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# Understanding Updates: Land Titles Office & Property Developers Bill

PRESENTED BY FRED ARUGAY, SEAN QUINN  
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Land Titles Office & Clayton Utz

CLAYTON UTZ

# Property Developers Bill 2023

Alfonso del Rio, Partner

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# 01

## Introduction

# Why are we talking about a bill?

- Obligations are novel
- Consequences are unusual
- Importance to be informed

**Note:** the ACT Law Society not consulted before release (no exposure draft)



# Elara saga shows need for construction reform

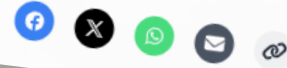
## Canberra's \$250 million building defects bill: report



By Dan Jervis-Bardy

Updated August 20 2019 - 6:16am, first published 4:30am

0 Comments



## ASIC bans two Canberra developers after several failed businesses



By Brittney Levinson

Updated January 12 2024 - 11:22am, first published 12:30am

13 Comments



## Call for developer licensing after ASIC bans Paul Hamilton of 3 Property Group 13

Elara apartme  
Elesa Kurtz

CLAYTON UTZ



By Brittney Levinson

November 4 2023 - 5:30am



...for defects at the Bruce complex. Picture:

02

The Bill



# Objects

- (1) The objects of this Act are to—
  - (a) protect the public by ensuring—
    - (i) residential development activities are undertaken by property developers that are competent and have the capacity to undertake those activities; and
    - (ii) property developers are responsible and accountable for the residential development activities they undertake; and
  - (b) promote public confidence in the standard of residential development activities undertaken by property developers.



# Objects – how will they be achieved

- (2) The objects are to be achieved by—
  - (a) establishing a licensing scheme that ensures certain residential development activities are only undertaken by licensed property developers; and
  - (b) imposing standards of practice and competency for the residential development activities undertaken by licensed property developers; and
  - (c) requiring property developers to rectify serious defects, or possible serious defects, in residential buildings they arrange to be constructed; and
  - (d) providing for the monitoring and enforcement of compliance with this Act.

# When is a licence required?

## Development approval applications for residential developments

- Building or altering a residential building on land
- For the purpose of building a residential building on land:
  - undertaking earthworks or other construction work on or under the land;
  - subdividing or consolidating the land;
  - varying a lease relating to the land (other than a variation that reduces the rent payable to a nominal rent); and
  - demolishing a building on the land.

## Building applications

- Applications for residential building work:
  - building approval;
  - building commencement notice; and
  - certificate of occupancy.

## Off-the-plan

- Selling and advertising of off-the-plan residential property.

**Note:** ACT Government entities are not required to hold a licence.

# What is an off-the-plan contract?

A contract for sale of:



A unit for residential use before the units plan for the unit is registered



A residence (other than a unit) on land identified in the contract before the certificate of occupancy for the residence is issued



Vacant land for residential use identified in the contract before the Crown lease for the land is registered

# Off-the-plan contracts – relevant provisions

- **Seller must be licensed** - it is an offence for a seller to enter into an off-the-plan contract if the Seller does not hold a property developer licence.
- **Advertising off-the-plan contracts** - it is an offence for a person to advertise the sale of a premises under an off-the-plan contract if the advertisement does not contain the property developer licence number of the proposed seller.
- **Disclosure requirements** – before a buyer and seller enter into an off-the-plan contract, the seller must give the buyer a disclosure statement including:
  - the licence number of the seller;
  - the fixtures, fittings and finishes that are included in each residence; and
  - any other matter prescribed by regulation.



# How is a licence obtained – Application

## **An application must include:**

- evidence that the applicant is a 'suitable person'; and
- if requested by the registrar, a rating report; and
- any information prescribed by regulation.

## **Who is a 'suitable person'? The registrar must consider the following:**

- the applicant's character and history of compliance;
- whether the applicant is able to demonstrate an ability to comply with the Act;
- the applicant's operational and financial capacity to undertake residential development activities;
- the applicant's compliance with any competency requirement;
- whether the applicant has previously held a licence that has been cancelled or suspended;
- if the applicant is an individual, whether the applicant has been insolvent under administration, disqualified from managing a corporation or was an executive officer of a corporation when it was placed into administration; and
- any matter prescribed by regulation.

