

Draft Quality Standard Not to Proceed

- John Pilley, State Director, BISCOA Victoria.

In Issue #12 of the Newsletter at page 34, it was reported that, arising out of the NPWC/NBCC Joint Working Party's report and deliberations, a decision had been taken for NPWC and NBCC in conjunction with Standards Australia to develop a new quality assurance Standard specifically for the building and construction industry.

In this report, John Pilley outlines Standards Australia's decision not to proceed with that proposal as a consequence of public review comment upon the draft; rather, to prepare a guide document to the ISO/AS3900 series of Standards for public review comment. That might lead then to the phasing out of AS2990 with Australia's international competitiveness enhanced by reliance upon the ISO/AS3900 series.

One of the immediate effects arising out of "No Dispute" was action taken by Standards Australia to draft a new Quality Standard for the building and construction industry. This draft was released for public comment in November 1990 and comment closed on 31 January 1991.

At a meeting held late February 1991 at Standards Australia, this Draft, No: 90192 - Draft Australian Standard for the building and construction industry, was discussed in detail over a two day meeting by QE1/1, the original drafting Committee.

Nearly 400 pages of public comment were received on the draft Standard. A large part of this comment concerned the issue of whether there was a need for another standard for the building and construction industry. The overwhelming majority of comment was that another standard was not needed and as a result the meeting resolved that the draft Standard not proceed.

Much comment was made on the fact that it would be desirable also to withdraw AS2990-1987 as a Standard and convert it into a Guidance Document. It is anticipated that moves along these lines will be made shortly through Standards Australia.

The meeting agreed that the draft now be converted into a Guidance Document, be redrafted and be offered again for public comment by Standards Australia.

This will be a Guidance Document to AS3900 series of Standards and will be a Guide on how to adapt that International series of Standards to the building and construction industry.

It was suggested by the meeting that, once completed, the draft guide should then be sent out to all those who offered public comment on the draft Standard for further input whether the draft Guide is in an acceptable form.

It would then be proposed that the guide will formally be issued by Standards for the usual public comment period of six weeks.

The Guide is proposed to be a guidance document

under AS3904. This will mean that the Industry will then have three layers of information concerning Quality Assurance:

1. The first will be the AS3900 series (presently supplemented by AS2990) which will provide the basis for setting up a quality system.
2. The proposed new Guidance Document will explain and demonstrate how the AS3900 series should be used and implemented by the building and construction industry.
3. Specific Industry groups will then develop their own practice documents for specific use in their area. For instance, the Practice Manual currently being developed by MBCHAA and BISCOA will provide "hands on" easy-to-use information on the mechanics of setting up a Quality System by a contractor and provide pro-forma for the documentation required. Likewise ACEA has developed a practice document and other bodies such as the RAIA are also proceeding down this path.

BISCOA/MBCHAA and other industry bodies in conjunction with the Australian Organisation of Quality will run a series of one day and two day seminars commencing in Sydney but then extending to the other States providing practical instruction for management, quality staff, and other staff concerned with quality such as site supervisors, foreman, etc. on how to implement and run Quality Systems within their companies.

It is hoped that this integrated approach will reduce the cost of implementing Quality Systems in the industry.

It also means that the building and construction industry would thus use a Standard which complies with the International Series of Standards currently used by manufacturing industries (including suppliers) so that there would be consistency between the building and construction industry and other sectors of Australian and overseas manufacturing.

This will have important costs benefits. Instead of having two or even three separate Standards which would have been the case if the draft standard had proceeded and AS2990 remained in force, there will in due course be only one Standard, the ISO/AS3900 Series. This also would provide ultimate benefits to Australia as far as its International competitiveness is concerned in that all sections of the Australian Industry would then be conforming to the International Series of Standards which are recognised in other areas of the world, especially South East Asia.

It is also likely that the Federal Government Building Industry Reform Strategy will recommend the phasing out of AS2990-1987 leaving the ISO/AS3900 Series as the only Quality Standard in use in Australia by the middle of this decade.