

21 July 2008

Mutual Recognition Review
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 3000

**REVIEW OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION SCHEMES - PRODUCTIVITY
COMMISSION - ISSUES PAPER, JUNE 2008.**

AMCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the issues paper.

The Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association (AMCA) is the employer association representing and promoting the air conditioning and mechanical services industry along with the well being of its members.

AMCA acts as the industry's voice in dealing with governments at all levels, other construction and service industry groups, and the unions.

AMCA members are the largest employers of on site plumbing trade labour. They employ people who are engaged in a wide range of occupations that include mechanical engineers, plumbers, refrigeration mechanics and a range of support occupations to which people can be promoted into like project managers and estimators.

AMCA is the only industry and employer association that is exclusively dedicated to the air-conditioning and mechanical services industry. The Association represents its members in a range of ways. It actively participates in a wide range of policy and advocacy committees at national and state levels. These committees deal with matters related to construction procurement, standards, regulation and registration, industrial relations, and occupational health and safety.

Since its inception in the early 1960's, AMCA's objectives have been to promote and protect the interests and welfare of the airconditioning and mechanical services industry, its members, and the public they serve.

AMCA members are fully engaged in the life cycle of air conditioning and mechanical ventilation systems. They design, install, commission and provide ongoing service on air-conditioning and mechanical ventilation systems and have worked on the largest and most complex systems in the Melbourne commercial precinct.

Our members:

- Have years of experience in the industry;
- A proven record of achievement in the installation of commercial and industrial plant;
- Have worked on the most complex projects in Australia;
- Maintain all of the appropriate licences and the regulatory requirements;
- Train and develop their staff.

Over the past two years AMCA has been an active participant in two of the COAG initiated action groups dealing with mutual recognition of occupations.

- Plumbing occupations action group; and
- Electricians, Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Mechanics action group.

Taken overall we believe the outcome of both these action groups was only marginally productive. On the positive side, we now have much better documentation setting out the regulatory requirements of each of the State registration bodies. This will no doubt be of assistance to workers who seek to move around the country but it does not fundamentally change anything. On the negative side, there is still not free movement around the country for people who are engaged in some occupations, e.g., plumbers and refrigeration mechanics. In the case of plumbers there is no universally accepted definition of what are the skills/competencies required to be a plumber. Without being critical of any specific state, take one example. A registered plumber in Western Australia cannot be registered in Victoria without additional training. A second example is that a person can work in Victoria as a refrigeration mechanic without necessarily having completed a Certificate III qualification but irrespective of their experience, they cannot work under the same conditions in the occupation in New South Wales.

These comments do not take sides with any of the regulatory bodies. They are quoted to highlight the factual situation that exists.

Our experience with the COAG action groups over the past two years is that generally the regulatory bodies have given little ground by way of changing their systems and requirements to achieve a more practical outcome for industry and workers.

AMCA does accept that where genuine and demonstrable differences exist they should be incorporated into the regulatory system. However, we believe that in Australia these differences need to be around the margin and not central to the regulatory requirements.

AMCA is also concerned about the situation in some states where regulatory bodies require graduating apprentices to contest a regulatory body examination prior to be eligible for registration.

It is not clear whether the continuation of this approach is in response to a lack of confidence in the TAFE system or a desire to retain a position of power and influence. Either way the situation in our view needs to be addressed. The requirements of TAFE and the regulatory bodies need to be aligned and this duplication removed.

Taken overall, AMCA believes that a national licensing and regulatory framework is in the interests of business productivity. However, we do not believe the way to achieve it is to go to the lowest common denominator. A more rational approach is required. This is consistent with the association's support for national occupational health and safety and industrial relations laws.

The other matter that we wish to comment on is the national legislation governing the purchase, handling, use and disposal of synthetic greenhouse gases. The issues paper asks the question whether the permanent exclusion of this issue should remain. AMCA does not believe there are any factors that would lead to the view that the situation should alter. New Zealand may have slightly different requirements. If they do, then the permanent exclusion must remain. However, given that the release of synthetic greenhouse gases is a global issue it is likely that New Zealand will agree with the current Australian approach.

Representatives of the association are available to meet with representatives of the Productivity Commission should you wish us to expand on any of the points made in this submission.

Yours truly,

David Eynon
National Director