# How is a licence obtained – Application

If the applicant is a corporation, the registrar may also consider the criteria for a 'suitable person' in relation to the following:

- an associated entity (i.e. related corporation) or key person for the corporation; and
- a former associated entity or key person for the corporation.

## Definition of 'key person':

- A director or secretary of the corporation or a related corporation.
- A person who is in a position to control or significantly influence the corporation's (or related corporation's) conduct including an individual who:
  - directly or indirectly holds or controls 25% or more of the shares in the corporation;
  - gives instructions to an officer of the corporation;
  - makes, or participates in making, decisions that affect the whole or a substantial part of the corporation's business or financial standing; or
  - engages in conduct or makes representations that would cause someone to reasonably believe that the person controls or substantially influences the corporation's business.

**However**, professional advisors, administrators, controllers, liquidators are excluded.

# How is a licence obtained – Eligibility

## Eligibility for licence

An applicant is eligible to be given a licence if—

- (a) the registrar is satisfied the applicant has the operational and financial capacity, and is otherwise a suitable person, to undertake residential development activities; and
- (b) the applicant is not disqualified (however described) from applying for a licence under this Act; and
- (c) the applicant meets any other eligibility requirements prescribed by regulation.

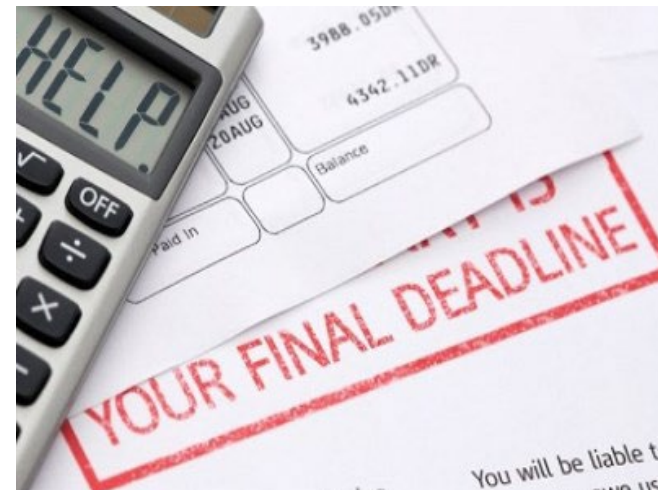
- Licences have a term of 7 years – apply for renewal of licence before the licence ends
- The registrar must keep a public register of licensed property developers





# Automatic licence suspension

- If licence fee not paid
- For an individual, if the licensee becomes bankrupt or personally insolvent
- For a corporation, if the licensee is the subject of a winding-up order or has a controller or administrator appointed



# Regulatory action

*regulatory action*, against a licensee, means any of the following:

- (a) reprimanding the licensee;
- (b) directing the licensee to undergo an assessment of the licensee's—
  - (i) required qualifications, experience and competencies; or
  - (ii) operational and financial capacity to undertake residential building activities including by providing an additional rating report;
- (c) directing the licensee to undertake stated training;
- (d) imposing, or amending, a condition of their licence;
- (e) suspending their licence for either a fixed period or until a particular event happens;
- (f) cancelling their licence.

## Grounds for cancellation include:

- knowingly or recklessly using false information in a licence application;
- failure to comply with a condition of a licence; and
- the licensee stops being eligible to be licensed, has been convicted of an indictable offence or has contravened the Act.

If the registrar proposes to take regulatory action, the registrar must first give a show cause notice to the licensee and the licensee has 28 days to give submissions.

**Note:** if the registrar proposes to immediately cancel or suspend a licence it must be in the public interest to do so.

# Rectification Orders - retrospectivity

- (1) This part applies to residential building work that is uncompleted or has been completed for up to 10 years, including work that was started or completed before the commencement of this part.
- (2) For this section, residential building work is *completed* if a certificate of occupancy under the *Building Act 2004* is issued in relation to it.

