

MediaRelease

5 June 2015

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Taller timber buildings Code change proposal creates new opportunities for designers and developers

Australia is poised to join similar countries around the world with proposed changes to the National Construction Code Volume 1 to allow timber construction in taller structures – up to 8 storeys for buildings including apartments, hotels and offices. Modelling indicates that this may result in construction cost reductions of 10-15%, while new material options create new scope for architects and designers. The proposal is open for public consultation until Monday 3rd August and if successful will be implemented in May 2016.

Over the past 2 years, the industry services body Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited (FWPA) has been consulting with representatives from the timber, building and insurance industries, regulatory bodies and fire and emergency authorities during the development of a Proposal for Change to the National Construction Code Volume 1 (NCC).

Essentially, the proposal is to create a voluntary deemed-to-satisfy (DTS) solution for the NCC for the use of timber building systems in Class 2 (apartments), Class 3 (hotels) and Class 5 (office) buildings up to 25 metres in effective height (approximately 8 storeys).

Currently, timber building systems are restricted to 3 storeys under the National Construction Code's DTS provisions with taller buildings requiring the design and documentation of an 'alternative solution' to gain approval. Alternative solutions, while practical on some larger projects, are generally found to be too costly for smaller constructions.

The proposed solution will cover both traditional timber framing and innovative massive timber systems (such as cross laminated timber, or CLT, and Glulam) and comprises the use of appropriate layers of fire resistant plasterboard and sprinkler systems.

Preliminary economic modelling indicates potential savings in the order of 10-15% in multi-residential and commercial build costs, primarily due to shorter construction times. The modelling also suggests net benefits over 10 years of approximately \$103 million, comprising

About Forest and Wood Products Australia

FWPA aims to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the Australian forest and wood products industry through innovation by investing in effective and relevant R&D and promotion of the industry's products, services and values. FWPA undertakes industry-level activities where a collective approach delivers more effective and valuable commercial outcomes than individual action. We deliver services that support the industry's capacity as a major exporter and mainstay of regional communities in many parts of Australia.

\$98.2 million in direct construction cost savings, \$3.8 million in reduced compliance costs; and \$1 million in environmental benefits.

“The proposed changes to the Code will not only bring Australia up to pace with much of the rest of the world, but will deliver a wide range of benefits to local residents, property buyers and the building industry,” said Boris Iskra, FWPA’s National Codes and Standards Manager.

He explained that the benefits of taller timber buildings not only included lower costs but will also deliver increased opportunities for innovative design and construction, faster build times leading to reduced truck movements and local disruption as well as improved environmental outcomes.

“This is just one of the emerging opportunities for architects, engineers, building designers and developers to take advantage of the benefits of traditional and innovative wood products,” said Ric Sinclair, FWPA’s Managing Director, “a look at international trends and design competitions shows the global sector is embracing wood and wood products in a broad range of structural and decorative applications. In Australia, this Code change has the potential to expand the options for designing and building a whole class of structures.”

A copy of the proposed changes to the National Construction Code can be downloaded from <http://www.abcb.gov.au/consultation/ncc-public-comment-draft.aspx> – NCC 2016 Volume 1 Public Comment Draft

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