

inform

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Homes for your future *Creating accessible homes*

**Exclusive website
area for all RBPs**
Free online access for all RBPs

Commissioner's comments



The end of the year is often a time to reflect on significant changes that have impacted our industry and it also provides an opportunity to celebrate the successes.

2003 has seen strong levels of building activity throughout Victoria. In the January to October 2003 period, activity reached \$11.9 billion, with 9 out of the 10 months exceeding the \$1 billion mark.

One of the major initiatives of 2003 was the announcement of the 5 Star standard for new homes – featured in the September 2003 edition of *Inform*. During October to November, the Commission, in partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria and the Plumbing Industry Commission, ran 5 Star information sessions throughout Victoria. Extra sessions were organised to cope with the demand, and overall 2,200 building practitioners attended. Thank you to those that attended, and for those who missed the session – there will be similar information events organised next year.

In addition to the recent trend towards more sustainable, energy-efficient housing, we are seeing a growing demand for accessible housing. Accessible houses are designed to consider the needs of various age groups and abilities. With our ageing population it makes sense to consider special needs in housing and offer alternative solutions to consumers, that will make it easier for them to live independently as long as possible. But accessible housing isn't just for the elderly, its for everyone and the feature article on page 4 in this edition of *Inform*, explores this topic.

One of the year's highlights for me was Engineers Australia's biennial Engineering Excellence Awards night, presented by the Commission. I was delighted to speak at this event, which recognises the important role of engineering for both our industry and the wider community.

Congratulations to Hyder Consulting Pty Ltd, Federation Square Management, AHW Consulting Engineers (Vic) Pty Ltd, Bonacci Group Pty Ltd, Atelier One and Multiplex on winning this year's Overall Excellence in Engineering Award for the Federation Square development.

Looking ahead, next year has been declared the Year of the Built Environment 2004 – to encourage the community to appreciate and achieve built environments which are sustainable, practical and provide us with an improved lifestyle. It represents an exciting time for our industry to raise its profile. More information on the events and activities being planned will be made available on our new website www.buildingcommission.com.au

As 2003 draws to a close, we at the Commission thank you for your support and wish you all the best for the festive season and a safe and successful 2004!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Arnel'. The signature is stylized and written over a faint, light-colored grid or background.

Tony Arnel
Commissioner



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Building Commission

At the Building Commission we bring vision, innovation and leadership to the Victorian building industry.

We oversee building legislation, regulate building practices, advise the State Government, and provide services to industry and consumers.

*Left: Winner of the Building Commission's Overall Engineering Excellence Award: Federation Square
Joint entry by: Hyder Consulting Pty Ltd, Federation Square Management, AHW Consulting Engineers (Vic) Pty Ltd, Bonacci Group Pty Ltd, Atelier One and Multiplex.*



This represents an opportunity for builders and designers to cater to a new and growing market by creating more accessible homes.

Accessible houses are homes for life, for all people, regardless of age or abilities.

Will your home still suit you... when you're 64?

Over 3.6 million Australians live with a disability and the need for accessible homes is growing as our population ages.

How old will you be in 2021? If the answer is 65 years or older, then you are part of Australia's fastest growing population group. There's also a more than 50 per cent chance you'll be living with some sort of disability, odds that increase to nearly 75 per cent by the time you hit eighty.

When that time comes, how well will you be able to manage the steps up to your front door or the stairs up to your bedroom? Find the light switch that's identical in colour to your walls? Go to the bathroom when you visit your friends or family?

These are situations that one-in-five Australians already face daily. It's estimated that in less than 20 years, this number will have grown to one-in-three – friends, families, colleagues, ourselves – whose everyday activities are affected by having a disability.

As these demographics continue to change, we need to find better ways to design and construct our houses that allow better access for all people – now and in the future.

From the cradle to the grave

In an ideal world, all houses would be designed and built so that people could stay put from the cradle to the grave if they chose to do so. Accessible homes provide benefits to all people including those who might be temporarily injured, parents with prams or children. Young parents manoeuvring prams need the same sort of access provisions (enough space, continuous pathways, minimum steps, gentle gradients) as someone in a wheelchair.

The Office of Housing (OoH) has built more than 600 accessible homes since 2001. As a result it has developed house designs that meet accessibility requirements.

