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Submission to the Commerce Select Committee on the Energy Safety Review Bill

Introduction

1.1 The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 40 nationally organised societies. It has 33 Branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 100 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. Through its 10 Standing Committees members are consulted on issues of concern and submissions prepared using received comments and previous submissions on similar topics.

1.2 In the preparation of this submission reference has been made to many submissions made during the past 10 -15 years in which Council members consistently opposed the removal of safety controls and the lessening of requirements for rigorous inspection of the work of tradespeople. The Council therefore welcomes the provisions of this Bill. The public needs, in the words of the Explanatory note, "mechanisms designed to assure the public that electric and gas workers are competent to undertake work and that electricity and gas supply systems do not put the public at significant risk".

General Comments

2.1 We have not responded in detail to the Bill, in that we are in agreement with the purposes set out for the amendments to the various Acts which it will amend, and that many of the matters are repeated for tradespeople whether electrical workers, gasfitters, plumbers or drainlayers.

2.2 Safety of the work done and the assurance of the skill of tradespeople are issues that particularly concern consumers.

2.3 Among the matters proposed in the Bill that seem to the Council to assist these matters are the increased requirements regarding licensing and re-licensing of both workers and employers. We are particularly pleased to see the emphasis on the need for proof of on-going competency, and the continuing training and up-dating of skills. We hope that the reluctance by plumbers and drainlayers regarding ongoing competency, as reported in the Explanatory note (p42) can be overcome, and ways found for them to be reassured about the importance of this.

2.4 The Council is pleased, too, to see that registers of registered tradespeople will be available for public scrutiny. Consumers are very aware of the number of so-called 'cow-boys' who claim to have skills; it is important for there to be ways in which their claims can be checked.

2.5 Many New Zealanders carry out installations and repairs in their own homes, and in those of relatives, and it is good to see that this continues to be permitted, although we note that helping in friends' homes will not be permitted. This seems a surprising, and possibly unnecessary restriction. Helping a mate is a strong New Zealand tradition. However we wonder if the condition that such installations and repairs must be checked by a properly licensed person before they can



be used, or the electricity restored, will be observed, or be able to be enforced. We are uncertain whether penalties are proposed for those who do not have such work tested and certified by a duly licensed person.

2.6 This caution does not mean we consider testing and certification of domestic work undertaken by unlicensed persons to be unnecessary. One of our concerns expressed when such checking was removed from legislation some years ago was that a future purchaser of a house could be at risk of inadequate and unsafe installations.

2.7 Effective functioning of the proposed regimes will be dependent on an adequate supply of properly trained tradespeople. The current shortage of such people has encouraged workers with limited skills to undertake work beyond their abilities. While consumers would prefer not to employ inadequately trained workers very often the need to have work done urgently means that whoever is available, and willing to come, is contracted.

2.8 It might be considered that the requirements of this legislation will add to charges which are already considered to be very high, but the Council considers that the issues of safety are so important that most people will accept this. It is, in a sense, a matter of insurance.

Conclusion

The brevity of this submission is not an indication of the importance the Council places on the proposals. We consider it to be extremely important legislation, of great value to the whole community, and look forward to its implementation as soon as possible. We congratulate those responsible for the lengthy discussions that have been held with the current registration boards, and for the agreements, that have, in general, been reached.

Christine Low
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Convener, Consumer Affairs Standing Committee