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IN OTHER NEWS

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

It seems like the Federation isn't achieving much and is rehashing what has been addressed in the past which gets a bit monotonous as a reader. How about taking on some new issues.

ED

Thanks for being the first contributor this year.

The Federation is more than happy to take on new issues if you let us know what they are.

We know its gets monotonous for the readers and we apologise for that but how do you think we feel having to say the same things over and over again to the same people in positions that can make change.

The movie Groundhog Day comes to mind for us.

EXCLUSION IS UPON US – AGAIN!



When signing up apprentices or employing anyone in the plumbing, gasfitting or drainlaying industry and making them part of the Federation, they should be warned they are entering a Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board (the Board) exclusion zone.

Over the last few editions of the Fellow Practitioner we have mentioned that the Federation has been excluded from the Board Stakeholder Liaison Group (SLG) on the basis that we have no members.

The Federations exclusion is now the subject of a formal complaint to the Board.' You might ask WHY we would bother. The reason is simple – because of you, our members! We have apprentices, tradesmen, some certifiers, some business owners and some administrators amongst our members. We do not know of ANY other group who has such a comprehensive membership – and your views are important and deserve to be heard.

We see in the minutes of Board Meeting 324 that another industry group is now formally excluded from the SLG as well. As part of item 6, being the Chief Executive's (CE) report, we note that the Board resolved to decline a request from the NZ Plumbers, Drainlayers and Gasfitters Association (the Association) to nominate a person to attend the SLG.

In that same section the CE announced that three new people had been appointed to the group. So the Federation representing a cross section of the industry was replaced with a bureaucrat from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and two

The Board have claimed:

“One of the primary goals of the Board has been to make it simpler and easier for practitioners, key stakeholders and consumers to communicate and interact with our organisation”

We don't see that as their standing is back to where it was before the report written by the Auditor General.

If the industry was progressing there would always be new issues to look at but when it is stagnant all that can be looked at are the same issues in the hope that someone who can affect change will grow some balls and make it happen.

If any readers have new issues then let us know and we will look into them.

Dear Editor

I'm new to the industry and my boss has been giving me the Fellow Practitioner to read along with the rest of the staff.

You talk about the issues that have been going on for years so my question is “what is the advantage of being in a regulated industry

ED

Firstly thanks to your boss for handing on the Fellow Practitioner. It's good to hear the information is getting out there.

drainlayers, one of which is a Master Plumbers member.

By our reckoning, around 50% of the SLG are Master Plumber members which could be an issue if there is something contentious being discussed as it is likely that the Master Plumber view would then dominate discussions and the Board may not necessarily get input on what is a broader view point on something they are considering or wanting feedback on.

Of course with certain issues they would need to go out to consultation, but from what we have seen the SLG is often a “toe in the water and testing group” for different ideas.

THE TO DO LIST



Last year passed quickly and for the Federation it was an uphill battle all year. Our relationship with the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board took a dive.

The change in the this relationship, almost back to where it was under the last regime, made us look at the environment the Federation and practitioners are expected to operate in.

When it gets to the stage where you can't trust the Regulator then the situation is critical.

What is beneficial about being in a regulated industry such as ours? It costs us in licence fees, disciplinary and prosecution levies. We haven't seen a reduction in unlicensed people working in the industry. We haven't seen the costs of fines for unlicensed people increase to the extent that it would deter those who are not meant to work in our industry from having a go, in fact many would just absorb these fines as a “cost of doing business”. In the end it is probably still cheaper that what we pay in licence fees, disciplinary and prosecution levies.

If the Government and Minister of Building and Construction had a to-do list last year and it had “Nothing” on it then we must congratulate them on achieving it.

In fact we could say the last decade has seen three Ministers of Building and Construction and perhaps they should be called “Ministers of Destruction”. They have achieved absolutely nothing for our industry.

Last year was another year where the Government and Ministers have sat back and not progressed on the Review of the PGDB Act, have alluded to the fact that they would make some immediate

If the industry was regulated in a proper manner then there would be huge advantages of being a practitioner in the industry but it isn't.

