



Australian Institute of Building Surveyors

## **ROOMING HOUSE SAFETY MUST BE PRIORITY**

### **BUILDING SURVEYORS PEAK BODY NOT CONSULTED BY TASKFORCE**

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The Australian Institute of Building Surveyors (AIBS) has called on the State Government to implement a new licensing regime for rooming house operators, along with stringent minimum safety requirements and more frequent property inspections.

Victorian State president Peter Jolly said AIBS members, as stakeholders with expertise in and responsibility for administering the building control legislative scheme in Victoria, were disappointed not to be invited to make a submission to the Rooming House Taskforce.

“Municipal Building Surveyors are responsible for life safety in the built environment. The current system of registration for rooming houses is dated and inappropriate. This was a contributing factor in the Brunswick fire that resulted in two fatalities.

AIBS believes the registration process is deficient, in that an application for registration of prescribed accommodation under the Health Act 1958 is made to the Municipal Health Department. There is no statutory referral process to the Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS).

As a result, the MBS is not informed of the proposed use of buildings for accommodation purposes. “This is of particular concern when the application involves changing the use to a Class 1b (boarding houses, guest houses or hostels) or Class 3 (backpacker accommodation, residential parts of hotels or motels, residential parts of schools, accommodation for the aged, disabled or children) building.” Mr. Jolly explained.

Building Regulation 1011 provides that where the use of a building is changed, the building must comply with the standards applicable to the new use. However, there is currently no trigger for mandatory inspection of a building proposed for use as a rooming house. Without an inspection, the MBS cannot ensure a building meets the minimum safety standards.

“A Municipal Health Department issued certificate does not ensure that life safety standards have been met or maintained, let alone checked.” Mr. Jolly continued.

“Frequent on-site inspections are necessary to ensure minimum safety standards are met and maintained in rooming houses and other prescribed buildings. AIBS recommends essential safety measures be escalated to include annual inspections by building surveyors, along with practical measures like banning the installation of deadlocks on internal doors.”

AIBS believes proprietors of accommodation buildings should be licensed in a similar manner to that set out in the Liquor Control Reform Act 1994 and/or the Prostitution Control Act 1994, with applicants required to pass appropriate character, qualifications and means tests. Licensing should be administered by Consumer Affairs Victoria.

“Penalties need to act as a deterrent and should include jail terms for repeat offenders. Coroner Peter White’s report identified that the rooming house operators in question had rented 60-70 properties for the same purpose over the past five years and were receiving approximately \$40,000 per week in rent from residents. The current penalties are inadequate. Life safety is the fundamental reason for the building control regime and penalties should adequately punish those who place people at risk.” Mr. Jolly concluded.

**MEDIA Maree Davenport Phoenix Public Affairs**  
**0400 584 388 [phoenixpa@optusnet.com.au](mailto:phoenixpa@optusnet.com.au)**