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IPENZ Actions to the Structural Task Force Report

The final structural engineering taskforce report was received by the governing Board of IPENZ on 11 November 2003. The report makes a number of recommendations in seven major areas.

Most of the recommendations relate at least in part to systemic or regulatory issues within the jurisdiction of the Building Act. The Building Bill, presently before the Government Administration Select Committee will improve the regulatory environment in a manner consistent with the recommendations of the taskforce. Areas in which there is a difference between the Bill and the taskforce recommendations have been addressed in the IPENZ submission to the Select Committee.

There are some actions that can be taken directly by IPENZ to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations:

1. Ensure that all applications for Chartered Professional Engineers registration in the structural practice field are assessed by competent structural engineers drawing on the expertise of the Structural Engineering Society (Note: applicants in the structural practice field must be able to demonstrate their claimed competence within this field, although there is a broad range of levels of competence ranging from competence in a broader civil engineering field to complex major structures)
2. Developing a culture of identifying, complaining about and disciplining poor performers. Whilst no complaints against Chartered Professional Engineers have yet been received we are generally experiencing more complaints against IPENZ Members from the public. It is still a relatively rare however to receive a complaint from a Member about the competence of a fellow Member.
3. Conveying advice to Members on their ethical responsibilities if they become aware of buildings posing significant and immediate risks to the public. This includes the processes to be followed when commenting on another engineer's work.
4. Seeking further funding to perform practice review work and for the development of Codes of Practice.

In respect of item 1, actions to ensure stringent evaluation of the competence of structural engineers have already been taken. In the last year we have improved the quality assurance processes and training procedures for assessors. We are seeking to expand the number and quality of trained assessors within the structural engineering practice field and have informed the Structural Engineering Society that we would welcome their assistance in identifying suitable engineers prepared to undergo assessor training.

In respect of item 2, whenever Members seek advice from National Office about how they should proceed when they come across any engineering work that concerns them we are making stronger recommendations that their concerns be formed into a complaint if the matter is not trivial. We have also changed the Institution rules in December 2002 to make it clear that complaints on competence can be made as well as complaints on ethics of Members.

In respect of item 3, we have published specific ethical advice to our Members in their regular periodical publications on what they should do if they are aware of a building that poses significant and immediate risk. We note that during their enquiries and those of staff supporting the taskforce's investigations no specific building was identified by any engineer in this respect.

In respect of item 4, we are already actively seeking funding because we do not consider that Member subscriptions should be called on to do the bulk of such work.

Dr Andrew Cleland
Chief Executive
24 November 2003