QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NT Government Taskforce Report on Outstanding Building Permits for Government Owned and Leased Buildings

What was the purpose of the NT Government Taskforce Report into outstanding building permits for government owned and leased buildings?

The Taskforce project was formed in March 2009 at the request of the Minister for Planning to identify all the outstanding building permits relating to government owned and leased buildings in the Northern Territory and commence a program to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for each of these permits.

What were the main findings of the report?

At the time of compiling this report the number of outstanding Certificate of Occupancies for the public sector since 1964 was 2,074, with approximately 75 per cent occurring prior to 2001.

Work undertaken as part of Phase 2 since compiling this Taskforce Report has resulted in further Certificate of Occupancies finalised or resolved, bringing the total number outstanding as at 26 August 2009 to 2,015.

Most of the outstanding permits were in the Tier 1 Building Control Areas which includes Darwin, Alice Springs and Lake Bennett.

The Department of Local Government and Housing accounted for 57 per cent of the outstanding Certificate of Occupancies.

Of the total outstanding Certificates of Occupancies, 51 per cent were for classification 5 ‘Office building and fit-outs’ and classification 10 ‘Non-habitable buildings’ such as sheds, garages and fences.

Dwellings accounted for 31 per cent of the outstanding Certificates of Occupancy.

From this report 18 locations have been identified as fire related works and 56 as priority areas. The Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) will be working closely with the government agencies associated with these buildings to resolve certification completion quickly.

The public sector in the Northern Territory has a similar rate of outstanding building permits to the private sector of 28 per cent.
What were the common reasons for why Certificates of Occupancy had not been completed?

The common causes that have led to outstanding Certificates of Occupancies are:

- Works certified and granted a Certificate of Occupancy placed on agency files, but not registered with the DPI's Building Advisory Services Branch.
- Works identified by building certifier completed but final inspection not undertaken.
- Works identified by building certifier not undertaken.
- A Certificate of Occupancy has not been sought.
- Some Certificates of Occupancies submitted but not registered in the system.

When do the outstanding Certificates of Occupancies date back to?

The issue of outstanding Certificates of Occupancy dates back to 1964 and 38 per cent of them are from the 1980’s when the Territory experienced increased building activity.

Summary of Outstanding CoOC for Government Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Decade</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Avge per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960's (6 years)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970's (10 years)</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980's (10 years)</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990's (10 years)</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000's (10 years)</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (46 years)</td>
<td>2074</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are buildings that have not obtained a Certificate of Occupancy safe?

A Certificate of Occupancy is in place to demonstrate that work as stated in a building permit has been completed accordance with it.

If an building does not have a Certificate of Occupancy it does not mean it is unsafe as government buildings are regularly inspected and maintained to ensure they are safe and in line with government occupational health and safety policies.

This report found 18 locations have been identified as fire related works and 56 as priority areas.

Fire related works sites undergo regular fire safety inspections in line with Australian standards to ensure they are safe.

As part of Phase 2 the fire related works and 56 priority area locations will be dealt with as an immediate priority and DPI will work closely with the government agencies associated with these buildings to resolve the Certificate of Occupancy paperwork process quickly.

Where were most of the uncertified buildings from?

Most of the buildings with outstanding Certificate of Occupancy issues were from Darwin, Alice Springs and Lake Bennett with a total of 1705 or 82 per cent. The remainder were located Tier 2 areas.
Which departments have the most outstanding buildings?

The Department of Local Government and Housing had the largest concentration of outstanding Certificates of Occupancies at 1187 or 57 per cent. This is representative 10 per cent of their housing stocks.

### Outstanding CoOC By Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Local Government and Housing</td>
<td>1187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Business and Employment</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Health and Families</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Planning and Infrastructure</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police, Fire and Emergency Services</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Justice</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power Water Corporation</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darwin Port Corporation</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of the Chief Minister</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Development Corporation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>2074</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What type of buildings were mostly identified as requiring a Certificate of Occupancy?**

In relation to the distribution of outstanding Certificates of Occupancy across the building classifications, the following were the main groups:

- Non-habitable building/structures (classification 10) such as sheds, carports, garages, fences etc represent the largest group of outstanding Certificate of Occupancy with a combined total of 804 or 38 per cent.

- Dwellings (classifications 1 & 2) represent the next largest segment with a combined total of 642 or 31 per cent outstanding Certificate of Occupancy.

- Offices, office fit-outs and alterations represent the third largest group of 262 or 12 per cent with outstanding Certificates of Occupancy.

**What action is being taken to ensure the 18 fire related and the 56 priority buildings achieve certification promptly?**

DPI will work closely with the agencies that operate the identified buildings to assist resolves certification quickly.

In the case of buildings identified with fire related work, although a Certificate of Occupancy has not been finalised there was a minimum fire risk as they were still subject to regular fire safety inspections to ensure they meet Australian standards.

Government buildings are also subject to ongoing inspections and maintenance to ensure they are safe and in line with government occupational health and safety policies.

Phase 2 will address these building as a matter of priority to complete the Certificate of Occupancy paperwork process.
When will certification compliance be achieved for the outstanding government owned and leased buildings?

The target date to complete the outstanding Certificates of Occupancies is July 2010.

What action are you taking to ensure government owned and leased buildings are properly certified in the future?

A review has been done and new processes have been introduced to ensure government agencies have Certificate of Occupancies have been finalised for new buildings they utilise.

What work is underway to assist the private sector complete outstanding Certificates of Occupancy?

A moratorium for outstanding Certificates of Occupancy is in place until 30 June 2011 to give people time to obtain certification.

The purpose of the moratorium is to allow owners of existing buildings which are unauthorised or have incomplete certification to achieve compliance. Enforcement action under the Building Act has been suspended during this time.

A subsidy for certifiers has also been introduced to Tier 2 areas. This is to assist Building Certifiers with the cost of travelling to regional and remote areas.

DPI has recruited additional staff to work on building certification issues and is working with the certification industry to introduce a cadet scheme to increase the numbers of qualified certifiers in the Northern Territory.

How long is the moratorium in place for?

The moratorium is in place until 30 June 2011.

Who can access the building certifiers subsidy?

To assist with certification of buildings in regional and remote Building Control Areas (Tier 2) a subsidy for building certifiers travelling to these locations has been introduced. The subsidy will apply to travel carried out from 1 July 2009 until 30 June 2011.

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

Who can people contact if they are unsure if they have obtained a Certificate of Occupancy?

People can contact DPI’s Building Advisory Services to check their records.

DARWIN
Ph: 8999 8965 or 8999 8966

KATHERINE
Ph: 8973 8926

TENNANT CREEK
Ph: 8951 9235

ALICE SPRINGS
Ph: 8951 9235