

1 September 2025

Hon Scott Simpson
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CC:
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Tēnā koe Minister Simpson

Recommendations to reform New Zealand's standards model

We would appreciate a meeting with you soon to discuss our collective recommendations to reform the current standards funding and development model.

Together the undersigned constitute a significant cross section of the engineering design, manufacturing, trade and construction representative bodies in New Zealand. We are calling for urgent reform to the standards system, starting with a review of the funding approach.

The Government needs to enable Standards New Zealand to provide a system that is fit for the 21st century. An effective system has standards that are up to date, accessible, affordable, modern, and technologically enabled. We appreciate the work MBIE and Standards New Zealand are doing in this space but more needs to be done at pace.

We are interested to note the recent announcement by Standards Australia on their advocacy for removing the paywall on their standards. They are advocating for a national standards access model for the construction sector to eliminate the cost and barriers to accessing standards mandated by laws. This sends a strong acknowledgement of the public good aspect to standards.

Requiring the industry to fund updates to standards (and volunteer their time to do it) and then having to buy the actual standards once they are developed is unreasonable. Our preference is for access to standards and system improvements to be publicly funded but the next best option is for existing industry levies to fund this system. We do acknowledge that the building levy pays for free access to some building and construction standards, but note this only applies to some NZ standards, and many commonly used standards are joint with Australia, requiring access fees.

We know you are fully across the challenges with the current system – so have focussed on recommendations for change, as discussed in the attached Appendix.

We would like to meet with you to help rapidly advance change to support the outcomes New Zealand needs. Improving the standards system will be vital to help realise the Government's reform agenda, particularly in improving New Zealand's infrastructure planning and delivery.

Noho ora mai



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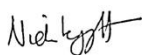

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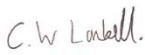

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Appendix

To reform the standards system, we recommend the following should occur

Prioritise reform by:

- Providing an actionable reform plan, with project scope, timeframes and consultation steps.
 - For some time, we have heard the Government is exploring a more sustainable and effective system, but there is no specificity or urgency.
- Organising workshops as soon as possible so that volunteers and industry groups with expert knowledge of the system can help Government officials expedite and shape the reform.
- Starting the reform with improving the funding model as soon as possible.
 - The preferred option is public funding to recognise the public good element to standards, with industry levies being an effective alternative/supplementary option – noting that levies may not work for all sectors.
 - This funding should be used to improve the system, remove cost burdens for access and reduce the reliance on volunteers (or at least fairly compensate them for their time).

Review access arrangements by:

- Making the access scheme fit for purpose by enabling purchase and access at an organisational level clear and effective.
- Improving use of standards through less expensive access arrangements.
 - The current expensive system has public safety risks – through adhoc use of free international standards, use of old standards or individual modification of international standards.
 - Make more or all standards free or heavily subsidised, especially essential construction ones and those cited in primary or secondary legislation.

Have a clear direction by:

- Providing a forward vision and work plan for standards use in New Zealand.
 - This should prioritise missing and outdated standards where risk is highest or innovation is needed most, fix the misalignment with the law and ensure updates are aligned with international best practice.
 - For example, there are over 140 standards related to water infrastructure. These standards are gradually lapsing into obsolescence or becoming disjointed from Australian standards due to lack of funding.

Make it easier to volunteer by:

- Reimbursing travel & accommodation costs for the essential technical volunteers.
 - By way of example, HERA has advised that their in-kind contribution from member's volunteer work (if charged at consulting rates) – is estimated as \$870,998 + GST annually, excluding any commissioning or purchasing fees
 - As a benchmark, Standards Australia reimburses 50% of IEC and ISO international travel costs for all Australian participants.
- Finding ways to make it easier and more accessible to volunteer.
 - Reduce or break up the time commitment required, utilise online platforms wherever possible and enable the ability to volunteer for set periods of time rather than requiring commitment across the full process which can take years.
 - Develop guidance to support volunteers through the development process, particularly international standards development.

Use international standards where it makes sense by:

- Adopting and integrating international standards more widely, where they reflect best practice and meet local needs.
- Having a clear system to test how international standards perform in the New Zealand environment.
- Clarifying the New Zealand/Australia alliance.
 - The abrupt de-jointing of standards with Australia has huge costs and is highly disruptive.

- Better balance the representation between New Zealand and Australia in joint standard development- ensuring balance in process, representation and costs for development.
- Better enabling access to international standards to support the changes to the Building Product Specifications changes.

Modernise and improve the system by:

- Supporting and enabling the use of AI.
 - On the job workers need real time answers to their questions, which technology can provide. This supports access and compliance and should be encouraged – not prevented by restrictive regulatory practices.
- Allowing previews or search functions to permit users to assess the relevance of a standard prior to purchasing it.
- Speeding up the standards ratification process.
- Exploring ways to reduce standards referring to other standards.
 - This practice creates a complex chain of required documents. Instances of this can be seen in NZS 1170.5:2004, NZS 3605:2001, and NZS 3404:1997.

Improve regulatory stewardship by:

- Establishing a formal process to keep legislative references current and improve transparency across government agencies.
 - Noting this will now be even harder for building standards with the three yearly building code updates.
- Exploring ways to update references outside of a formal legislative or regulatory process.
- Improving transparency by providing more information on what levies are spent on.

Better support government reforms by:

- Contributing to the success of wider Government reform (particularly resource management), which is moving towards greater use of national standards. Success will require a functioning standards system.
 - We think it is unlikely that central government agencies will have the capacity and capability to develop, maintain and update the increase of national standards arising from many Government reform programmes.