1. Imposes new liability

AND

2. Then makes it retrospective

UNLIKE other legislation (e.g. Building Act)

**Note:** applies to serious defects and possible serious defects only

# Rectification Orders – definition of 'property developer'

(1) In this part:

*property developer*, in relation to residential building work, means any of the following:

- (a) a person who contracts or arranges for, or facilitates or otherwise causes (whether directly or indirectly) the building work to be done;
- (b) the owner of the land on which the building work is undertaken at the time the building work is done;
- (c) the principal builder of the building work;
- (d) for a residential building under a units plan—the *developer*, as defined in the *Unit Titles Act 2001*, dictionary, in relation to the units plan;
- (e) a person prescribed by regulation.

(2) A regulation may exclude a person from the definition of *property developer*.

**Note:** means many developers / licences for a project

# Rectification Orders – definition of 'serious defect'

(1) In this Act:

*serious defect*, in relation to a building, means—

- (a) a defect in a building element that is attributable to a failure to comply with a performance requirement of the building code, the relevant Australian Standards or the relevant approved plans for the building work; or
- (b) a defect in a building product or building element that—
  - (i) is attributable to defective design, defective work or defective materials; and
  - (ii) causes or is likely to cause—
    - (A) the inability to live in or use any part of the building for its intended purpose; or
    - (B) the destruction of any part of the building; or
    - (C) a threat of collapse of any part of the building; or
- (c) a thing prescribed by regulation.

# Rectification Orders

## Notice

If the registrar believes on reasonable grounds that:

- residential building work was or is being undertaken by a property developer in a way that could result in a serious defect in the building; or
- a residential building constructed by a property developer has a serious defect,

then the registrar may give the property developer a proposed rectification order notice and the property developer has 28 days to make a submission in relation to the defect.

## Making rectification orders

If, after considering any submission from the property developer, the registrar is satisfied it is appropriate to make an order, then the registrar may make a rectification order against the property developer which will state the action required to be taken to rectify the serious defect, or possible serious defect, within a period (not less than a month).



# Rectification Orders - 10-year period

'10-year period' starts on the later of the following:

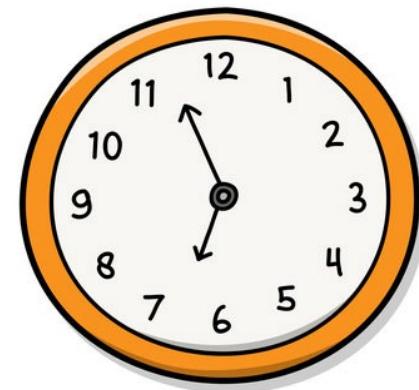
- the day the residential building work stopped being undertaken; and
- the day the certificate of occupancy (or certificate for building work involving demolition or erection of structure) was issued.

## Timing

(4) The registrar may only make a rectification order before the latest of the following:

- (a) if the registrar first became aware of the serious defect, or possible serious defect, within 6 months before the end of the 10-year period—1 year after the registrar became aware of the serious defect, or possible serious defect;
- (b) if the registrar gives a proposed rectification order notice before the end of the 10-year period—1 year after the notice is given;
- (c) in any other case—the day the 10-year period ends.

NOTE: no clear end date



# Rectification Orders – other provisions

## Emergency rectification orders

If the serious defect, or possible serious defect, needs to be rectified urgently to protect the health or safety of people, property or the environment, the Registrar may give to the developer an emergency rectification order to rectify the defect in a period not less than 24 hours.

## More than 1 property developer

If there is more than 1 property developer in relation to residential building work, then a rectification order may be given to 2 or more property developers. The order applies jointly and severally.

## Rectification by the Territory

If a person contravenes a rectification order then the Territory may authorise a person to undertake the action stated in the rectification order and the non-complying party is liable for reasonable costs incurred.

## Appeals against orders

A property developer may apply to the Supreme Court to have an order revoked or varied.

