



Plumbers Licensing Board
Government of Western Australia

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Dr Mal Washer MP
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Secretary:	XV

**INQUIRY INTO THE REGULATION OF PLUMBING PRODUCT QUALITY
IN AUSTRALIA**

Dear Dr Washer

The Plumbers Licensing Board responds to your Committee's call for submissions to assist you in your Inquiry into the regulation of plumbing product quality in Australia

The Plumbers Licensing Board in Western Australia (PLB) licenses the plumbing trade and the regulation of its work standards to safeguard the lifestyle and sustainability of this State's community and environment. Our regulations provide that any plumbing work, undertaken by a licensed person, carries a statutory workmanship guarantee of 6 years from the completion of that work for consumers and business.

PLB has therefore a fundamental interest in the quality of any component plumbing fixture or fitting, that a licensed plumber installs, as components of a water supply, sanitary or drainage plumbing system serving the needs of their customers.

PLB looks to the Committee to recommend outcomes from the Inquiry that will ensure that the interests of consumers' health, safety and their environment is not compromised by allowing inferior or inappropriate plumbing products to enter the national market

Gaps in protection at the national level result in the role of quality controller defaulting to local plumbers. From time to time customers, such as builders, owner builders and traders propose that a variety of inappropriate and unsuitable products are installed by the plumber. These products are sourced via import, the internet or hardware store or by other means. These may or may not carry the Commonwealth's WELS Star rating.

PLB is of the view that a plumber's role should be to advise and expertly install the most efficient plumbing product given the job requirements and the customer's budget. The range of choice should only be from accredited ie quality endorsed plumbing products

PLB wants these plumbing products to carry the industry recognised WaterMark verifying agreed testing standards for product quality in terms of engineering, material type, sizing and integrity and also where a relevant water saving product is concerned, the water efficient WELS Star rating.

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The WELS rated products such as toilets, shower heads, clothes and dishwashing machines and the like fall in the categories specified under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth's *Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2004* and recently harmonised State legislation.

The Western Australian Government has recently launched a 5 Star plus housing program that specifies the installation of WELS rated products in all new houses from 1 September 2007. Stage 2 of that initiative will see the design of homes to be grey water ready and able to access alternate sources of water from tanks and bores that do not fall under the harmonised legislation.

These sustainability measures convince PLBWA that as the community becomes more reliant on increasingly complex and specialised plumbing systems that regulations and supporting mechanisms governing plumbing product quality are needed at both the State and national level.

PLB applauds the National Plumbing Regulators Forum (NPRF) for its work and demands of Standards Australia for an ongoing quality assessment and technical report on plumbing products seeking accreditation in Australia. It appears however that some WELS Star rated plumbing products do not carry the WaterMark. This is a gap in the current arrangements that causes confusion in consumers minds and adversely impacts on service delivery by plumbers.

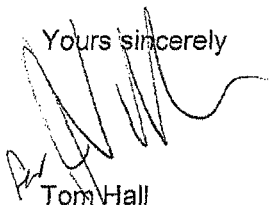
PLB urges the Inquiry to pursue this matter and ascertain from Standards Australia its business plans for WaterMark. PLB also notes that a rival Smart Approved Water mark brand has drawn funding from the Commonwealth in advancing other water saving products that are not covered by the WELS Stars rating. This situation further adds to the dilemma for licensed plumbers in dealing with plumbing products and needs to be clarified in the Inquiry's Report.

In summary the view of PLB is that all plumbing products in Australia carry, as a mandatory requirement, a nationally recognised quality endorsement for the protection of the community and support of the plumbing trade. This quality endorsement should be standardised with minimum product quality specifications agreed to by the NPRF. Water saving products that fall within the scope of WELS Star ratings would be subject to these arrangements.

Should you or your committee require any further information in these matters please do not hesitate to contact me or the PLB Executive Officer Ms Jean Villani on (08) 9282 4371.

I look forward to the recommendations and outcomes from your Inquiry in this important community matter.

Yours sincerely



Tom Hall
Chairperson
17 August 2007