Summary of Submissions

**Provisional Plumbing Licences for Overseas Trained Applicants**

**Proposal for Western Australia to Implement Provisional Licences for Overseas Trained Applicants through the *Plumbers Licensing and Plumbing Standards Regulations 2000***

**January 2014**

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# Introduction

The discussion paper ‘Provisional Licences for Overseas Trained Plumbers’ was published on 14 November 2013. Feedback on the discussion paper was sought from interested stakeholders, with a closing date for submissions of 13 December 2013. A number of questions were broached in the discussion paper with stakeholders asked to provide feedback by emailing their comments to the Building Commission.

In total, 16 submissions were received, comprising 11 from licensed plumbers, two industry associations, one registered training organisation, one interstate regulator and one advisory body.

# Overview of submissions

There were highly divergent views on whether a provisional licence for overseas trained plumbers should be implemented in Western Australia. Some respondents took the view that overseas trained persons should have to restart and complete their training from scratch before being eligible to apply for a licence. In contrast, one respondent thought that licensed plumbers from Britain and Ireland should be eligible to apply for a full licence while doing minor gap training on the grounds that training and regulations in those jurisdictions are similar to WA.

However, there was a general consensus that the existing system was not highly effective, either in the rules set in place or in how they are being applied.

# Offshore Technical Skills Record

Where comment was made about the application of an Offshore Technical Skills Record (OTSR) it was normally in a negative manner. These comments included:

* current frontend offshore assessment being conducted by vetassess and Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) in the country of origin is continuing to cause concern and often leaves migrants confused as to what the jurisdictional licensing requirements are when they arrive in Australia; and
* testing outside of Australia may give rise to less than acceptable, even dubious practices that will only accentuate problems on a domestic and commercial level.

An interstate industry body provided specific examples of cases where the assessment had failed and where overseas trained plumbers did not have the skills stated in their OTSR. This view was supported by a number of WA based licensed plumbing contractors who had employed overseas trained plumbers but had let them go due to not having the required skills and experience.

# National licensing

There was limited feedback on whether the national licensing model should take precedence. On 13 December 2013, the Council of Australian Governments decided that the policy for a National Occupational Licensing System would no longer be pursued. This makes the need to ensure consistency with other jurisdictions in assessing overseas trained persons both more important and more difficult.

This is highlighted by the submission by an interstate plumbing regulator requesting that WA not lower its licensing standards in any way due to mutual obligation requirements. The regulator expanded on this, stating that all provisional licences should include conditions specifying any limitations to the scope of work that migrant plumbers can carry out. Such an approach would make it easier to regulate migrant plumbers that move jurisdictions by enabling regulators in each state to offer provisional licences with similar limitations.

# Number of allowable licence terms

While limited comment was received on this matter it was generally agreed that more than one licence term should be allowed. However, there was some divergence on how this should be managed, e.g. whether there should be a time limit to apply for a new provisional following the expiry of the first licence or whether the licence should only be renewed in exceptional circumstances.

# Hand skills test

The need for a migrant plumber to show appropriate levels of hand skills prior to obtaining a provisional licence received general support. Some respondents considered that a specific test would be required to ensure this while one respondent thought that hand skills could be inferred if a formal qualification and industry experience had been proven.

# Suitability of current migrant gap training course

A large number of the submissions dealt specifically with this issue. Responses were varied and included that:

* training and assessment should be aligned to the national package;
* migrant plumbers should have to complete full (Certificate IV) before obtaining a licence;
* it is effective in making an overseas trained plumber aware of local conditions and regulations and should remain a requirement at some stage in the process; and
* WA is the only jurisdiction providing gap training and other states find it problematic.

# Timing for obtaining a full licence

While few submissions dealt specifically with this issue, comments on when a full licence should be available generally reflected an outcome rather than a time period, e.g. once a licensed plumbing contractor has signed off that all skills have been attained, completion of Certificate III, etc.

# On-the-Job Supervision

It was generally agreed that some form of on-the-job supervision was required. The level of supervision deemed necessary was somewhere between what is currently required for an apprentice and tradesperson.

It was also noted that EnergySafety requires the overseas trained gasfitters to have ten jobs monitored prior to obtaining a full licence.