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TIMELINE FOR BCA COMPLIANCE

Around March each year, the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) publishes its amendments to the National Construction Code (NCC).

Most of our readers are familiar with the first two volumes of the NCC, which comprise the Building Code of Australia (BCA). These amendments officially take effect on May 1 of that year.

In most years, it contains critical changes to structural design requirements that affect the design of timber frames and trusses. Truss fabricators are aware of such changes in recent years to the loading codes, timber codes and residential framing codes that have affected material sizes and grades.

Naturally, all structural design software, including those for truss and frame designs, have to be updated annually to comply with these periodic amendments to the BCA.

This year, the amendments that affect truss fabricators include an update to the 2011 edition of the Australian Standards for Wind Action and the introduction of a new ABCB Protocol for Structural Software.

Despite the clearly defined date in which the NCC/BCA comes into effect, some builders (and their suppliers) are unsure as to when they are obliged to switch design compliance during this transitional period.

As the regulations are administered by individual certifiers and local authorities with some discretion at their disposal, they are the only ones that can categorically answer this question for their territory.

Nevertheless, it is our observation that the following practices generally occur:

If a building project is in the middle of construction on May 1, construction may continue under the version of BCA the approval was given.

If building approval was granted before 1st May under the previous version of the BCA and construction commences soon after that date, construction may continue under the version of BCA the approval was based on.

If a building application was submitted before 1st May under the previous BCA and approval is granted after 1st May on that basis, construction may continue under the version of BCA the approval was given. However, it should be ascertained if approval was given conditional upon compliance with the new BCA.

In all cases, it does not prejudice the builder to construct under the new BCA after 1st May even if approval was given under the old system.

This is especially the case if construction is delayed or continues far into the year or beyond. In these situations, it may not be possible to obtain materials, e.g. timber grades that comply with the old system and so design has to be prepared or re-done under the new standards.

All building applications lodged after

1st May should comply with the new BCA and be constructed accordingly.

In situations of design and supply when a supplier (e.g. truss fabricator) is called upon to quote their materials after 1st May for a project that began before that date, it is strongly advisable to prepare the design under the new BCA.

This is all the more important if an engineer's design certificate has to accompany the job later when the tender is successful as most engineers will not condescend to approve designs prepared under superseded standards.

Important Note: This guide is given in good faith according to our understanding of general building practice and should not be relied upon as a definitive interpretation of the regulations.

If in doubt, the local authority or certifier should be consulted for their requirements.

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