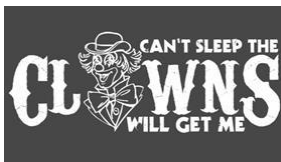


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**IN OTHER NEWS**

**Letters to the Editor**



Some people have a real fear of clowns and find them quite creepy and scary. In fact there is a name for fear of clowns – Coulrophobia!

Is it possible the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board are using that fear to impose their policies on the industry?

I was at Napier when Mr Bickers took exception to the Board being called a bunch of “clowns.” Quite frankly I would have to agree with the person who made the comment, as many did on the night.

We are three years down the track from that meeting and the situation is worse than ever.

Is the government going to do something about it or do we

**Board Chairman, Mr Alan Bickers Retires**



Mr Alan Bickers, the Chairman of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board has announced his retirement from the Board effective January 2014.

In the December issue of the Board’s “Info Brief” he stated:

*"This is my final column. I will be retiring from the*

*Board in January 2014, due to personal reasons. When I accepted the role of Chair, I set out to restore the reputation of the Board as a fair and responsible regulator in the public interest".*

Quite a profound statement and we looked forward to reading his opinion as to if he achieved what had been stated - but it didn't come. What he wrote instead was how he believed the Act was unnecessarily complicated which made it difficult for trade's people and the Board. That differs from our opinion - we believe the Act is fine and any problems are caused by people trying to manipulate it to fit their ideas.

He made mention about how the Board had worked diligently to resolve the legacy issues they inherited, but made no mention of the legacy issues they had created. He stated CPD was now a way of life for licensed trades people. To us this proves they are not in touch both reality and the industry.

Mr Bickers added:

*"The technical difficulties with funding of disciplinary actions and prosecutions have been addressed by Parliament; where both the problem and solution lay".*

So in his opinion the unlawful taking of money from the industry by the Board was a technical issue and was not the Board's fault. Looks like he lays the blame squarely with the Government!

The only statement we agreed with from Mr Bickers column was this one:

*"From my observations the majority of trades people are competent, ethical and responsible - but there is a proportion of the industry who are not and bring it into disrepute. Regulation of trades is therefore essential in order to protect the public from the actions of this minority, which is key to the Board's purpose".*

rename the Beehive as the Big Top and John Key can be the Ringmaster, with Minister Williamson his ever trusty sidekick, complete with Ute, dog and cell phone jokes?

**Ed:** You have summed up the situation very well.

Early on in the Federation's life, September 2010, the Federation produced this picture and caption.



### **Beehive Renamed**

*It's been announced this week that the Beehive will be renamed Turtle House. This is keeping in tune with the nature of the occupants. It's no longer a hive of activity but more a place of refuge.*

*The iconic Turtle House, where all New Zealand politicians can wait for it to be safe before venturing out to speak to the people they have let down. Turtle House has its own serviced hotel rooms (with video), private travel agency and credit cards are accepted and expected.*

So based on his own statement why does the entire industry get punished for the actions of a few?

So what is in store for the industry now? Well it is up to the Board to vote for a new Chairperson at its first meeting. This will be a critical vote and the Board should realise there is a division in the industry between industry organisations. To vote a member of one of the organisations into the Chairperson's position would obviously create conflict, as the neutrality of the members is already in question.

One legacy issue not addressed by the Board is the relationship with the industry. We strongly believe the failure of the Board is due to its stance that they are established in the public's interest and they have no governance over the industry. We do not believe that was the intent of the Act and has resulted in an interpretation being taken which has failed.

If the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board doesn't have a leadership or governance role then why is it funded by the industry, why is it deemed to be a Statutory Board, and why has the Act stipulated there must be trades people on the Board?

It is only ten years ago we had a respected and cost effective Board, but when people wanted to empire build the entire system lost the plot, the Board and the ITO started to sink to the levels they are at now. They lost the respect and trust of the industry and relied upon the support of Master Plumbers and the fear factor of discipline. Now they know no better.

From the Federation's perspective, we can only prepare for the inevitable as we have seen and heard it all before. Perhaps if we can't view Mr Bickers tenure as an example then we should look at it as a warning. Only unity will help us get fairness and equality and help hold others to account.

### **Time to think of a different approach**



As mentioned above the Board's relationship with the industry is unstable, so perhaps it's time to try a different approach. Obviously what the Board are doing now isn't working and they are simply fighting on all fronts. This creates an environment where they aren't happy and neither is part of the industry.

The Board are the ones who cut meaningful communication with the Federation and created what can only be termed an adversarial situation.

Not much has changed.

### Dear editor

Lawyers seem to place themselves above the rest of us for no more reason than they can write in a way that only other lawyers can understand.

But their industry isn't squeaky clean and they have the same trouble as our industry, where a few make the rest look bad.

*"An Auckland lawyer's been found guilty of professional misconduct after overcharging a former golfing buddy. Eion Castles faced the Lawyers and Conveyancers Disciplinary Tribunal after he charged his friend just over \$1 million for help with his leaky Remuera home. APNZ reports assessors estimate the work should have cost less than half that, at around \$400,000. The tribunal has labelled Castles' charges "grossly excessive". His penalty has yet to be decided."*

Perhaps the Board's lawyers should remember this next time they are persecuting a member of our industry.

Perhaps they should rethink what we have been communicating to them and look for some way of working with the Federation, because in reality there are two industry groups, the one that gets on with the Board (but has rapidly declining numbers), and says yes to everything the Board says and then there is the Federation, whose membership is growing daily.

Probably the end goals are the same but the manner in which the two groups want to get there is different. One is an imposed "do as we say or else" attitude coupled with "we are in positions of authority so we know better" and the other is a practical solutions based path.

No one seems to want to back down, but we know from our point of view the Federation will not back down because this is the livelihood of our members, we all live the industry and it is our chosen profession whereby others trying to rule us are just in it for the money and position.

We are willing to engage with the Board on an equal footing – that means that true dialogue takes place. The ball is in their court.

We really feel that if they engaged with us they could save themselves a lot of grief and anguish – undoubtedly we have raised a number of issues and been proven to be right.

Remember these issues were always, always raised first with the Board – but through sheer stubbornness and lack of goodwill they simply would not listen. Perhaps 2014 is a chance for them to try a new tack – and work WITH industry not against them?

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