



Australian Institute of Building Submission to the Draft Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022: *Healthy, Safe and Productive Working Lives*

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Building (AIB) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022: *Healthy, Safe and Productive Working Lives*. Work health and safety is a priority for AIB. We note that construction is one of the five broad industry groups identified as priorities for the reduction of the incidence of traumatic fatalities, injuries and illnesses by 2015 listed on page 8 of the draft strategy. This focus is a positive aspect of the draft strategy.

AIB Contributed To And Supports The ACIF WHS Policy

The AIB is a member of the Australian Industry Construction Forum (ACIF) which facilitates and supports an active dialogue between the key players in residential and non-residential building, and engineering construction, other industry groups, and government agencies.

In the latter half of 2011, AIB assisted ACIF to develop a Work Health and Safety (WHS policy), and this is listed in Appendix 1.

The main points of this policy are:

ACIF supports a proactive safety culture in the building and construction industry through workplace health and safety legislation that:

- 1. is nationally consistent;*
- 2. ensures the responsibility for safe construction, maintenance and repair rests with those who have the direct ability to control and manage safety at the relevant time;*
- 3. ensures all participants, including clients, employees, designers and suppliers share this responsibility;*
- 4. provides clarity and certainty for all workplace stakeholders;*
- 5. does not discourage innovation;*
- 6. does not impose excessive “red tape”;*
- 7. is continuously developed using open industry consultation;*
- 8. appropriately balances the notions of prevention and enforcement;*
- 9. does not include the offence of industrial manslaughter; and*
- 10. rests with the regulator the sole responsibility for commencing prosecutions, and the onus of proof, for breaches of the legislation.*

Goals of the Strategy

AIB notes the following goals in the draft strategy on page 7:

Targets will be developed and implemented by 2015.

The targets are:

- 1. Work-related fatalities targets: a 20 per cent reduction in the number of injury fatalities.*
- 2. Work-related injuries targets: a 30 per cent reduction in incidence rates of all claims resulting in one or more weeks off work.*
- 3. Body stressing injuries targets: a 30 per cent reduction in the incidence rate of claims due to body stressing.*

The AIB strongly supports meaningful targets, recognising that targets are preferable to achieve tangible and better results, and therefore supports the settings of targets to improve work health and safety outcomes.

Alignment with AS4801

AIB recommends that the strategy be aligned with AS4801. Most large contracting construction companies have been accredited to Australian Standard AS4801. The reason for this is that AS4801 is the mandatory standard to operate and win major commercial contracts in the mining, oil, gas, and infrastructure construction industries. The building industry uses AS4801 extensively at managing contractor level, but currently not as well in the construction of small buildings (under \$15 million cost of construction) and subcontractor level. Implemented properly AS4801 produces safer people, a safer culture, better financial outcomes and site efficiencies. However, if AS4801 is not implemented properly, it can become an administrative burden with few, if any, outputs.

Design Responsibilities

WHS aspects of design responsibilities need to be reinforced for stakeholders on construction projects, but particularly clients and design professionals. Strong anecdotal evidence collected from AIB members suggests that the bulk of responsibility to identify and control health and safety risks continues to rest with builder, and there is a lack of impetus for the client or design professional to adhere to their responsibilities. We suggest a re-balancing of WHS responsibilities through education, and where necessary regulation, among all stakeholders, and particularly clients and design professionals. Safety in design is how oil and gas companies achieve performance, as designs are undertaken with construction ability and maintenance in mind. If something is difficult to build or maintain, then generally it will be inherently unsafe. The responsibility for the design must be taken by the design professionals with full support from the client.

Education and Training

Since health and safety affects all of those that work, a clearer and more connected health and safety educational process should be implemented by governments during school years, through vocational and higher education into employment. WHS needs to have a greater profile across all levels of Management. Delivery of substantial WHS studies within the Construction Management and Economics degree is of the utmost importance, this should be delivered and emphasised by appropriately qualified people. It should be mandatory that those who lead the various university

schools, including design professionals, have a good understanding of the safety requirements of construction managers.