At the moment it is really only the honest practitioners that make mistakes that get regulated with a few non register people getting picked up.

If there was real regulation of the industry there would be huge numbers of unregistered people getting prosecuted for doing their own sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying.

The Board don't have the resources to do that and the Government don't want to front up with funding so we are left with a semi regulated industry where practitioners pay the price for everything.

Regulation of the industry affects performance there must be trust in the regulator and training systems for them to be successful.

Obviously the Government must be happy with the performance of the Board and the Skills Organisation as no one seems to have been held accountable for any of their activities.

The regulation of honest people can have the reverse affect if they don't believe in the system.

If we were regulated properly the industry would be more actively

changes to some areas of the country where homeowners could do their own plumbing, they would get rid of exemptions – but to date we have seen ZERO progress on these things.

In particular the Government should be ashamed at the tardiness around the review of the PGDB Act and we have got the message loud and clear that we are well down the food chain as a priority. . They get the regulatory governance for free and don't care about the industry governance at all.

They sit back and wonder why a large number of small businesses in the industry don't take on staff and lay the blame on the employers and the industry when it is in fact due to a lack of leadership and trust.

It's quite ironic that the Federation, at its last attendance at the SLG, stated that the industry needed over arching governance and the SLG was the closest thing the industry had to that and that this group should be more vocal.

Our reasons for stating this was that this group had representation from Master Plumbers (who essentially represent business owners), from the Federation (who essentially represent main waged practitioners, apprentices and administrators with some business owners), from rural practitioners, a plumbing inspector, hydraulic consultants and some large and self employed.

It was a wide over arching group who had the background and breadth of representation to make statements about the plight or successes of the industry. We now feel that the Board has undermined the credibility of that group.

The Federation believes the regulation of the industry has created an environment that isn't trusted and where the regulations may be supporting anti competitive behaviour.

A reported 11% drop in apprentice numbers speaks volumes about things that are happening in the industry and to the uncertainty and distrust industry has of government, the economy and the support it has going forward. This at a time when we need to be boosting apprentice numbers to meet the future demand for tradespeople.

We operate in an environment of blame where practitioners are not permitted to make mistakes. A genuine mistake is classified as incompetence and can be costly for any practitioner.

It is rapidly approaching a decade since the implementation of the Plumbing Gasfitting and Drainlaying Act 2006 and still the review has not been completed and it was the Government who wrote the review into legislation and now the purpose of the review is ignored.

This is the Act that was supposed to resolve all issues in our industry and has only succeeded in dividing the industry due to the powers granted to the Board to impose certain things on the industry.

involved in regulation, apprenticeships and training.

There would be fairness and standards would be higher.

There would be a sense of pride in being a practitioner.

There would be a willingness to hand on trade skills and take on apprentice but alas there is no trust in the system.

Honest practitioners are worn down with the cost of policing others and have the enthusiasm drained from them.

We would love to tell you it will get better soon but that is out of our control.

The Minister and Government don't appear to have put any priority on this at all and still we wait for an outcome. They claim it's due to a broader review of regulated industries but seem forget we are not the same as other industries as we are self funded 100%.

The Board must be pleased with their performance - they have gone another year regulating honest hard working practitioners at no cost to the Government.

They are not required to do anything for the industry simply regulate us. In the meantime we are all dealing with the fallout from ROVE, uncertainty around training and the future of it, questions around the Certifying Exam, what supervision is and what it should look like, and whether in fact a one qualification registration for plumbers, gasfitters and drainlayers would help solve a lot of these problems.

If there was a change in attitude and interpretations of the Plumbers Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act 2006 things could be very different.

A simple thing like taking the interpretation that the six practitioners appointed to the Board are there for their expertise and to represent the practitioners would be an excellent start. Simple representation of practitioners would help no end.

"Fools multiply when wise men are silent" Nelson Mandela

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