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The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# Managing the Flow

**Regulating plumbing product quality**

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

September 2007  
Canberra

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## Foreword

While we might be tempted to consign the issue of plumbing product quality, and the regulation thereof, to the realm of technical professionals and legislative drafters, the Committee would argue that a failure to adequately control the manufacture, importation, sale and installation of plumbing products could have serious public health and environmental implications for Australia.

The environmental significance of the effective regulation of plumbing product quality is crucial, both in safeguarding Australia's scarce water resources from avoidable contamination and providing the foundation for water savings. Ultimately, we would hope, it could also contribute to longer-term sustainability goals.

The Committee was alarmed to hear evidence about the role that plumbing products of sub-standard quality can play in the spread of dangerous diseases. For example, during the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong in 2000, the failure of plumbing products at Amoy Gardens permitted the further spread of the disease. Cases like these highlight how vital it is to control the quality of plumbing products throughout Australia.

It was, therefore, disappointing and troubling that evidence to the Committee revealed deficiencies in the current regulatory arrangements for plumbing product quality. The Committee felt that the lack of coordination between State/Territory jurisdictions and, indeed, even between the national mandatory schemes (Water Efficiency Labelling Standards and WaterMark Certification), is a problem for industry, consumers and the Australian community.

There is a pressing need for improvements to be made to the cohesion, consistency, understanding and enforcement of the current regulatory arrangements for controlling plumbing product quality.

Dr Mal Washer  
Chair





## Membership of the Committee

Chair            Dr Mal Washer MP

Deputy Chair   Ms Jennie George MP

Members        Mr Russell Broadbent MP

                    The Hon Warren Entsch MP

                    Ms Kelly Hoare MP

                    Mr Harry Jenkins MP

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## Terms of reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage will inquire into the regulation of plumbing product quality in Australia, examining in particular:

- the appropriateness and effectiveness of the current plumbing product quality regulatory arrangements
- scale of environmental benefits from controlling plumbing product quality
- trade implications of controlling plumbing product quality
- potential improvements to the plumbing quality regulatory system
- the appropriate level of government to administer plumbing product quality regulation, that is, the states (as is now) or the Commonwealth.





## List of abbreviations

AEEMA	Australian Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association
APCB	Australian Plumbing Codes Board
AS/NZS	Australian Standard/New Zealand Standard
ATS	Australian Technical Standards
CAB	Conformity Assessment Body
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
HIA	Housing Industry Association
MPMSAA	Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
NPAA	National Plumbing Associations Alliance
NPRF	National Plumbing Regulators Forum
PCA	Plumbing Code of Australia
PIAC	Plumbing Industry Advisory Council
PIPA	Plastics Industry Pipe Association of Australia Ltd
PPI	Plumbing Products Industry
SA	Standards Australia
WSAA	Water Services Association of Australia

WELS      Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards

WMCS      WaterMark Certification Scheme



# List of recommendations

## 2 Regulating plumbing product quality

### Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of the Environment and Water Resources, in consultation with industry and the community, take immediate action to progress their investigation and to implement appropriate minimum water efficiency standards for all plumbing products under the WELS Scheme.

### Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government act to make the necessary legislative changes to establish WaterMark Certification as a prerequisite for compliance with the Water Efficiency Labelling Standards Scheme.

### Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department of the Environment and Water Resources examine its current enforcement practices for the WELS Scheme.

### Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the National Plumbing Regulators Forum, take a lead role in exploring, in consultation with government and industry stakeholders, options to improve the audit and enforcement profile for ensuring plumbing product quality in Australia.

### Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that COAG explore options for constituting a national coordinating body that can take responsibility for improving the coordination and cohesion of regulatory arrangements for controlling plumbing product quality in Australia, including the mandatory schemes, relevant standards and their application across jurisdictions.