**Note:** no ACAT review



# Rectification Orders – Personal Liability

If:

- the registrar makes a rectification order against a property developer;
- the property developer is a corporation; and
- before or after the registrar makes the order the property developer:
  - becomes the subject of a winding-up order; or
  - is placed into administration, receivership or liquidation; or
  - is deregistered,

then, the registrar, if satisfied that it is appropriate to do so, may make a rectification order against each person who was a director of the property developer at or after the time the residential building work was undertaken as if they were the property developer.

# Rectification Orders – Personal Liability

In considering whether it is appropriate to make a rectification order against a director, the registrar must consider:

- if a latent defects insurance policy or similar insurance policy covers the work required to rectify the serious defect; and
- any other matter prescribed by the regulation.



# Rectification Orders – Penalties

## Failing to comply with a rectification order – maximum fines

- **Intentional non-compliance** –
  - Corporations - \$1,620,000
  - Individuals – \$320,000
- **Reckless non-compliance** –
  - Corporations - \$810,000
  - Individuals – \$160,000
- **Failure to comply (strict liability)** –
  - Corporations - \$40,500
  - Individuals – \$8,000



# Stop work orders

The registrar **may give the property developer a stop work order** requiring the property developer to ensure that residential building work stops if:

- residential building work is being, or is likely to be, undertaken by a property developer in a way that could result in:
  - significant harm or loss to the public or occupiers of the building; or
  - significant damage to property; or
- residential building work is being undertaken and the person is required to hold a licence and does not; or
- regulatory action is being taken against the licensee.

**The stop work order ends on the earliest of:**

- the registrar revoking the order;
- any term stated in the order ending; and
- 12 months from the day the order is given.



## Defective building work (not serious defects or possible serious defects)

- An affected party may give notice to the builder and any property developer, **within 2 years after the completion day for the residential building work**, requiring the defective work to be rectified.
  - **Affected party** means the owner of the building or the land whether or not the person was a party to the contract for the building work or contract for sale of the building or a person prescribed by regulation.
  - **Completion day** under Building Act 2004 (ACT) means the later of the day the work is completed or the day the contract relating to the work ends.
  - **Reverse onus** - it is presumed that the building work is defective and able to be rectified unless proven otherwise.
  - The affected party may also claim damages for any loss or damage resulting from the defect that is reasonably foreseeable as a result of the defect.

**NOTE:** This provision does not apply to residential building work carried out before the commencement of the provision or under a contract entered into before the commencement of this provision.

# Regulations – matters that could be included

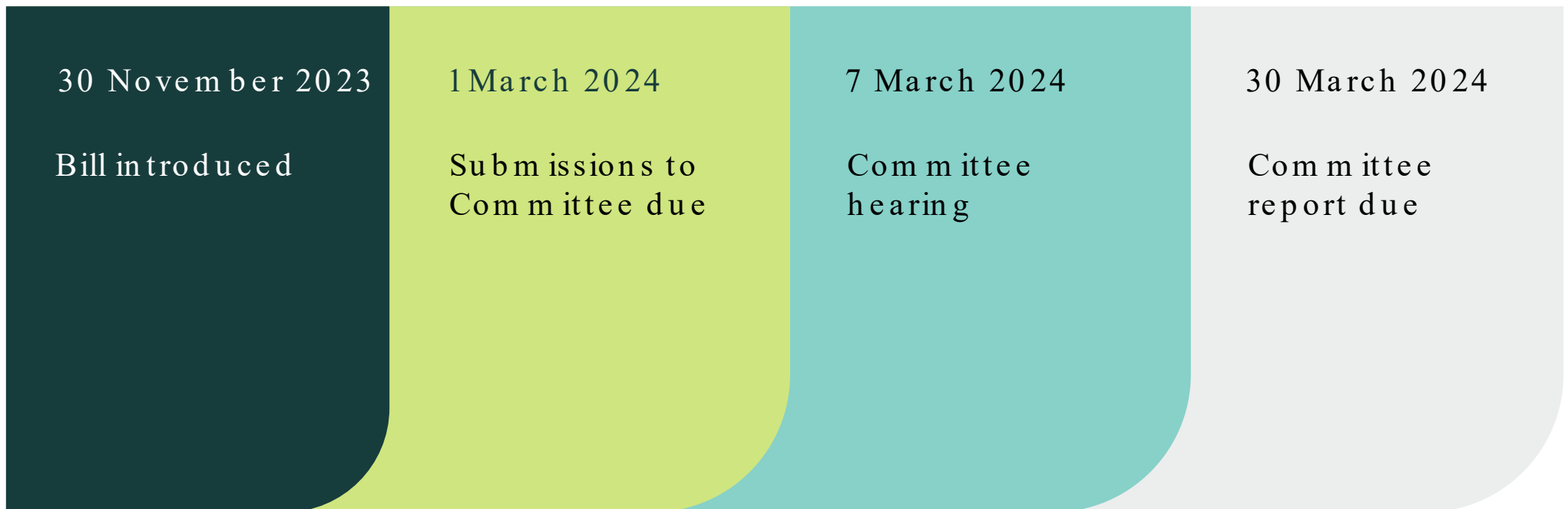
- Further criteria for a 'suitable person'
- Requirements for rating reports
- Information required in licence applications
- Eligibility requirements for licences
- Definition of 'property developer' – inclusions and exclusions
- Definition of 'affected party' for defects – inclusions and exclusions
- Considerations the registrar must take into account in making rectification orders against directors if developer wound up
- Requirements for latent defects insurance
- Matters for inclusion in off-the-plan disclosure statements

