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**IN OTHER NEWS**

**Letters to the Editor**



**Dear Editor**

You may or may not have read the Board's Info Brief where the Deputy Chairperson of the Board defended the Board's Travel to Australia by stating:

*"The only travel we can identify that they may have been referring to was in fact a series of meetings in Australia nine years ago when members of the Board and staff travelled to Australia to progress the Trans-Tasman training package that was proposed at the time."*

Is this the same Training Package that the Armstrong report deemed was outside the functions of the Board and the Board had no statutory right to be involving itself in the activity of providing training?

Whether training or holiday which happened to coincide with meetings, it would seem it was still an activity the Board should not have been involved in. Perhaps the Board should go running to the Minister and get him to change the law to say the money was legally spent!

**We NEED Governance!**



Remember when the Americas Cup was enjoyable to watch? A time when sailors ran it and it was all about the competition and them applying their skills in their sport, and then the lawyers got involved and now more time is spent in the court room than on the water.

Much the same has happened with our industry - everything ran smoothly when it was run by trade's people but since bureaucrats and lawyers have got involved, the industry is slowly being destroyed. The egos of people, who are in positions of authority and have been appointed beyond their levels of understanding, are dragging the industry down.

It seems to be that the Board and others cast doubt on the skills and abilities of the industry, so there is no end to the things they can fail at without being noticed. The Board and secretariat have continually done that over the last decade by interfering with the training system, which is now nonexistent and is purely an assessment scheme; by imposing CPD and by using discipline as a measure of success.

We have ended up with a secretariat where even the most lowly paid are earning similar wages to qualified trades people. Where the CEO earns five times more than the average wage for a plumber, gasfitter, and drainlayer. Where a technical manager earns twice as much, and all they manage is the bureaucracy, and where lawyers earning anywhere from one and a half times, to five times, the average wage of a tradesperson. We have to ask ourselves how the hell this ended up like this.

The big question is what does the secretariat and Board ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTE to the industry? We believe the answer is NOTHING. You see there are NO measurements of success with regard to industry performance hence the reason the Board puts so much emphasis on discipline and prosecutions, it's an easy way to cast doubt on our abilities whilst hiding behind their own incompetence.

It's claimed by the Board and bureaucrats that their regulation of the industry protects OUR reputation as an industry. That may have been the case at one time, but now the Board's regulation is CREATING the problem it claims it is fighting - non registered or non licensed people operating in the industry. It's a prime example of bureaucracy at work.

Let's look at the last decade. We have had the Board trying to get involved in the training of the industry which was outside their legislative responsibilities (ref the Armstrong Report). Hundreds of thousands of industry dollars were wasted. We had a Continuing Professional Development Scheme implemented and operated for 8 years WITHOUT statutory authority and a situation now where the scheme is still believed to be without authority but political influence is holding up the allegations being addressed.

The last decade has seen discipline and prosecutions fund the building of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board empire. What does it tell you about an organisation and the way they operate when licensing is DOWN 12% in one year, and they have to install security doors to protect their staff from the perceived danger imposed by practitioners?

**Does your opinion count?**

In addition I find it very difficult to see how the actions of the Federation in voicing their opinions and facts can reflect badly on those working in the industry?

Perhaps those that Mr Jackson claims called him, have a guilty conscience that they have backed the Board and its unlawful activities?

These people need to realise that even though the Government is changing the law to cover the Board's Illegal activities, it doesn't make them right - it only makes them legal.

Mr Jackson stated:

*"In line with your feedback from the recent survey, the Board has made significant progress in recent years. The Board has already implemented the majority of the recommendations contained in the report from the Office of the Auditor General."*

That comment seems strange in that I am sure the OAG Report stated the Board should act lawfully, all their regulations should be lawful, they should become trusted by the industry and form better relationships with them.

Looks like they must have forgotten about those particular recommendations!

And to state; "The Board is disappointed that again we are all subject to misleading information being used to undermine public confidence in the industry and those working in it" is very rich when there is still confidence in the trades people just no confidence in the Board and others helping with the destruction of the industry.

Keep up the good effort Federation as the people behind you are growing daily.

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**Dear Editor**

I read the Minister of Tertiary Education,



We read recently that the Secretariat informed the Board that during consultation on "Fees and Levies" only 1% of the industry responded. In their opinion those who disagreed with the Board were more likely to respond than those that didn't, so the 106 responses received did not present the Board with any evidence

of significant opposition to the review. Perhaps they misread the fact that the Board has ignored the industry so much over the last decade that the industry didn't want to waste time responding to the Board.

With regard to the fees and levy review the secretariat said "The fact that the Board's proposal did not attract a good number of submissions can be regarded as an indicator that the proposal is not unpopular". If this attitude is taken with all consultation then it is no wonder the Board have lost their credibility and are heading decidedly in the wrong direction.

