

Building and Plumbing Newsflash 533

Proposal to adopt Queensland Development Code Mandatory Part 3.7—Farm buildings

Purpose

To advise that a new Queensland Development Code (QDC) part is available for public comment from 11am, Wednesday 10 September 2014 until 5pm, Friday 10 October 2014.

Background

The National Construction Code (NCC) provides the classifications and construction standards for buildings in Australia. When making a decision about the classification of any building, a building certifier must consider the purpose for which the building is designed, constructed or adapted to be used, and the extent to which people will be occupying the building.

Farm buildings can be used for a variety of purposes, including storing farm machinery, storing and packing of produce and animal husbandry. Farm buildings are not dealt with specifically under the NCC, however, it is considered of these buildings most are likely to fall under NCC classifications 7a, 7b or 8. Simple storage sheds, such as those used to store farm vehicles, could also be classified as class 10a buildings.

Changes in the agricultural industry in recent years, however, have created difficulty with the NCC classifications and requirements for some farm buildings. A shift towards more intensive farming and production techniques and the emergence of large scale operations that are highly mechanised and reliant on technology, has altered the risk associated with these buildings, leading to uncertainty and inconsistency in how they are classified.

For example, the NCC currently requires many larger farm buildings to install special fire services and installations such as hydrants, hose reels and in some cases, early warning systems. However, the type of occupancy of some of these buildings may not always justify the requirements. For example, a class 8 building used to grow large numbers of hydroponic vegetables may be occupied by only one or two people for an hour each day, but would still be required to provide a level of fire safety features that is aimed at protecting human lives, often at significant cost.

As a result, a growing trend is reportedly to classify these buildings incorrectly as class 10 buildings, where there is no requirement to consider active fire safety features.

Issues

The draft QDC seeks to cut costs and reduce red tape for expanding farm industries by providing alternative requirements to specific provisions under the NCC considered inappropriate or impractical for farm buildings. The draft QDC will also provide certainty and consistency for the

building industry in relation to classifying and assessing new farm buildings.

The draft QDC provides acceptable solutions that vary the NCC in areas such as egress, fire hydrants, emergency lighting and exit signage. The acceptable solutions that apply to a farm building will depend on how it is categorised under the draft QDC: as a low-occupancy farm building, high-occupancy farm building, or motor vehicle storage building. Any NCC requirements not varied by the draft QDC will still apply.

The creation of three categories of farm building recognises the wide variety of activities that can be carried out in a farm building and helps ensure that minimum levels of fire and life safety expected in farm buildings are provided appropriate to the building's use and occupancy levels.

Other jurisdictions

South Australia and Victoria have both taken steps to address issues relating to farm buildings. For instance, South Australia introduced Minister's Specification SA H3.2 'Concessions and additional requirements for farm buildings' in 2004, which provides both concessions and additional requirements in relation to the NCC requirements for fire resistance, firefighting equipment, access and egress, emergency lighting and exit signage.

In January 2013, Victoria issued a Practice Note to provide guidance in classifying and assessing farm buildings against the NCC.

Consultation

The South Australian Minister's Specification was initially used to inform the draft QDC. Building Codes Queensland (BCQ) sought comment on this approach from industry, local governments and the community at 13 public consultation sessions held across the state in June and July 2014.

In response to stakeholder feedback, the draft QDC has undergone revisions to ensure it satisfies the needs of Queensland's building and agriculture industries.

Have your say

BCQ welcomes your questions and feedback on the [draft QDC](#) and accompanying draft [explanatory notes](#).

Submissions can be made by email or posted:

Post:

Attention: Proposed farm code
Department of Housing and Public Works
PO Box 2457
City East QLD 4002

Email:

buildingcodes@qld.gov.au (please include 'Attention: Proposed farm code ' in the subject line).

Contact for further information

Building Codes Queensland
Department of Housing and Public Works
Email: buildingcodes@qld.gov.au

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