Fire safety certification in student accommodation

Response given to the Sydney Morning Herald

Inquiry: Requested that the department respond to concerns raised by some building certifiers that student accommodation buildings are being certified and built without the appropriate fire safety measures due to differing interpretations of the Building Code of Australia.

Response given by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure on Friday, 23 November:

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure is aware of this issue and has already taken action to address concerns raised by the certification industry.

The department has discussed these concerns with the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) and requested that it clarify how the provisions in the Building Code of Australia (BCA) relating to sole occupancy units should be interpreted.

As a result of this action, the department understands the ABCB is proposing to amend the guide which accompanies the BCA (when it is next published in May 2013) to provide clarity on this issue.

In addition, the department will be providing guidance to the certification industry in the meantime with clear advice on this issue.

This advice will confirm the need for fire-rated walls around each bedroom that is being rented and used by an individual student or students to the exclusion of all others (for example, individual key-lockable bedrooms surrounding a common lounge area).

The communication of a clear and consistent position by the department on this issue should reduce the scope for developers to ‘shop around’ for certifiers with differing interpretations.

The department will also continue discussions with the relevant industry bodies on whether any additional action is required at this time.