Mr Jackson's statement in the July issue of "The Info Brief" implying the Federation is undermining public confidence in the industry is a prime example of them casting doubt on the industry, in an effort to cover other issues which the Board has failed with - such as the legality of setting the fess and levies, being a Registered Charity and implementing double CPD points without following legislated procedures (this is still the subject of a complaint).

With regard to the Registered Charity status of the Board we seem to remember Mr Bickers denying there being any Fringe Benefit tax issues. We read recently that the 2005 annual financial reports were delayed due to the Board getting charitable status which entitled the Board to a refund on GST paid on the "**Fringe Benefit Tax**". The accounts show the Board received a Fringe Benefit Refund of \$173,498 for the year ended 31 March 2005. Remember also the money now being spent on appealing the Charities Commission decision, tens of thousands of dollars (and this is only coming from one place – money YOU have paid).

We noted also that in 2004, \$122,686 was spent on "projects", and the projects were for "registration, licensing, and the Board". When the books were reviewed the reviewer was of the opinion the information provided was not sufficiently transparent to allow the reviewer to make a judgement on the nature of this "project" spending.

How much money has had to be spent of dealing with past issues?

Obviously the Board will say this is all history, but to us it has all occurred within the last decade and has coincided with an increase in our fees and levies and a decrease in industry numbers and capability. The latest debacle of the Government removing our democratic rights, and their changing the law to cover the Board's "mistake in law" is yet another example of the bureaucratic blunders that have occurred under this Board's watch.

The Board have stated they have no Governance role over the industry. This leaves the industry in a situation where you have a "consumer protection" agency (PGDB) and a training administrator (the Skills Organisation) making the decisions that affect the industry, unabated.

Look at how the balance has changed and responsibilities have moved. In days gone by training was provided for apprentices to get national continuity and now the onus of ALL training is on the employer and the ITO simply provides an administrative and assessment service at a huge cost. In our opinion apprenticeship training has hit an all time low. The current working groups looking at the "new look" qualification does not have anywhere near the number of working practitioners taking part to ensure that the qualification represents the needs of industry. The whole exercise seems to be more about Skills getting the Government and NZQA's boxes ticked to ensure ongoing funding rather than addressing the needs of industry and its customers going forward.

Stephen Joyce is failing to meet his own better public service targets. His attempts to get more New Zealanders qualified to level 4 are missing the mark.

Is this where the pressure is coming from for the ITO to pass people?

It seems to me it is all about money and pass numbers rather than about producing people that can do the job.

The 2017 target of 45,000 people aged between 25-34 achieving a level 4 or higher qualification has about a 25% projected shortfall.

Treasury predicts the Government will fall 11,250 people short of their better public service target.

Where do we fit into all of this? All I see is partially trained people being told they are qualified. No disrespect to the trainees as it's not their fault; it's the system letting them down.

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**Dear Editor**

You have to laugh. The Board had this posted on their website

### **Special notice about office closure following Wellington earthquakes**

*For the following reasons, the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board will be closed until Wednesday morning, and possibly for longer. We will post further information about when the Board will reopen as it becomes available.*

*Following the earthquakes that Wellington has experienced, the building where the Board is located needs to be assessed for damage. The building manager has advised tenants to stay out until an assessment has been completed and we have been advised it is safe to return.*

*We will return all messages when we can but that may*

The barrier to ordinary members of our industries taking part is money – if you want to lend your expertise then you have to pay for the privilege of doing so, i.e. if you are in Auckland and want to offer your expertise then you need to give up a day's work and pay your own travel to and from Wellington. Does this seem fair? No we do not believe so.

Essentially then we are left with groups that represent educators (who will be selling us their expertise through block courses eventually), and government agencies (NZQA), TA's, and representatives of organisations like Master Plumbers who pay for their representatives to attend – and lastly Wellington based practitioners, who bless them can afford to pay the petrol to drive into town and the exorbitant parking fees! Is this a good cross section of industry – NO it is not.

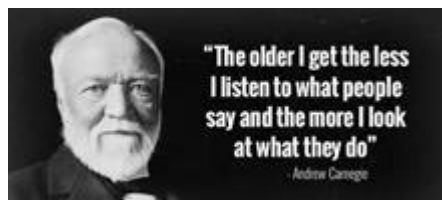
The Board's CPD scheme is implemented to cover the inadequacies of apprenticeship training. CPD is supposedly for "identified" training needs which are "necessary", but look at the recent release of the new gas certification scheme where it is imperative all gas fitters know about the new systems - what has been done about mandatory training, absolutely nothing! Of all the examples we could give this one shows a gaping hole. Gasfitters are crying out for information – they are concerned, frustrated and in some cases even a bit scared of the new system and what it means for them. Do we see any requirement by the PGDB to ensure gasfitters upskill in this area which does have an implication for the consumer? No, we have heard very little other than a regurgitation of what ESS is putting out.

