

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Building and Construction Industry Inquiry

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Submitter: Mr Frank D'Agostino
Director

Organisation: Collingwood Building Services Pty Ltd

Address: 162 Nicholson Street
ABBOTSFORD VIC 3067

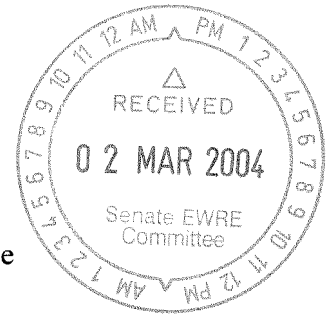
Phone:

Fax:

Email:

13th February, 2004

Mr. John Carter,
Secretary
Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



I am writing to you in my capacity as Director of Collingwood Building Services Pty Ltd, a company providing plumbing and associated works to the commercial and industrial building industry in Victoria and Queensland.

My name is Frank Michael D'Agostino and I have had an active participation in the building industry for thirty years firstly as an employee of a major national building company as an accountant for thirteen years, and since 1985 as Managing Director and shareholder in my present company, Collingwood Building Services Pty Ltd.

Although I am not from a trade background I believe that the absolute most important asset the company and industry has is the tradespeople we employ and the skills and training these people bring to what is a dangerous, demanding and critically important industry.

We currently employ 90 tradespeople and apprentices with this figure fluctuating to as high as 120 during peak project times.

All our employees are covered by a certified EBA.

We treat the EBA as a set of minimum conditions and believe that those employees possessing qualities beyond the norm can be rewarded accordingly and as such we have a number of employees paid above the EBA agreed rates.

We view the current EBA system as a very important part of our industry for the following key reasons:

- (a) Industry stability as to wage structures.
- (b) Stable conditions attract good quality employees
- (c) Tendering is fairer and on a level playing field.
- (d) Enables management to be more certain of cost structures and increases on long projects.
- (e) Indirectly promotes innovation as a means of gaining tendering advantages.
- (f) Protects and enhances safety for all involved.

We have over the years been involved in projects where some of the subcontractors on site have not been covered by an EBA and in every case those particular sites have been poorly run with "shortcuts" taken especially in the area of safety and quality and with many unqualified workers engaged in performing substandard and at times dangerous work practices.

We acknowledge that the EBA system in our industry does have some problems that we would like to have addressed. A construction site comprises many different trades and as such many different EBAs apply. We would like to have a more universal approach to standardizing some interpretations as to things like inclement weather, working hours, EBA expiry dates and training requirements. Each subcontractor is so heavily reliant on other trades on site that these sometimes inconsistencies make it difficult to co-ordinate work flows.

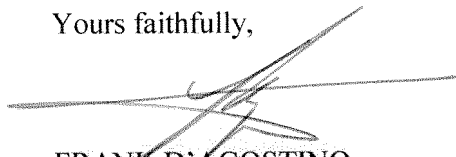
It must be said that the last two EBA rounds have gone along way to addressing this problem, however more needs to be done.

It must also be said that the level of disputation in our industry leading to lost time and production is significantly lower than it once was. How much the EBA system has contributed to this is difficult to say however we are sure it is a major contributing factor.

I strongly believe in the EBA system and I believe that it has greatly benefited our industry. Our industry has matured since the "bad old days" of the seventies and eighties and this is due to a more cop-operative approach between contractors, subcontractors, clients and unions. Employees now enjoy better work conditions, subcontractors enjoy greater certainty in both tendering and probable outcomes and clients enjoy projects completed as scheduled.

Why we would be contemplating changes as muted in the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill 2003 is hard to understand. Politics aside, I can see no reason for the proposed changes but rather can see a plethora of reasons as to why they should be discarded.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'FRANK D'AGOSTINO', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

FRANK D'AGOSTINO
DIRECTOR