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**IN OTHER NEWS**

**Letter to the Editor**

**Dear Editor**

You made mention about the Board not supporting the Mitre 10 Mega, Upper Hutt initiative or even mentioning it.

I don't know why you are surprised about that, after all the Chairman of the Board is also on the Plumbers Merchants Board who will be affected by this action if it takes off nationwide.

It's not the first time we have seen this behaviour. Look at when CPD was implemented –there was a conflict of interest where some Board members were Master Plumber's members and voted for their scheme when Master Plumbers were the biggest suppliers of CPD.

It's all about trust and respect as you so often say - and I have neither for the Board.

**Around the Industry**



Well done to NZ Plumber magazine (formerly Plumbers Journal), for publishing a letter from one of its readers entitled "TOO PUNITIVE". It was in the latest edition of NZ Plumber, which by the way is a very interesting, informative read.

The letter was written regarding the discipline process imposed by the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board. The writer was involved in a disciplinary process as the initial complainant and primary witness. He was left disillusioned with the process, dismayed at the punitive arrangements and horrified at the costs to all parties.

He felt the associated costs were prohibitive and with so many people involved, it was little wonder the disciplinary levy is now the bulk of licensing fees. He felt a small team could have investigated and educated the individual.

He stated: *"Sure, errors were made by this gasfitter, but there was no malicious intent. I could have provided them with knowledge and support: instead I handed them over to the executioner – something I now regret. Until punishment is replaced with education, and interrogation with assessment, safety and quality issues will continue to go uncorrected."*

The Federation believes the Act allows for a better solution by way of infringement notices, but the Board have dismissed this saying it is not a viable solution.

The Board's response via the Registrar to the "Too Punitive" letter was that the Board is very careful to ensure that it complies with relevant law around complaints and discipline and that the process is fair.

**Letters to the Editor**



**Dear Editor**

I see in the Info Brief that the Board must operate in a "way that is fair". What definition of fair are they using?

The Board relies on the honesty of tradespeople, on our integrity

**Ed:**

We would certainly hope that interests in other organisations wouldn't influence anything the Board does but who knows for sure?

The behaviour of this Board and Registrar has done nothing to gain the trust of the industry. It seems to be common place that whenever they do something questionable they sound out the war cry "that it's for the safety and good of the public" - it's as if people in the industry have no rights.

As a matter of interest, the Federation did bring up conflicts of interest and CPD with the previous Minister but our complaints were never addressed. It was as if it all fell on deaf ears and the word of the Board was good enough.

At the same time we bought up about the cross subsidization of licensing fee money to support registration and also that the general complaints process doesn't deal with general complaints.

Nothing was done by the Minister, MoBIE or the Board. In fact we remember what the Chairman of the Board, Alan Bickers said at the time about complaints - "if we were to deal with general complaints we wouldn't get anything done because we would be forever dealing with general complaints" or words to that effect.

A simple fix would be to

and perhaps they would achieve better results if they treated us better and not hide behind their iron curtain imposing senseless regulation on us.

**Ed:**

For those that don't read the Board's Info Brief this is the article the writer is referring to:

### ***THERE IS STILL SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTION AS TO HOW THE BOARD'S ROLE FITS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY***

*What is the Board's intended role? The Board's role comes from the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006. The role is to protect the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring people working in the trades are competent. The Board does this by regulating people who are working in the trades to require things such as examinations and CPD. Unlike a membership organisation such as Master Plumbers, the Board's role is not to advocate for the commercial interests of tradespeople. The Board is however required to regulate in a way that is fair.*

That's very brave of the Board to say that, because when you look at the behaviour over the last four years and beyond you would have to ask if they are regulating in a fair manner because:

- What's fair about unlawfully taking money from the industry when the Board knew what they were doing was wrong?
- What's fair about retaining surpluses well above that which the Board's own policy states?
- What's fair about stating that issues have been resolved when the people are still not satisfied?
- What's fair about imposing terms and conditions on licensing that are not necessary?
- What's fair about having evidence withheld at a hearing?
- What's fair about having the having false statements submitted at a hearing by the solicitor assisting the investigator?
- What's fair about having historical complaints proved in practitioners favour but they are no better off and don't receive any compensation or consideration?
- What's fair about continually taking money for one off events to support the Board's overheads?

So what is fair? It is just, reasonable, open-minded, impartial, rational, even-handed, and non-discriminatory.

Do you think the Board are fair then? Let us know what your thoughts are.

**Dear Editor**

I saw this in the Board's Info Brief:

*Licence update from the Board*

*The number of authorisations issued this year, after seven months has passed the level it was at after the full 12 months of last year.*

*There are five months to go. Numbers are 7% up on the same time*

implement work that people wouldn't complain about – the type of work the Board demands from the industry every day.

### Dear Editor

Hi guys I just felt the urge to write this letter. I started a 5 year apprenticeship back in the mid seventies, back in those days it was a fantastic system, for the first and second year we did 5 weeks Poly Tech and the following years it was scaled down to 4 weeks then 2 weeks .

