Building Certification Taskforce First Report Received

The Minister for Planning and Lands, Delia Lawrie, today welcomed the first report from the Northern Territory Government Taskforce looking at outstanding building permits for Government owned and leased buildings.

Ms Lawrie announced the formation of a taskforce in March as part of measures to improve certification rates in the Northern Territory.

Key findings from the Taskforce’s first report include:

- 2,074 outstanding Certificate of Occupancy Certificates across 1,362 public sector lots/properties going back to 1964, with 75 per cent occurring before 2001.
- More than half of outstanding Certificate of Occupancy Certificates are for non-habitable buildings.
- 82.2 per cent of buildings are located in Darwin, Alice Springs and Lake Bennett.

Ms Lawrie said since the report had been finalised, 54 Certificates of Occupancy had been finalised bringing the total outstanding number of certificates to 2015.

“It is clear from the findings from the Taskforce’s audit that this issue has arisen out of decades of incomplete paperwork,” Ms Lawrie said.

“Government departments have already begun investigating outstanding Certificate of Occupancy and are working with DPI Construction Division to resolve these processes.

“The Taskforce noted that the non-closure of issued building permits has been a long standing issue and not just a recent phenomenon.

“The common causes that have led to outstanding Certificates of Occupancy were works not being registered with DPI’s Building Advisory Services Branch or the final inspection not completed.

“It’s important to note that Government buildings are regularly inspected and maintained to ensure they are safe and meet occupational health and safety standards including fire safety.”

Ms Lawrie said the Government had already taken steps to address outstanding certificates and ensure future compliance standards were met for new and completed works.
“Since the formation of the Taskforce a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to prevent a reoccurrence of the situation,” she said.

These actions include:

- Verifying issued building permits and developing a database to manage outstanding Certificates of Occupancy.
- Appointing a co-ordinator in the Department of Planning and Infrastructure Construction Division to assist other Government departments.
- Setting a priority list to ensure safety-related and high priority locations including hospitals and schools are dealt with as a matter of urgency.
- Introducing new protocols that ensure DPI Project Directors must sign off that a Certificate of Occupancy has been obtained before a project is closed.
- Ensuring all buildings leased by government include a Certificate of Occupancy.

The public sector rate of outstanding Certificates of Occupancy is similar to the private sector at about 28 per cent.

Ms Lawrie said for private certification a moratorium remains in place until June 30, 2011.

“To help with certifications of buildings in regional and remote building control areas, the Government has introduced a subsidy for building certifiers travelling to these locations,” she said.

“The subsidy will be a flat rate for each trip by a building certifier and will be based on $2 per kilometre and where appropriate, reasonable costs for accommodation may be claimed.

“DPI has also recruited additional staff to work on building certification issues and is working with industry to introduce a cadet scheme that aims to increase the number of qualified certifiers in the Territory.”

Ms Lawrie said the Taskforce will continue to meet regularly to finalise outstanding issues and report back to Government.

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