

**July 2017**

**Response to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry  
into the Management and Oversight of the Perth  
Children's Hospital Project**

**The Master Plumbers and Gasfitters Association of  
Western Australia (Union of Employers)**



**Because public health matters.**



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Mr Timothy Hughes  
Principal Research Officer  
Public Accounts Committee  
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

[lapac@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:lapac@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Hughes

**Re: Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into the Management and Oversight of the  
Perth Children's Hospital Project**

On behalf of the members of *The Master Plumbers and Gasfitters Association of Western Australia (Union of Employers)* ('MPGA'), I appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission to the inquiry.

Our area of interest is the lead contamination in the water supply at the Perth Children's Hospital ('PCH').

MPGA recognises that the inquiry is focusing on the project's governance arrangements and considering the seven specific questions listed in your background document.

While this submission relates to the seventh question (*How have key decision-makers obtained assurance that the materials and practices used on the project meet required standards?*), our view is that the lead contamination problem is really a symptom of an issue that goes well beyond the governance arrangements of the PCH project.

Even the highest standard of governance will fail to prevent problems from occurring if there are flaws in the underlying regulatory regime.

We believe this is the case with the lead contamination at PCH.

We also believe the problem should not be reviewed in isolation. Instead, we see it is as just one example of the importance to public health of a regulated plumbing industry.

**The need for a thorough review of the regulatory framework**

It appears that all parties involved in the design and construction of PCH did everything required to comply with plumbing regulations including specifying and installing WaterMark products.

According to the Jacobs Report, one of main causes of lead contamination was the dezincification of WaterMark-certified brass fittings.

This indicates to us that something is amiss with the regulatory framework, the way it is implemented, or both.

Therefore, we strongly believe there is an urgent need for a thorough review and overhaul of all aspects of the regulatory system including, but not limited to, the:

- Applicable standards;
- Plumbing Code of Australia;
- WaterMark Certification System and its processes; and
- Enforcement of compliance.

Such a review should also consider the education of the public and all stakeholders in the supply chain about the value of plumbing regulations and the role of licensed plumbers as front-line guardians of public health.

### **WaterMark compliance at point of sale**

In addition, we are calling for the introduction of mandatory compliance with the WaterMark system at the point of sale. This is essential in order to remove the current contradiction that makes it legal to sell non-compliant products, but illegal for anyone to install them.

### **Plumbing regulation is not 'red tape'**

MPGA and other plumbing industry organisations across Australia have strongly advocated the case for a regulated industry and the enforcement of compliance.

In recent years, we have been fighting a popular perception among government bodies, commercial interests and consumers that what we are fighting for is unnecessary 'red tape'.

The example of PCH is a wake-up call that shows the opposite is true.

It is easy for people to take for granted the benefits of plumbing, such as a clean, healthy water supply and sewage systems that efficiently dispose of waste, when they have known nothing else.

While the risk of a catastrophic event related to plumbing practices or products may be small, the consequences of such an event could be far-reaching in terms of both costs to government and its effect on the health of the population.

### **Our call the Government of Western Australia**

We call on the Government of Western Australia to announce its support for a thorough and open review of all aspects of Australia's plumbing regulatory framework in order to prevent problems such as those that have occurred at PCH from happening again.

We would be pleased to cooperate fully with such a review.

Yours faithfully,

Murray Thomas  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Master Plumbers and Gasfitters Association of Western Australia  
(Union of Employers)