The Minister for Housing, Candy Broad understands an important element towards strengthening communities is by, "providing secure, affordable, and safe housing that enables people to stay in their own homes and live in their own established neighbourhoods for as long as possible.

"Our community requires housing that meets a variety of needs – for young people, the aged, and people with a disability."

After much consultation with community groups, the Office of Housing's Dino Kalivas is confident that their new accessible house designs meet a variety of occupant needs.

"One of the main challenges has been to keep to a minimum increased floor space required for improved mobility. This has been achieved by 'chasing' overall space internally – making house plans more open, with fewer internal corridors – so only a small increase is required overall. This keeps costs down, and in some designs we have actually reduced floor space."

Building skills

The good news is that because customers like the Office of Housing are demanding access-friendly homes, builders and engineers have been up-skilling to meet the challenge.

"Stormwater drainage and low thresholds are the elements that builders seem to find hardest," says Allen Kong of Allen Kong Architects, who has a special interest in design for elderly people. "Thresholds are not such a problem with new houses, which can be sited into the landscape at a height suitable for achieving on-grade access and manageable slopes. But builders do have to be vigilant when they're doing final levels."

Access-friendly housing actually calls for extra vigilance all round, because the

tolerances are very fine. "In many houses it may not matter if a door is slightly out of place, but it does if you're trying to provide a circulation area for a wheelchair, especially in bathrooms."

Allen nominates the set out of toilets and the grading of flows in stepless showers as other tricky areas. He believes there is a great opportunity for industry organisations to assist architects, builders and building designers with training in these areas, and also points to the *Welcome: Design Ideas for Accessible Homes*.¹

Overall he is optimistic. "I don't think builders will run into too many problems if they take things carefully, and make sure they are aware of the critical issues, like the fine tolerances. If they're unsure of something, asking the designer what the intent is will usually sort things out."

Being aware

Cath Williams of the Independent Living Centre² says that along with finetuning their building techniques, domestic builders could become more proactive with clients about making houses accessible.

"There has been a fair amount of recognition in codes and standards, but I've found that unless someone asks outright 'Have you made it accessible?', it's still overlooked," Cath says. "Access needs to be on some sort of 'must do' list people check off before they start building."

"I encourage people to think outside the square. Builders could say to someone building a two-storey house with a single, upstairs bathroom, 'Why not include a second downstairs bathroom for when you are older and for visitors now who need easy access?'"

...when you're 64? [continued]

How will it look?

While many consumers are actively looking to make their homes accessible, some still resist the idea, as Brian O'Donnell, General Manager of Hamlan Homes found out. The company built three display homes at Caroline Springs and, knowing there are plenty of retirees in the market, decided to include some of the access-friendly features.

"We found that reasonably 'able' people resist the idea, in fact some of the older ones felt that it was like 'giving in' to the ageing process," Brian says. "It was an emotional, not a practical decision."

On the technical front, Brian agrees with Allen Kong. "Our builders needed to learn extra skills, like the plumbing techniques for stepless showers, and to pay a bit more attention to detail, like ensuring there is bracing in place for grab rails. But they're generally fine after they've done a couple of access-friendly jobs."

The fear expressed by some potential customers that access-friendly house will 'look different', is not borne out by the experience of the Office of Housing. "I've received feedback from tenants who were really pleased that their place not only works for them, but doesn't look different at all," says Dino Kalivas. This is confirmed by Allen Kong, who says, "If they are applied sensitively, access-friendly features shouldn't make a house look any different from a run-of-the-mill place."

Sooner or later?

Consensus is that it's more effective to build an access-friendly home from scratch, rather than to adapt an existing home, because:

- there is more opportunity to achieve better access-related outcomes

- the features are an integral part of the design, so are virtually invisible to those not in the know
- it's usually cheaper in the long run than adapting a house bit-by-bit.

This presents builders with a challenge: educating customers.

Despite the mixed reception his Caroline Springs initiative has received so far, Brian O'Donnell is convinced Hamlan Homes is on the right track. "We go to all the conferences and it's apparent the need for these homes is growing," he says.

So it's worth pointing out to customers that it's:

- cheaper to go access-friendly from day one
- likely that being access-friendly will give their home greater resale value later on
- safer for all members of the family from toddlers to the elderly.



Lever handles for doors allow easier access. Also consider aligning door handles and light switches.

What will it cost?

The short answer is, not as much as you might think. Estimates of the increase in costs associated with building a fully-accessible new home range between one and five per cent.

