

Architects Inquiry

Productivity Commission

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SUBMISSION RE: REVIEW OF LEGISLATION REGULATING ARCHITECTS

I read with disappointment of the Productivity Commission's intention to repeal the Architects Acts on the grounds of public interest, for I am a member of that endangered species, the Architect. But mostly I feel sad because my talented daughter wishes to study for a degree in Architecture next year.

It appears as though the commission made its mind up long before it really gave any weight to the case, and it is disempowering to be swept aside by the tide of economic evangelism that pervades those in authority, despite other countries treading a very different path. Consider the practice of Architecture which, steeped in tradition, is the only profession that combines both Art and Science into a practical outcome. There would not be many Australians who do not enjoy the beautiful curves of the Sydney Opera House or the stately lines of Parliament House. Compare these to the overwhelming number of buildings that are erected by non-architects and one begins to understand the difference between architecture and building. This distinction is precisely why the term Architect needs to be restricted.

Take away the statutory protection [flimsy though it already is], and what would you get. A person who likes drawing can simply put pen to paper, or pointer to screen, and draw any calibre of construction they can pass off as a design. The market may be able to weed out the worst offenders eventually, but not after significant damage to the client and building environment has been done by a self proclaimed "architect". Of course that can happen now with building designers, but at least a trusting public is not led to believe that the person has adequate training and expertise to call themselves an Architect.

Currently if my daughter wishes to pursue her career, the community has several safeguards in place. She must study at a recognised University for five or more years before graduating with a Bachelor of Architecture degree. She must then work in the profession for a minimum of two years, before having to pass an examination set by her peers as to the thoroughness of her knowledge of the practice of architecture. This adds up to seven years hard work before she can call herself an Architect. No wonder building designers don't want to do it.

An untrained person, under the deregulated proposal, could conceivably have little knowledge or skill, but put up the 'architects for sale' board up on the day after leaving school. Surely the public have the right to know there is a minimum standard being set somewhere by competent people? At the moment, if they use a designer, good luck to them, they at least make an informed choice. No one is excluded from doing the hard yards and earning the degree. Those too lazy or inept to do the course now have the perfect answer, 'we are all architects', and ipso facto none of us is an architect.

Many overseas countries, notably France and Germany, require that all building plans, regardless of how big or small, even for a house extension or office entrance, must be designed by a registered architect. Who could argue that architecture and building is at a lower standard

than here, quite the converse. Even young countries like South Africa have reserved work for architects, limiting non-qualified persons to domestic dwellings and buildings smaller than 500 square metres in area. Suitably experienced designers can qualify through their own organisations for exemption, but they are not architects. This is an eminently suitable middle path, which satisfies the need for a better-built environment with the desire for families to participate in the design of their own home. No doubt the framers of their legislation appreciate the difference between a good and an ordinary built environment. It is no surprise to learn they are concerned overseas about accreditation of the proposed lowering of standards.

So after all is said and done, it seems a fait accompli that the last vestige of professionalism, the term Architect, will be stripped off those who have nurtured and enhanced it for over a century, and thrown to the throng in the name of public interest, with scant evidence that this will enhance anyone but a special interest group. Architecture without pride is just rubble.

Just answer this one simple question: 'Why should my daughter bother to study Architecture ?'

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