When I started there were two full classes. At the end of the 5 year term there was only enough left to fill one class, the rest either didn't have the ambition or they quit for other reasons.

It was a hard trade to stick to for 5 years as other trades were only 4 years but the training was great and the costs were minimal.

My situation - although I loved the work I hated the exams. In those days they didn't have a Craftsman qualification - it was called registration and the exams were still very intense but I completed my apprenticeship and was deemed a journey man plumber and stayed working for a company.

As I got older I decided to get registered, by this time the Craftsman exam had come into play so I had to pass the registration and then had to wait 2 years before I could sit the Craftsman exam. This is

*last year and if that trend continues, total authorisations for the year will stand at about 15200 at the year end.*

Didn't we get all this propaganda before the last licensing period where numbers were higher than the previous year and then when the Annual Report came out numbers were actually down 6 or 7%?

I see also they are going on about the CPD numbers as well. I get the impression they chuck out these numbers to try and get people to believe it's actually happening, and to encourage them to follow others. What do you think?

**ED:**

We can see what you are getting at and it's hard for us to answer your question as we like to deal in facts, and the Board are the only ones with the truth.

We are reliant on them to supply the industry with the real facts but unfortunately for them they have lost the respect and trust of a lot of practitioners so that leaves us all in the dark – do we believe them or do we mistrust them?

From our point of view all we really have to go on past behaviours but look at it this way - the 7% should get the numbers back to where they should have been last year. So if the Board can post a surplus with the current numbers then we should expect at least a 7% decrease in fees.

**Dear Editor**

Have we got to a situation in our industry where the Board requires the support of Master Plumbers to claim they have the support of the industry?

It seems like **"The NZ First syndrome"** where they have gone into elections where they may hold balance of power and the Government would need them.

It seems to me the Board rely on Master Plumbers for support and the numbers they claim to represent. Long live the Federation.

**Ed:**

Thanks for your comments writer. In some ways you are right that the Board relies on Master Plumbers and its numbers.

The Registrar has shunned the Federation but still meets on a regular basis with Master Plumbers.

This isn't Master Plumbers fault, but more the Board meeting with those that they feel they can manipulate.

Without Master Plumbers support the Board have nothing. Maybe this is something Master Plumbers members should be looking at – are they achieving anything or are they simply the Board's "Patsy"?

**From the Plumbers Forum**

my fault because I should have applied myself back in the day when it was all laid out for me; so finally fully qualified; now after all these years we are seen as incompetent unless we get sufficient CPD points.

I am left wondering if this moving target will ever stop. I still have 8 years before I can retire but no longer have the will to put up with a Board who can't tell their arse from their elbow. Keep up the good work.

**Ed:**

Hi writer. Your story is a common one we hear whenever we get out and about talking to practitioners.

You are right about it being a continual moving target and you would expect after all these years there would be some progress but there isn't.

**From the Media**

There are over 27,000 registered charities in New Zealand – 15,000 of which have posted surpluses for the last financial year. The Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board being one of them.

It's a growth industry with around 2,000 new charities per year and it was reported that it is questionable that all these charities are meeting their charitable purpose.

*"Amazing how they can post a surplus and then still carry on taking the same amount from us. Fleecing the industry for another 12 months. Didn't they do the same thing with unlawfully taking money from us until they had sufficient reserves?"*

**Ed:**

We picked up on the above observation on the Plumbers Forum at <http://www.plumbers.co.nz/forum/> . This comment was in response to a post which stated:

*"Hi guys, an excerpt from this month's Info brief, cheers ...The Board will soon start the three yearly review of licensing fees and other charges. The review will be completed about this time next year with any changes to be in place in time for the licensing year that commences 1 April 2016. The last review took effect on 1 April 2013"*

We believe the response is quite right. The Board is already operating in a surplus and will continue to take the same amount from the industry for another 12 months.

With regard to the unlawful taking of the money we feel the comment is right as well. The Board Gazetted the notice taking money from the industry knowing that it was the subject of review and that the Auditor General's Opinion was that it was unlawful. The Board issued the notice on suspect grounds and waited for it to be deemed unlawful – enter the Government who then made retrospective laws to cover the Board's actions and to make legal all the Board's questionable expenditure and fees collection. (On the basis, remember that the Board would be insolvent if this wasn't done).

And they wonder why we laugh at the comment of the Board regulating in a fair manner.

For a long time the Federation has been asking for a high level meeting of the Minister, MoBIE, the Board, and industry - but requests have gone nowhere. Industrial exclusion continues and the industry is being restricted by regulation.

**Thanks**

Thanks to all our contributors this week – great to see so many letters to the Editor coming in – we love to read your views and are sure all our readers feel the same.

Keep them coming – after all – this is your vehicle to say what you think about the industry, where it has been and where it is going. Tell us if you think we need to do something, if we've done something well or if we need to do it better.

Letters are printed as they come (with the exception of tidying up the spelling sometimes)!!