"The increase in cost for structural items is negligible," says Brian O'Donnell. "Some things are cost neutral, like aligning doors handles and light switches, although lever handles for doors are currently more expensive than standard round door knobs. However, as the demand grows, manufacturers will see the need for a competitive lever product, and this should bring the price down."

In contrast, the cost of adapting an existing home varies considerably. Cath Williams says those who can afford it are spending between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

What will it save?

A plentiful stock of access-friendly housing is likely to deliver significant benefits to individuals and the community, both economic and social. These include:

- a reduction in the number of accidents in the home (such as falls), saving on health costs
- a reduction in the need for expenditure on residential care by government and individuals
- enabling older people and those affected by disabilities to maintain their lives within the community as long as possible. Research shows this results in improved physical and psychological well-being, reducing pressures on health costs.

"Consensus is that it's more effective to build an access-friendly home from scratch, rather than to adapt an existing home."

Welcome: Design Ideas for Accessible Homes

Think access

If you're still not converted, remember that one day the person struggling to negotiate two steps, an uneven pathway or a cramped bathroom will probably be you.

Consider the various needs and ages of your clients, and suggest alternative ways to build homes that are comfortable for life.

¹ Welcome: Design Ideas for Accessible Homes Building Commission (2002), special price for December and January \$35. To purchase a copy telephone (03) 9285 6400 or email welcome@buildingcommission.com.au

² The Independent Living Centre assists people with disabilities to enhance their independence and quality of life by providing impartial information and professional advice on daily living equipment.

In October 2002, the Building Commission, working with leading government agencies and building industry organisations produced Welcome: Design Ideas for Accessible Homes, to help architects, designers, builders and homeowners to create better homes. It offers practical advice on building and adapting houses – some of Welcome's tips include:

- The most accessible house layout is one with generous open spaces. Narrow hallways can be difficult for people to navigate.
- Good external lighting enhances security and makes paths more visible, a huge help for people with impaired vision.
- Locate the garage close to the house with covered, level access to the house.
- In the bathroom install a shower with a level entry, or have semi-recessed basins, which provides clear access for everyone.
- Use contrasting colours on benchtops and cupboards to assist people with impaired vision.
- Line up light switches and door handles to help people find the light switch.

The suggestions in Welcome are illustrated with recommended dimensions based on Australian Standards.

If you would like to purchase a copy of Welcome visit the Building Commission website on:
www.buildingcommission.com.au or purchase a copy of Welcome at a special price of \$35.00 for December and January by phoning (03) 9285 6400 or email: welcome@buildingcommission.com.au

National Initiatives

The Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) has prioritised the need for a national strategy on public building accessibility by developing a draft Premises Standard and proposing changes to the Building Code of Australia (BCA). The ABCB will run several public awareness sessions across Australia

in early 2004, as part of its broader consultation process. These sessions will detail the draft Premises Standard, the revised BCA package and the process for the public comment period. Your feedback would be welcome. For details on the sessions, contact the Commission's Policy Unit on (03) 9285 6400.



Level paving and a stepless entry allows easy access to the home.

...when you're 64? [continued]

Case Study: It Shouldn't be this hard

Architect Chris Porter and occupational therapist Dianne Porter provide access consulting to architects, builders and project managers through their company Architecture & Access. They say, "Our forte is being able to assess both what a client with a disability needs now, and to plan for changes in their ability over the next months or years."

Irene is one such client. Now 43 years old, she became disabled after being hit by a car backing out of a driveway. These days she can get around on forearm crutches for short distances and in a wheelchair for longer distances.

When Irene and her partner Neville decided to build a house, they deliberately

chose a flat block. ("Neville's son has Downs Syndrome, so he's no good on stairs either!" says Irene). They then looked at display homes and narrowed their list to two builders. "One of them had a nice open plan living area, but wouldn't agree to move a wall 600mm, so we ditched him. The other wouldn't guarantee to move anything until we'd signed up, and we weren't prepared to take that risk."

Fortunately Irene found a builder, Ashford Homes. She then hired Chris and Dianne Porter. It has turned out to be a great team.

"Di and Chris looked over the plans and pointed out several things we hadn't thought of that would help me in the

home now and later on, like having no steps into the ensuite, mounting the toilet out from the wall, not having cupboards under the hand-basin and having enough noggings to support grabrails.

