Building newsflash number 484

New laws for pool fences on common boundaries

Purpose
Amendments to the Building Act 1975 (BA) relating to pool fences on common boundaries commence on 1 November 2011.

Background
The amendments provide that all rules relating to pool fences on common boundaries are now found in the BA. The amendments also provide some new rules for pool fences on common boundaries.

New rules
The changes allow pool owners in prescribed circumstances to construct or alter a pool fence without first obtaining the agreement of their neighbour. However, pool owners are encouraged to consult with adjoining owners and the BA provides that pool owners must give neighbours notices about proposed work at least 14 days prior to undertaking any work. The notice (Form 39—notice of proposed fencing work for a pool barrier) must include information on the type of fence proposed and the materials that will be used.

Agreement—new and existing fences
The changes provide that where there is no pool on the adjoining land a pool owner can construct a pool barrier on the common boundary without having to first obtain agreement from their neighbour. However, where the adjoining owner also has a pool, the pool owner proposing fencing work is required to obtain consent from their neighbour prior to undertaking constructing a new fence or work on an existing fence. This is to ensure the proposed fence can comply for both pools.

Existing fences—colours and materials
Where there is an existing fence the BA provides that the pool barrier must be consistent with the existing fence for matters such as materials and colours, unless this would prevent the fence from complying with the pool safety standard. If a pool owner proposes to significantly vary the character of an existing fence, they must obtain either consent from their neighbour or an order from the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) allowing them to build a different type of fence.
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Access and options for neighbours
Many pool owners will be able to make their pool fence comply with the pool safety standard without accessing their neighbour’s land, particularly for fences that are 1800 mm or more in height. In addition, most pool owners will also not be able to claim any financial contribution to the cost of the work. In these cases, Form 39 advises neighbours that if they agree with the proposal they need take no action.

Where access to the neighbour’s land is necessary, the pool owner must get consent from their neighbour or apply to QCAT for an access order.

Where neighbouring owners do not agree with the proposed work or access arrangements they should advise the person proposing the work as soon as possible and before work is due to commence.

If a neighbour is not satisfied with the final look of a fence, the new laws do not prevent the neighbour from painting or otherwise changing the appearance of their side of the fence, so long as they do not materially alter or damage the fence.

Cost of fencing work
In general, the pool owner is responsible for the cost of building and maintaining pool barriers. Exceptions apply where two pools will benefit from the fencing work (i.e. there is a pool on both sides of the common boundary) or where there is a special fence (e.g. a fence for a regulated dog). In these cases, details about the costs associated with the fencing work, and the proposed contributions, should also be provided to the neighbour on the Form 39.

Disputes
The new BA provisions provide a comprehensive framework to deal specifically with a range of different scenarios likely to arise with pool fences on a common boundary, including one pool, two pools and special fences (e.g. a fence for a regulated dog). Under the BA, QCAT has been given jurisdiction to hear any dispute involving pool barriers on common boundaries.

For more information about the changes to the BA, refer to the New rules for dividing fences which also serve as a pool barrier fact sheet. For information about fencing disputes that do not involve pool fencing, visit the Department of Justice and Attorney-General website.

Contact for further information
Department of Local Government and Planning
Building Codes Queensland Division
tel +61 7 3239 6369
buildingcodes@dlgp.qld.gov.au

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