



THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS

Founded 1918

QUEENSLAND GROUP – AUSTRALIA

Established in Queensland 1936

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DISCUSSION PAPER

FORMATION OF A *FIRE ENGINEERING* ACCREDITATION BODY WITHIN IFE AUSTRALIA

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DISCUSSION PAPER FORMATION OF A FIRE ENGINEERING ACCREDITATION BODY WITHIN IFE AUSTRALIA

PREAMBLE

The last 12 months has been spent researching the need for fire safety engineers within the building industry and the accreditation bodies that accept appropriate levels of qualification, expertise and experience so that a person can be deemed to be *competent*.

Information has been obtained from the Board of Professional Engineers, Queensland, The Institution of Engineers, Australia and The Building Surveyors and Allied Professions Board.

Several seminars were attended, in particular, the seminar on appropriate qualifications conducted by the Institution of Engineers, Australia in Brisbane.

IFE Members who have recently obtained post-graduate qualifications in fire safety engineering have been turned away from the established professional organisations such as the Institution of Engineers, Australia and the Professional Engineers Registration Board of Queensland because-

- a) the IFE applicant does not have a recognised undergraduate qualification; or
- b) the IFE applicant does not fit any definition within the organisations structure; or
- c) The IFE applicant is considered not to be appropriately qualified (*incompetent?*).

The Institution of Engineers, Australia is “exclusive” in relation to the acceptance of qualifications for registration.

DEMAND

There is an urgent demand for qualified and experienced fire safety practitioners throughout Australia as a result of the introduction of the performance building code of Australia – BCA96. The present number of practitioners working in the Queensland building construction industry is not meeting this demand.

Universities, such as the University of Western Sydney, The Queensland University of Technology and the Victoria University of Technology have recognised the importance of training in the fire engineering disciplines and are providing postgraduate courses.

The Queensland Group is frequently approached by Surveyors and Certifiers to provide advice on whom is a *competent* person and where a competent person can be found. Surveyors and Certifiers see the Institution of Fire Engineers as the Institution where fire engineers can be found, primarily because of the name “*Fire Engineers*”.

WHERE ARE THE COMPETENT FIRE ENGINEERS?

Surveyors and Certifiers are being frustrated by a general lack of support from the bodies that are seen as providing the *fire engineers*, particularly our own institution.

Building Surveyors and Certifiers, responsible for the “sign off” of a completed building cannot inspect and check the fire safety installations within buildings because they are not *competent* in this field.

Surveyors and Certifiers, therefore, rely on competent persons designing, inspecting and certifying *port ions* of the building on their behalf e.g. fire safety systems, however, competent fire engineers are not readily available.

Engineers, qualified in other disciplines e.g. mechanical, electrical, civil etc., are now practicing in the new discipline of *fire engineering* to fulfil this demand.

ACCREDITATION - THE CURRENT SCENE

Two accreditation bodies now offer accreditation in the field of fire safety engineering. These bodies are-

The Institution of Engineers, Australia
Building Surveyors and Allied Professions Board.

Research has been undertaken into accreditation bodies who have an interest in Fire Safety Engineering. The current situation is-

The Institution of Engineers, Australia

The institution of Engineers, Australia has failed to meet the expectations of Building Surveyors and Certifiers, and its own membership within the Society of Fire Safety because-

- Delay in the provision of a pathway for its members who do not have undergraduate qualifications in *engineering* but who have practiced in design of fire systems for buildings for many years and who have appropriate qualifications in the fire engineering field;
- Lack of the provision of a readily assessable reference list of accredited fire engineers and their areas of expertise.

The Building Surveyors and Allied Professions Board

BSAP has commenced a level of accreditation of Fire Safety Engineers. Whilst this is commendable, it appears that this level of registration is designed for building surveyors or certifiers who also have post graduate qualifications in fire engineering.