"Our wonderful builders said, 'Just let us know what you want – no problems!'"

On the basis of her experience, Irene said she would encourage all builders to be more flexible and listen to what people want. "Ashford Homes have just opened their first display home in Victoria," she says, "and I'd say to the other builders here, 'Watch out!'"

Disclaimer: company and individual case studies are used as examples only, the Building Commission does not endorse companies.

BAC update

Each edition of Inform profiles one of our four associated statutory bodies. This edition we look at the role of the Building Advisory Council.

The Building Advisory Council (BAC) is the senior industry based advisory group that advises the Minister for Planning on the administration of the *Building Act 1993* and *Building Regulations 1994*. It also advises the Minister on the impact of the building regulatory system established by the legislation, on issues relating to the building permit levy and any other matter referred by the Minister

During the 2002-03 financial year, the BAC played a key role in the development of legislative proposals on owner-builders and the introduction of Security of Payment legislation.

The Council comprises a broad cross section of senior industry and consumer representatives that are appointed by the Minister for Planning. Their wide-ranging experience means issues can be discussed from a variety of perspectives.

Chair Genevieve Overell explains, "that the BAC works behind the scenes, developing, reviewing and debating policies to shape and improve the building industry."

"In addition the BAC is committed to the development of Victoria's building industry by supporting local research and innovation initiatives and reviewing international breakthroughs."

New brochures detailing the role of the BAC and outlining Security of Payment legislation for subcontractors are available online: www.buildingcommission.com.au or by calling (03) 9285 6400.



Prosecutions

1/4/03 to 5/6/03

DENNIS SMITH, Camberwell (Unregistered)

Date of Offence: **January – April 2001**

Date of Prosecution: **2 April 2003**

Dandenong Magistrates' Court

The defendant was charged with a range of offences under the *Building Act 1993* arising from his involvement in the construction of a brick fence at a site in Wheelers Hill for the contract price of \$21,000. He was charged with carrying out building work under a major domestic building contract when not covered by the required insurance contrary to section 136(2) of the Act, carrying out building work under a major domestic building contract when not registered under Part 11 of the Act contrary to section 176(2A) of the Act, holding himself out to practise in the category of builder, class of domestic builder, when not registered in that category or class, contrary to section 176(1)(d) of the Act, and knowingly providing false information to the relevant building surveyor, contrary to section 246 of the Act, by stating on an application for a building permit that the proposed building work was to be carried out by the owner of that site.

The matter was originally heard ex parte after the defendant failed to appear at Court to answer the charges. In those proceedings, the defendant was convicted and fined the amount of \$2,000 on all charges and ordered to pay the Commission's costs in the sum of \$2,373.42.

The defendant subsequently applied to have the matter re-heard and pleaded guilty to all charges. The matter was heard by Magistrate Harber, who took into account the defendant's lack of prior convictions in imposing an aggregate fine of \$1,000 on all charges, without conviction. The defendant was also ordered to pay the Commission's costs in the sum of \$4,812.49.

ROBIN MONCUR, Gibraltar Finance Pty Ltd (ACN 064 198 269)

Leongatha (Unregistered)

Date of Offence: **January 2000 – September 2001**

Date of Prosecution: **17 April 2003**

Korumburra Magistrates' Court

The two defendants (Moncur and Gibraltar)

each pleaded guilty to occupying a building without an occupancy permit having been issued for that building, contrary to section 39(1) of the *Building Act 1993*.

The defendant company was the lessee of the premises and operated a licensed hotel under the registered business name of 'Benny's Tavern'. The defendant Moncur is one of the directors of the defendant company.

Magistrate Batt convicted both defendants and the defendant Moncur was fined \$750, the defendant company was fined \$2,000 and each defendant was ordered to pay statutory costs of \$35 and to pay the Commission's costs in the sum of \$500.

BERNARD NOY, Noy Brothers Building Pty Ltd (ACN 067 046 575)

Apollo Bay (DB-U 15583)

Date of Offence: **February 2001**

Date of Prosecution: **12 May 2003**

In February 2001, the defendant Company demolished an existing dwelling at a site in Apollo Bay in preparation for the construction of six townhouses at that site. The defendant Noy, who is a registered building practitioner, is the sole director of the defendant company.