Work-Related Disease and Disorder

Given that there is a near ten-fold incidence of disease-related fatalities in the workplace compared with injury-related fatalities, there needs to be greater emphasis on combating these risks to the work force, notwithstanding the limited reliable national data.

Research-Based Evidence

This area needs to be significantly improved as construction organisations are concerned about utilising limited resources in an effective way to reduce risk. More emphasis should be placed on national sharing of practical examples to manage workplace risks, as currently this sharing appears to be limited to regulators in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Targeted Assistance for Small Businesses

Targeted help for small businesses would help improve overall performance, given that around 50 per cent of the organisations in Australia are classified as small businesses. The Health and Safety Executive in the United Kingdom has a specific section on their website for small businesses and provide ongoing support for these entities. Assistance for small business in Australia appears to be more limited, fractured and not nationally networked.

AIB Awaits the Final Strategy To Assess How We Can Support it

We note that in the draft strategy on page 4 it states that:

Professional associations, interest groups and even individual workplaces are encouraged to undertake supporting strategic activities relevant to them.

We welcome that professional associations have been considered, and once the final Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 has been released, we will examine it carefully to see how we can support the goals, recommendations and activities that it contains. The AIB recommends appropriate levels of funding being considered for these professional organisations to educate their members on WHS.

Further Information

For further information, please contact the AIB Chief Executive Officer or Policy & Advocacy Manager on (02) 6247 7433 or ceo@aib.or.au or policy@aib.org.au

Appendix 1

ACIF POLICY ON SAFETY

The challenge of achieving improvements in workplace safety is a priority for all ACIF members.

ACIF POLICY POSITION

ACIF supports a proactive safety culture in the building and construction industry through workplace health and safety legislation that:

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2. ensures the responsibility for safe construction, maintenance and repair rests with those who have the direct ability to control and manage safety at the relevant time;
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OVERVIEW

The incidence of serious injury and death in the Australian Construction Industry needs to be reduced further through the introduction of targeted WHS strategies.

The economic and social impact of injuries, death and, disease, is significant. This impact can also be felt through the loss of trained, skilled and experienced people, compensation payments, hospitalisation and medical resources including rehabilitation, ongoing care costs and to victims, and the costs of litigation and payouts by insurers under compensation or negligence actions.

ACIF welcomes the COAG initiative to adopt harmonised WHS laws by 1 January 2012. Harmonised WHS legislation should eliminate diverse OHS requirements in each state jurisdiction that create misunderstanding and uncertainty. The achievement of national consistency of the WHS regulatory requirements across all Australian jurisdictions remains a priority. However, such regulatory requirements need to be clear, effective and practical with desired outcomes expressed in terms of the improvements and levels of performance required.

Improvements in workplace safety require an effective health and safety culture. All participants, including clients, employers, employees and suppliers, must accept individual and mutual responsibilities, duties of care which place all of the responsibilities for the workplace upon employers are both unmanageable and unworkable.

Responsibility for safety in construction (including but not limited to safety in design) rests with a range of stakeholders, starting with the client who commissions the work and including, current and future owners and developers, designers and construction contractors, whose influence can have a major impact on the safety outcomes of a project, starting from initial site works through the life cycle to use and demolition.

Appendix 2

About the AIB

Founded in 1951, the AIB is the leading institute for building and construction professionals, acknowledged for its ability to bring individuals together who share a common interest in improving the standing of the building profession and their career within Australia and overseas.

The AIB is incorporated by Royal Charter and is the preeminent professional body for building professionals in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Recognised as the accrediting body for building and construction degrees at educational institutions, the AIB has a long and proud history of supporting and servicing the building profession. For more than fifty years, the Institute has worked with the building and construction industry, government, universities and allied stakeholders to promote the building profession, support the development of university courses in building and construction whilst promoting the use of innovative building techniques and a best-practice regulatory environment.

AIB is proud of its role in promoting the exchange of information amongst individuals and accomplishes this through publications including the *Construct* magazine and the Australasian Journal of Construction Economics & Building (AJCEB).

The AIB also has an extensive continuing professional development program in Australia and overseas and facilitates the annual AIB Professional Excellence in Building Awards Program.

For further information please go to www.aib.org.au