# 03

What's Next?

# Timeline – Standing Committee

**Bill expected to pass before ACT elections in October 2024**



**Commencement Date:** on the date fixed by the Minister.

If no date fixed by the Minister, then the licence requirement provisions commence within 3 years of the Act's notification day and the rest of the Act commences within 2 years of the Act's notification date.



## Submissions

1. Owners Corporation Network (ACT)
2. Property Council of Australia (ACT and Capital Region)
3. ACT Government
4. Masters Builders Association of the ACT
5. Housing Industry Association
6. Joint Submission (aged care and retirement living operators) – Goodwin Aged Care Services, IRT Group, LDK Seniors Living, RSL Life Care, Uniting and BaptistCare
7. Community Housing Industry Association
8. Retirement Living
9. ACT Law Society
10. ClubsACT
11. Advanced Structural Designs
12. CFMEU ACT

## Submissions – Some comments and themes

- Removal of retrospectivity and personal liability
- Definition of 'property developer' too broad – exclusions required
- Introduction of a trade licensing scheme is also required
- It will disincentivise residential development which will impact housing affordability and supply
- Legislation is too complex - all licensing requirements should be within one Act
- Level of control of developers – considerable influence vs no involvement in day-to-day operations
- Liability of directors for not for profit and community organisations will disincentivise people taking such positions

## Submissions – Commonly requested exclusions

- Not for profit (e.g. clubs)
- BTR
- Retirement villages
- Mums and Dads
- Licensed residential builders
- Projects involving adding secondary dwellings
- Projects already captured under home warranty insurance

# ACT Law Society Submission

## 1. Complexity of legislation

- The events that trigger the need for a licence are set out in three separate pieces of legislation
- Dispersing licensing requirements across multiple Acts may make it difficult for those intended to be regulated to navigate and comply with their obligations

## 2. Building Act reforms

- Reverse onus of proof for defect claims made within two years of completion – in civil claims the burden of proof usually lies with the person making the claim
- Any departures from this general legal principle should be done cautiously and in a way that balances the interests of justice, fairness and efficiency
- In relation to claims for damages for affected parties resulting from the defect, it is unclear whether the two-year limitation period also applies to a related claim for damages or whether the default six-year limitation period (under the Building (General) Regulation 2008) applies

# ACT Law Society Submission

## 3. Rectification orders scheme

### Potential retrospective operation of the rectification orders scheme

- Common law presumption against retrospectivity – fair, stable and predictable legal environment
- ACT Government position in COLA context – laws are not retrospective simply because they relied on conduct or events that happened before the provisions existed

### Personal liability of directors

- ACT Government position in COLA context – amendments necessary to prevent phoenixing and reduce the impacts of insolvencies on building owners
- Wide definition of 'property developer' could operate in practice to capture persons who are not involved in the development decision making process

# ACT Law Society Submission

## 3. Rectification orders scheme (continued)

### Broad discretion of the Registrar in making rectification orders

- Registrar can make orders where 'they are satisfied to do so'
- Rectification orders made under section 52 of the Bill are not reviewable in ACAT – application must be made to the ACT Supreme Court to revoke or review

### Practical implications of rectification orders being made against multiple parties

- Each developer may have varying degrees of financial liability
- ACT Government position in COLA context – who receives an order will be determined by what is appropriate in each case. The registrar is not required to issue an order to more than one party.