Although an application had been made for a building permit in respect of the construction of the townhouses, no application had been made for a building permit in respect of the demolition of the existing dwelling. In any event, the building permit for the construction of the townhouses was not issued until at least two weeks after the existing dwelling was demolished.

The defendants appeared before Magistrate von Einem and each pleaded guilty to carrying out building work, namely the demolition of an existing dwelling, without a building permit having been issued for that work, contrary to section 16(1) of the *Building Act 1993*.

In sentencing the defendants, His Worship took into account the fact that the defendant Company had already been prosecuted and fined for breaches of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985* in relation to the demolition. The defendant Noy was placed on an undertaking to be of good behaviour on the condition that he pay \$500 to the Court

Fund within a period of 1 month. The defendant Company was convicted and fined \$1,500 and was ordered to pay the Commission's costs in the sum of \$2,465.

PETER WILSON, Chirnside Park (DB-U 7206)

Date of Offence: **May 2000 – October 2000**

Date of Prosecution: **5 June 2003**

Ringwood Magistrates' Court

The defendant was engaged to construct a triple garage as well as carry out extensions to an existing dwelling in Croydon. Prior to the defendant entering into major domestic building contracts for this building work, the owner of the dwelling obtained a building permit as the owner/builder. The defendant agreed to transfer the responsibility for the building work into his own name after the contracts had been signed.

The building work commenced in May 2000 with two separate contracts being entered into in May 2000 and July 2000 in relation to the construction of the garage and the extension respectively. However, it was not until July 2000 that the defendant obtained insurance in respect of the construction of the garage and the defendant did not obtain insurance in respect of the extension to the dwelling until October 2000. The defendant therefore carried out domestic building work under a major domestic building contract when not covered by the required insurance contrary to section 136(2) of the *Building Act*.

In addition, the defendant failed to notify the relevant building surveyor that he had been engaged as the builder and provide the relevant building surveyor with details of the insurance by which he was covered contrary to section 24(4B) of the Act.

In sentencing the defendant, Magistrate O'Reilly took into account the defendant's plea of guilty, his lack of prior convictions, his claim that his offending had not been deliberate and the likelihood that he would not re-offend. Her Worship then adjourned the matter for a period of 12 months on the condition that the defendant be of good behaviour during that period, pay the Commission's costs in the sum of \$2,270, and pay \$5,000 to the Court Fund.

Exclusive website area for all RBPs

The Commission's new website has a restricted section for Registered Building Practitioners only

Go to www.buildingcommission.com.au and go to the Registered Building Practitioner login. The website uses an automated system to setup a RBP's login and will generate your own password.

As an RBP you will be guided through a process that verifies your registration and date of birth, asks for an email address and then emails your password. You can change your password online.

Exclusive information for RBPs:

- Download the Building Practitioner Manual online – now only available electronically for RBPs
- Read the latest information on Continuing Professional Development
- Update your contact information online



Website homepage: click on the 'login' button.



Login page: click on the 'RBP member setup' link.



Registration page: complete form and click the 'submit' button. You will be emailed your password.

BRAC accreditations

The Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC) recently accredited this product:

Reinforcement Services Pty Ltd – VICMESH concrete Reinforcing Fabrics – V03/09

Welded wire reinforcing fabric for concrete construction, suitable for use in:

- Residential slabs and footings
- Industrial and commercial concrete floors
- Paving slabs
- Concrete tanks
- Suspended slabs

In accordance with concrete structures code AS 3600, AS 2870 and associated codes.

For further information on BRAC accredited products, contact Technical Services on 1300 360 380.



5 Star attendance

Over 2,200 people, mostly builders and designers, attended the 5 Star information sessions that travelled across Victoria, from Portland to Gippsland during October to November. The Building Commission in partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria and Plumbing Industry Commission presented on the 5 Star standard for new homes and responded to questions.

One of the key questions asked related to the cost of attaining the 5 Star standard. The answer depends on the type of house and by looking at energy efficient measures at the design stage. In fact, there may be no extra cost involved at all. The average upfront cost is estimated at \$1,000-3,000 – however customers of 5 Star homes will save on cheaper energy and water bills throughout the life of their home.

The key to achieving 5 Star involves siting of the block, insulation and glazing. For information on the standard, and to view a copy of the presentation, go to: www.buildingcommission.com.au/www/default.asp?casid=3559
Or for technical questions call 1300 360 380.

