

**Submission
No 165**

**INQUIRY INTO REGULATION OF BUILDING
STANDARDS, BUILDING QUALITY AND BUILDING
DISPUTES**

Name: Mr David Mehan MP

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David Mehan MP

STATE MEMBER FOR THE ENTRANCE

26 August 2019

Mr David Shoebridge MLC
Chairperson
Public Accountability Committee
public.accountability@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Shoebridge,

Inquiry into the regulation of building standards, building quality and building disputes

Whilst I understand submission to this inquiry are closed, I wanted to make a few comments as someone who has worked in the building industry on and off for over 20 years as a geologist specialising in geotechnical engineering.

In the building industry a geologist will typically provide information on ground conditions to assist an engineer produce a design. Subsurface exploration will provide information on foundation conditions from which design parameters such as the load bearing capacity of different soil and rock types can be deduced. Under the Australian Standard used for designing that part of a residential dwelling which carries the building load to the groundⁱ, the geologist is the site classifierⁱⁱ.

I have reviewed reports I prepared during 2014. Most of these were for single residential dwelling projects on the Central Coast but also some light commercial and apartments. Given the limited information provided by a standard geotechnical investigation, it is usual practice to verify foundation conditions during constructionⁱⁱⁱ. I recommended inspection during construction on 42 separate occasions. My records show I was only called on to undertake an inspection on 15 occasions.

This is a large number of projects to ignored a recommendation even allowing that some projects don't go ahead. I note it is my experience that before privatisation of building certification occurred, Councils absolutely required all recommendations of a geotechnical report be followed.

I have been asked to verify foundation conditions based on photographs sent to me by the builder and I have been asked to verify foundations after construction has ended.

Inspection and verification of geotechnical conditions during construction is more important than ever given the greater intensity of modern development on the earths surface. A basic family home will often involve deep excavation into the ground requiring design of ground support and drainage to an extent not common 20 years ago.

The current certification system is not working in the interests of our community nor the interests of those who work in the building industry. De-regulation and privatisation have not produced better quality or more affordable homes.

Independent approval and checking of building works which avoids the conflict of interest associated with 'fee for service' can only be adequately undertaken by a public sector authority which also has an eye to the impact of the building works on the surrounding area. Return of this function to local government would, to my mind, be the easiest way to achieve this.

Yours sincerely

David Mehan
Member for The Entrance

ⁱ Australian Standard AS2870 (2011): Residential Slabs and Footings.

ⁱⁱ Ibid: Appendix A, page 68.

ⁱⁱⁱ On commercial and apartment buildings with larger loads, inspection is linked to the maximum allowable load bearing capacity which can be recommended: Pells et al (1978) Design Loadings on Shale & Sandstone in the Sydney Region, *Australian Geomechanics Journal*, G8, p31.