It has been left to individuals to interpret the regulations and suffer the consequences of prosecution if they get it wrong. Practitioners are being advised to seek advice from their lawyers! Quite simply if the user of the legislation can't understand it then it is poor legislation. (Given the Government's recent history of poor legislation perhaps we were hoping for too much when it comes to getting it right this time.)

The new gas certificate regime is a prime example of the bureaucrats not listening to the industry. Did anyone think of the \$600,000 plus of industry money that was spent on the Board's computerised gas certificate scheme which is now redundant? We know of two INDUSTRY led meetings held in the Wellington region to try and make sense of the new regulations. Simply gasfitters "doing it for themselves."

The nature of the regulations and their implementation has seen discussions held regarding the formation of a "Prosecutions Support Group" to aid practitioners when the Board and Energy Safety Services have a go at them. A great idea by the individual who thought of the idea but he has opted out, so the Federation is going to build on this concept and introduce it for all of our trades.

### **Action not words**



Why doesn't the Board spend more time helping the industry instead of finding legal ways to weasel around the intent of the Act? Why does the ITO simply provide assessments instead of training? Why does the Minister interpret the Act in a

manner that he has a personal consumer protection Board?

We believe the time has come for practitioners to take BACK CONTROL of the industry and form its own Industry Board consisting of people FROM the industry FOR the industry. We don't care if you are a Federation Member or a Master Plumbers member, or not a member of either industry group. It's time for those that WANT our industry to return to its rightful status to step up and be counted!

The Federation wants to start by getting the names of people who are interested in forming a Board. **We want people that are passionate about standards in plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying, who really care**

take a few days. We ask for your patience and understanding in all the circumstances. We apologise for the inconvenience this causes you.

How would you tell they are there or not? We can't get in because of their bomb blast doors. Go the Federation!

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**Dear Editor**

I read with disgust the internal promotion of an existing board staff member to Team Leader Technical Services. I just can't believe some of the decisions made in that place. Are they on a mission to self destruct?

I see also we have a Team Leader Registration and Licensing. Jez what size are these teams that we need team leaders?

Surely it's not that busy that we have huge teams doing these tasks?

**Ed:** Most organisations have a supervisory factor built into their pay rates so the more direct reports you have the more you get paid.

So it is probably a situation where the managers or CEO will benefit from the titles that have been bestowed on these individuals.

In effect two people can make a team but it does seem a bit overboard to have team leaders for a couple of people but as mentioned above someone will be benefiting from the appointments. .

We think it would be more important that the Board look at the industry perception of individuals and take that into account when appointing individuals as trust goes a long way to good working relationships.

**about the direction these industries are heading and who are willing to put something back in.** We are going to continue on with the electronic communication system that the existing committee has been using for the last three years with great success. So there will be no flying around the country - wasting time and money, but there will be a forum where we can all have our say and vote on a majority rules basis.

What skills do we want? It's not skills we want, its ideas and opinions, so we want to see apprentices, sole traders, managers, business owners, supporters and not to forget wives and partners who are often the backbone to the small NZ business. The issues affect us ALL, so everyone should have an opportunity to participate in resolving the issues.

The administration committee will coordinate the issues identified by the Industry Board. The processes and procedures are yet to be established and that will be some of the first issues to be dealt with by the Industry Board.

What we need at this stage is a brief description of who you are if you wish to be part of the Board. Contacts details are a must. Here 's an example:

**Tap Faucet:** *I am a third year plumbing and gasfitting apprentice, based in Auckland. I am disgusted in the apprenticeship scheme and welcome the opportunity to participate in the industry Governance in particular I would welcome the opportunity to sit on any apprentice and training committee.*

The Federation has put in a lot of work over the last two and a half years and is not going to succumb to the Industrial Exclusion tactics being used by the Board and the Government. The time is right for us all to stand together and make the difference needed to return this industry to where it should be.

Enough excuses by the Board and government, enough wastage of industry money, enough wastage of industry time, enough of their deceit. We want action, not talk about action.

This is what we WILL do:

- Make the Board and Government ACCOUNTABLE
- Increase Industry Participation
- Tackle Excessive Expenditure
- Ensure Better Decisions
- Ensure Past Issues Are Addressed
- Strengthen the Industry
- Ensure Relevance in Training
- Make Your Opinion Count

It's up to us to make the difference as no one will do it for us.

So in essence we are calling for volunteers to form an Industry Board and practitioners who would be willing to be part of a Gasfitting Prosecutions Support Group, A Plumbing Prosecutions Support Group and a Drainlayers Prosecutions support group.