The Professional Engineers Registration Board of Queensland

This Board is only now realising the discipline of Fire Engineering. An application for registration is rejected if accreditation in the discipline of fire engineering is being applied for.

The Institution of Fire Engineers

On a fragmented basis, IFE has been successful in obtaining recognition in NSW and Queensland, AT STATE LEVEL.

Queensland provides an annual list of *fire system Certifiers* to the Department of Local Government.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Which professional body should be responsible for the accreditation of Fire Engineers? The traditional “engineers” i.e. Mechanical, Electrical and the like are claiming the rights to “Fire Engineer” and “Fire Engineering”. These “services” engineering bodies require an applicant for accreditation to have the core grounding in traditional engineering subjects applicable to their engineering disciplines.

Where do we go from here? We have a number of choices. We can-

Lobby the Institution of Engineers, Australia for formal recognition of the IFE qualifications as Graduate engineer qualifications; or

We can lobby BSAP for recognition as their name suggests that we are an ALLIED PROFESSION; or

We can structure our own level of accreditation within the IFE.

RECOMMENDATION

If we are to be a truly recognised force in Australia, we must claim the title “Fire Engineer” now and move to set up a register of competent persons skilled in various levels of fire engineering.

The IFE has been in this Country since 1936. Fortunately or unfortunately, we have always played a passive role. It’s now time to lead and to establish our presence.

It is now time for the IFE to move forward to provide a service to the building industry. This service, in the initial stages, can be the accreditation of building professionals engaged in the multifaceted discipline of “Fire Engineering”.

PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION BY IFE AUSTRALIA

The IFE Qld. Group proposes to proceed with a “Register of Fire Safety Practitioners”. The term “Practitioners “ will include-

Persons who are regularly engaged in the design of Fire Safety systems for buildings.
Persons who are appropriately qualified in the area of registration.
Persons who are covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance to the value of \$5Million.
Persons who are corporate members of IFE Australia.

The proposed levels of accreditation are-

COMPETENCY LEVEL 3 - FIRE SAFETY ENGINEER

Skilled in the formulation of Level 1, level 2 and level 3 analyses described by the Fire Engineering Guidelines.

Must be a corporate member of IFE with a current acceptable level of Professional Indemnity Insurance.

Must be engaged in Continuing Professional Development.

Skilled in the interpretation of the Deemed-To-Satisfy provisions of the Building Code of Australia and applicable Australian Standards.

COMPETENCY LEVEL 2 - FIRE ENGINEER

Skilled in the interpretation of the Deemed-To-Satisfy provisions of the Building Code of Australia and applicable Australian Standards.

Must be a corporate member of IFE with a current acceptable level of Professional Indemnity Insurance.

Must be engaged in Continuing Professional Development.

COMPETENCY LEVEL 1 - FIRE SAFETY INSTALLER

Must be a graduate of IFE or a similar institution.

Skilled in the interpretation, installation, testing, commissioning and maintenance of performance based alternative building solutions in relation to fire safety systems.

Skilled in the interpretation, installation, testing, commissioning and maintenance of Deemed-To-Satisfy fire safety systems.

Must be engaged in Continuing Professional Development.

Each person “accredited” by IFE Qld. Group will be provided with a registration number (and membership card) applicable to the level of accreditation provided.

Accreditation must be renewed annually.

Registration details will be placed on the IFE Qld. Group web site for access by Surveyors and Certifiers and any other interested persons.

ENABLING PROGRAMME

Before the IFE Qld. Group can proceed with this proposal, all members must be protected from litigation. The following must be put in place-

- IFE Qld. Group must be incorporated in the State of Queensland (in progress).
- IFE Qld. Group must have in place a Professional Indemnity Insurance Policy (In progress).
- IFE Qld. Group must have in place a Public Liability Insurance Policy (in progress).

IFE Qld. Group proposes to produce the "Accreditation Model" and to forward this model to IFE Australia at some future time to be managed at the national level.

Chris Odgers.