Good Policy

Bad Policy

# Media Articles – Differing Perspectives

10 March 2024

## Licensing Canberra developers will protect the public

By [Sunday Canberra Times](#)  
March 10 2024 - 5:30am

2 Comments



Directors of development companies could also be held liable in the event their company was wound up.

None of this would hurt diligent developers.

It would only strengthen them by giving them a seal of approval for all to see. People who buy homes could identify developers of good repute.

It is the cutters of corners and the hidiers of flaws who would lose.

As they should.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8548994/canberra-property-developers-bill-wont-hurt-good-businesses/>



# Media Articles – Differing Perspectives

11 March 2024

## Developer licensing bill will only deepen housing crisis

By Dan Carton

March 11 2024 - 5:30am

9 Comments



The ACT government's new developer licensing bill risks making the housing shortage much much worse. As drafted, it will curtail new investment in housing due to the uncertainty and potential personal liability for company directors including those from not-for-profits like community housing providers and licensed clubs.

Let's not have well-intended but poorly constructed legislation smash all hopes of delivering that housing.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8547949/act-govt-developer-licensing-bill-will-only-deepen-housing-crisis/>

# History Lesson

## *Code of Hammurabi* (c. 1760 BC)

229. If a builder build a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.

230. If it kill the son of the owner the son of that builder shall be put to death.

231. If it kill a slave of the owner, then he shall pay slave for slave to the owner of the house.



# History Lesson

## *Code of Hammurabi* (c. 1760 BC)

232. If it ruin goods, he shall make compensation for all that has been ruined, and inasmuch as he did not construct properly this house which he built and it fell, he shall re-erect the house from his own means.

233. If a builder build a house for some one, even though he has not yet completed it; if then the walls seem toppling, the builder must make the walls solid from his own means.



# Simple Principles

- Developers should accept responsibility for things that are in their control
- Question is **what is in their control?**
- Should they also have responsibility for things not in their control?

# Examples (Audience participation time!)

## 1. Developer directs builder to use unlicensed trade

(1) In this Act:

*serious defect*, in relation to a building, means—

- (a) a defect in a building element that is attributable to a failure to comply with a performance requirement of the building code, the relevant Australian Standards or the relevant approved plans for the building work; or
- (b) a defect in a building product or building element that—
  - (i) is attributable to defective design, defective work or defective materials; and
  - (ii) causes or is likely to cause—
    - (A) the inability to live in or use any part of the building for its intended purpose; or
    - (B) the destruction of any part of the building; or
    - (C) a threat of collapse of any part of the building; or
- (c) a thing prescribed by regulation.



# Examples (Audience participation time!)

## 2. Façade film delaminates

(1) In this Act:

*serious defect*, in relation to a building, means—

- (a) a defect in a building element that is attributable to a failure to comply with a performance requirement of the building code, the relevant Australian Standards or the relevant approved plans for the building work; or
- (b) a defect in a building product or building element that—
  - (i) is attributable to defective design, defective work or defective materials; and
  - (ii) causes or is likely to cause—
    - (A) the inability to live in or use any part of the building for its intended purpose; or
    - (B) the destruction of any part of the building; or
    - (C) a threat of collapse of any part of the building; or
- (c) a thing prescribed by regulation.



