

## Media Release

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# Grenfell Fire Causes Australian Politicians to Bury their Heads in the Sand

Two weeks on from the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in London, and nearly 3 years since the Lacrosse apartment building fire in Melbourne, Australian governments have still not taken effective action to protect the public.

While the exact cause of the Grenfell fire will take many months of investigation and inquiry to determine, it is clear that the external cladding played a role in the spread of the fire, as was the case with the Lacrosse fire. But the only response by Australian Federal politicians to protect the public from dodgy building products and practices so far, is to extend a Senate inquiry that has already been dragging on for 2 years.

For the Building Products Innovation Council (BPIC) the lack of government action is unconscionable. This week BPIC was asked to make yet another submission - the third so far - to the *Senate Inquiry into Non-Conforming Building Products*. This Inquiry started out as a general investigation, then became about asbestos contamination of building products and now is focusing on flammable cladding. This will be the second change to the inquiry's terms of reference, and the sixth extension of time since the inquiry originally commenced in 2015.

"It is unacceptable that this inquiry has been extended again with no end in sight as to when, or if, it will ever recommend appropriate government action," says Ms McIntyre the Chair of BPIC, "Furthermore it is too narrow in focus. From the beginning it should have been about all the systemic failures resulting in National Construction Code (NCC) non-compliance, not just about a particular product or products."

For years prior to, and ever since the Lacrosse tower fire, BPIC and the building industry has been voicing serious concerns about non-conforming building materials and building non-compliance generally. Politicians cannot use the excuse that they don't know about the problems or what is required to sort them out.

"Also the industry has invested heavily in third-party conformance schemes, to help prevent the spread of non-compliant building products" says Ms McIntyre, "But governments have neither acknowledged nor endorsed these efforts. Instead they have buried their heads in the sand."

"The latest knee-jerk political reaction in Australia to the Grenfell fire, is a call for a cladding audit of buildings across the country," says Ms McIntyre, "But there has already been a cladding audit done in Victoria in the wake of the Lacrosse fire, and the NSW Department of Planning and Environment conducted their own internal audit and estimated that 1800 buildings (and possibly as many as 2500) in metropolitan

Sydney could contain flammable cladding material,” says Ms McIntyre, “and both those audits have failed to result in rectification and prosecutions.”

“Calling for more audits is only going to tell what we already know,” says Ms McIntyre, “and besides, these cladding audits will miss or ignore all the other non-compliance issues in buildings that can lead to the kind of disaster we have seen in the UK.”

BPIC would rather see any State money earmarked for cladding audits, being used to conduct a more thorough and widespread audit of building non-compliance in each Jurisdiction conducted by suitably experienced and knowledgeable experts. This should be done in association with free building inspection and non-compliance testing services provided to residents who suspect or find out their buildings are at risk.

Furthermore BPIC wants to see State and Territory politicians immediately enact easy pathways to enable the prosecution of those responsible for non-conforming and non-compliant products and practices. These pathways should also allow building owners to easily pass the cost of rectification on to those who created the problems in the first place.

Armed with all this industry input, the Lacrosse fire investigation, the tragedy of the Grenfell Towers fire and shocking evidence of widespread building non-compliance in the UK, Australian politicians should be doing all they can to identify and hold accountable those who have allowed building non-compliance to flourish across Australia.

“The time for action is now and BPIC calls on the Federal government to take the lead from their UK counterparts,” says Ms McIntyre, “They should be working with their State and Territory counterparts to do everything in their considerable power, to stamp out this endemic problem of product and building non-compliance once and for all.”

“With calls for manslaughter charges to be brought against UK politicians at all levels of government who let their non-compliant building debacle take place, it is hard to know what further motivation our Australian politicians need, in order to protect the health and safety of the public and prevent properties from being put at risk,” Ms McIntyre said.

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**About BPIC:** The Building Products Innovation Council (BPIC) is the national peak body representing Australia’s building product associations who support Australia’s building product manufacturers and suppliers. BPIC’s members and associated member companies directly employ over 200,000 Australians with more than 470,000 employed indirectly. Their collective industries are worth over \$54bn annually to the Australian economy.

For more information about BPIC visit [www.bpic.asn.au](http://www.bpic.asn.au)



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