancy permits to the private sector.

"There will be competition out there," Mr. McClelland said. "If builders so choose, for whatever reason, they can use private certifiers.

"Local municipalities would then operate their departments either as parallel services, or perhaps do away with them altogether, depending on the council concerned," he said.

ignore

State Housing and Construction minister, Mr. Andrew McCutcheon, said state governments around the country cannot ignore the advantages of a uniform building code.

"There are some fundamental concepts addressed by reforming building regulations and their enforcement," Mr. McCutcheon said.

He listed these as the development of nationally standardised, consolidated and simplified building legislation; nationally accepted standards for tradespeople's qualifications and accreditation of building products, materials and systems; the introduction of alternatives to council approval and inspection processes; examination of liability problems currently affecting local government and the industry; and cheap and efficient dispute resolution.

strong

"These concepts are established. Now we need to reach agreement on their practical application," Mr. McCutcheon said.

He paid tribute to AUBRCC and Mr. Lovegrove for giving Australia a strong lead in streamlining an industry which is vital to the country's future growth.

"Many changes have aimed at reforming building legislation in the past, but have failed to attract a response from industry and local government.

"The Model Building Code and the subsequent drafting of Victorian legislation proposes a range

of substantial building legislation reforms.

"The experience of the 1980s building boom in Victoria has made this state well aware that the building regulatory system must be able to respond quickly and effectively to the requirements of both the community and the industry," Mr. McCutcheon said.

The Australian Uniform Building Regulations Co-ordinating Council (AUBRCC), has for a number of years worked intensively to develop national uniform technical standards in the form of The Building Code of Australia.

Engaging a consultant, Mr. Kim Lovegrove of Hame, Wilkinson and Lowry, Barristers and Solicitors, AUBRCC published "The Model Building Act" in 1991 upon which a Victorian working party is basing a reformed building code for the state.

Draft legislation for Parliament later this year is currently being prepared, but Victoria is not the only state keen to see uniform building regulations throughout the country.

While building codes are the domain of state governments, for many years the need for uniformity has been identified.

The Northern Territory is working very quickly on formulating and adopting its new code, and other states will follow this year.

The Independent spoke with Government and Opposition sources this week, about the introduction of the Bill later this year.