# Examples (Audience participation time!)

## 3. Electrical cable is found faulty

(1) In this Act:

*serious defect*, in relation to a building, means—

- (a) a defect in a building element that is attributable to a failure to comply with a performance requirement of the building code, the relevant Australian Standards or the relevant approved plans for the building work; or
- (b) a defect in a building product or building element that—
  - (i) is attributable to defective design, defective work or defective materials; and
  - (ii) causes or is likely to cause—
    - (A) the inability to live in or use any part of the building for its intended purpose; or
    - (B) the destruction of any part of the building; or
    - (C) a threat of collapse of any part of the building; or
- (c) a thing prescribed by regulation.



# Examples (Audience participation time!)

## 4. Sinkhole appears and building collapses into it

(1) In this Act:

*serious defect*, in relation to a building, means—

- (a) a defect in a building element that is attributable to a failure to comply with a performance requirement of the building code, the relevant Australian Standards or the relevant approved plans for the building work; or
- (b) a defect in a building product or building element that—
  - (i) is attributable to defective design, defective work or defective materials; and
  - (ii) causes or is likely to cause—
    - (A) the inability to live in or use any part of the building for its intended purpose; or
    - (B) the destruction of any part of the building; or
    - (C) a threat of collapse of any part of the building; or
- (c) a thing prescribed by regulation.





# Alternative Regimes – Personal liability

## Example – Environment Protection Act 1997 (ACT)

**Personal liability** – the Supreme Court may order a person to comply with an assessment or remediation order at the person's own expense if the person was a director of, or a person concerned in the management of, a body corporate that has been wound up within 2 years before the court's order was made.

**NOTE:** the Supreme Court must be satisfied that there is reason to believe that the body corporate was wound up as part of a scheme to avoid compliance with the assessment or remediation order.



# Alternative Regimes – Defences

**Defences** – the Supreme Court must not make an order if the person:

- exercised due diligence to prevent the body corporate from avoiding compliance with the assessment order or remediation order;
- could not reasonably have been expected to be aware of a scheme to avoid compliance with the assessment order or remediation order; or
- was not in a position to influence the conduct of the body corporate in relation to that scheme.



# Trade Licensing

Quote from Submission 3: Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, page 2

Almost all key professions that are involved in the design and construction of residential buildings are required to be licenced or registered. This includes builders, plumbers, and electricians, who are required by the *Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act 2004 (COLA)* to hold a licence.

**Note:** reference to 'includes' is actually 'means'

## Trade Licensing

# Building minister tells dodgy builders: watch out, we're coming

Rebecca Vassarotti is also announcing work has begun on a future trades licensing scheme, which the government plans to introduce after a property developer licence system.

A list of priority trades will be drawn up as part of work on a new licensing scheme the ACT government believes will help improve building quality in the capital.

"I'm sure we can all acknowledge that just as the urgency of the climate crisis demands action, we cannot allow ourselves to overlook the rapid spread of the housing crisis," she says. "Similarly, we cannot permit the housing crisis to serve as a pretext for the emergence of yet another impending crisis in the quality of our homes."

Ms Vassarotti is calling on builders to work together with the government to ensure quality homes are built in the ACT.

"Together, we can change the city. Together, we can improve the standard of living in the ACT. Together, we can change the building industry for good," she says.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8531171/building-minister-rebecca-vassarotti-puts-dodgy-builders-on-notice/>

# Trade Licensing - NSW

Air conditioning and refrigeration  
Bricklaying  
Building  
Building practitioner registration  
Carpentry  
Decorating  
Design practitioner registration  
Disconnection and reconnection of fixed electrical equipment  
Dry plastering  
Electrical  
Erection of pre-fabricated metal framed homes  
Excavating

Fencing  
General concreting  
Glazing  
Installation of security grilles and equipment  
Joinery  
Kitchen, bathroom and laundry renovation  
Medical gas systems  
Metal fabrication  
Minor maintenance and cleaning  
Minor trade work  
Painting  
Plumbing, draining and gasfitting  
Professional engineer registration

Roof plumbing  
Roof slating  
Roof tiling  
Stonemasonry  
Structural landscaping  
Swimming pool building  
Swimming pool repairs and servicing  
Sydney Metro projects - building practitioner registration  
Underpinning and piling  
Wall and floor tiling  
Waterproofing  
Wet plastering

05

Questions?

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