RBP Alert – CPD launch due February

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program will be launched in early 2004. The program boosts the skills of building practitioners and involves a range of activities. A CPD information pack will be sent to all Registered Building Practitioners – and details for the launch will be on our website in the new year – check out www.buildingcommission.com.au

Commission opens new office in Ballarat

The Building Commission's new Ballarat office officially opened on 10 November 2003. This means that builders and other industry practitioners in Victoria's West will now have easier access to services, as well as a local contact point for building control issues.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Elaine Carbines, was delighted to officially open the Ballarat office. "It provides an opportunity for the Government to better service the building industry in regional Victoria."

Andrew Burgess is running the new Ballarat office, and is excited about the opportunity to start up the office. "Victoria's provincial West is fast becoming a popular place for building, and it also has a robust industry with specific needs."

According to the latest building activity figures for the year to October 2003, the provincial South West was up 13% to total 688 million and the North West region was up 18% to 394 million, compared to the same period last year.

The Ballarat office will operate similarly to the two established regional offices servicing the Wangarratta and Gippsland region. To contact Andrew Burgess call (03) 5331 1246



Andrew Burgess at the new Ballarat office

Celebrate the Year of the Built Environment 2004

The Year of the Built Environment 2004 (YBE 2004) will be a year of celebration for Victoria. Events and activities held throughout the year will demonstrate the importance of a well-designed built environment.

YBE 2004 was launched on 15 December 2003 by the Governor-General, His Excellency, Major General Michael Jeffery.

Events will be held under the six themes of:

- Towards sustainable communities
- Healthy environments
- Imagining the future
- Our built heritage
- Excellence in building
- Design for all

Victoria's YBE 2004 is an industry led initiative supported by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

For more information on YBE 2004 visit: www.builtenvironment2004.org.au



From left: David Parken, National President RAlA, Major General Michael Jeffery, AC, CVO, MC and The Hon. David Kemp MP at the YBE 2004 launch.

Builders Warranty Insurance providers

The Government is tightening requirements for insurers who supply Builders warranty Insurance. They will soon have to be either:

- authorised by Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA); or
- have an acceptable international credit rating

These changes are being introduced to bring greater certainty to both building practitioners

and consumers. The changes also bring Victoria more into line with other States.

There are a number of financially sound providers of Builders Warranty Insurance already in the market and the number of providers is growing. With new insurers looking at entering the market, it is vital to provide protection for both consumers and builders to ensure continued confidence in our industry.

Everyone seems to be building or renovating!

Throughout Victoria, the trend for renovating is continuing to climb. Every TV station is running programs on renovating and it seems everyone is getting in on the action.

Building permits for alterations and extensions issued during the three months to September, were up by 23% to total \$423.5 million, with the average permit for an extension or renovating totalling around \$36,300. Provincial Victoria saw the biggest surge in renovating activity, up 44% to \$102.7 million, while metropolitan Melbourne's renovating activity was up 17% to \$320.8 million.

The top 3 municipalities for renovating by value of building work are:

Inner Melbourne:

- Boroondara
- Bayside
- Stonnington

Outer Melbourne:

- Mornington
- Yarra Ranges
- Kingston

Provincial Victoria:

- Greater Geelong
- Surf Coast
- Golden Plains

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Technical Enquiries 1300 360 380
Registration Enquiries 1300 360 320
BACV 1300 557 559

**For further information or comments
please write, fax or email**

Marketing and Public Relations
Building Commission
PO Box 536E Melbourne 3001
Level 27, 2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000
Tel +61 3 9285 6400
Fax +61 3 9285 6464
publicrelations@buildingcommission.com.au
www.buildingcommission.com.au

Ballarat Office

2 Skipton Street
Ballarat, Victoria 3350
Australia
Tel +61 3 5331 1246
Fax + 61 3 5333 4817

Melbourne Office

Level 27, Casselden Place
2 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000
PO Box 536E
Melbourne, Victoria 3001
Australia
Tel +61 3 9285 6400
Fax + 61 3 9285 6464

Sale Office

317 York Street
Sale, Victoria 3850
Australia
Tel +61 3 5143 3024
Fax + 61 3 5143 3027

Wangaratta Office

1 White Street
Wangaratta, Victoria 3677
PO Box 1100
Wangaratta Victoria 3676
Australia
Tel +61 3 5721 4865
Fax + 61 3 5722 9074



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