

party will be set up when the regulation review unit hands down its report. "The final report is due at the end of March and a decision should be made in only two to three weeks after it is presented," he says.

The terms of reference for the working party have been changed, and it will now look into how consumers can be better protected from shoddy architectural practices. At present, the Architects Review Board is composed of seven professionals who oversee and police the profession's standards. "We should have some lay people on this board," Peck says, "and not necessarily have architects reviewing architects."

He adds that another item on the working party's agenda may be the hidden side-effects of the recent building boom. "A large number of builders and contractors tended not to use architects in the construction phase of building during the boom. We expect problems to arise as a result of not using architectural services at this crucial phase, and we should look at ways to minimise the impact on proprietors," Peck says.

And in a touch of irony for the regulation review unit, the profession may find itself with more power after the legislation is reviewed. The Institute's Smith says the review board's powers may be beefed up in the interests of protecting consumers. "We would like to see greater penalties for those breaching the code of ethics," he says.

Victoria's architects are the first true professionals to be scrutinised by the regulation review unit. The unit has so far reviewed the operations of pawnbrokers and real estate agents. Smith believes architects were seen as a test case. If they could be deregulated, other professions might soon follow.

Smith says architects have been chosen "because we are a relatively small profession and we would go easily and become a precedent for the deregulation of other professions".

Peck says the Architects Act already provides well for consumer protection. "Consumers presently have redress through the Act if an architect stuffs up," he says. "Repealing the Act would remove this. I am confident deregulation as envisaged by the (unit's) consultants will not go ahead."

He believes architects generally welcome a review of their governing legislation and expect improvements to be made. "A review of the Act is still pertinent but total deregulation isn't," he says.

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