



Peter Verwer

No band-aids for safety

The Australian construction industry kills one of its workers every week.

Despite a 30 percent drop in deaths over the past decade, construction workers are far more likely to die on the job than all workers on average.

It's a startling statistic, and yet safety is just one area of industry performance that fails to measure up to other sectors.

Despite half a dozen industry inquiries, two Royal Commissions, a gaggle of government reform programs and 'action agendas', there's been NO *relative* improvement in construction industry productivity over the past four decades.

"Hang on a tick", you say. "What about those reports by McKinsey et al which declare Australian builders are equal to any in the world?"

Yes, that's true. However, *relative* to productivity growth in the rest of the economy, the construction industry is lagging.

It's a similar story for our construction industry colleagues in other countries. The construction industry is brilliant at tactical issues – getting the job done under pressure – but lacks strategic nous.

It may be a harsh call, but we should admit that the construction reform programs of the past 20 years have fallen short, which leads us to the current state of play.

At present, there is:

- No competitiveness strategy for the construction sector
- No agreed set of industry performance benchmarks
- No leadership group that brings together all stakeholders
- No agreed reform agenda
- No recognised toolbox that helps the industry meet evolving performance goals, with a skills program to match.

It's all tactics and no strategic thinking.

One saving grace is the practical research underway at the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation (CRC-CI), chaired by John McCarthy and run by Keith Hampson

If productivity levels are to improve, the

CRC-CI needs the resources to maintain its program of industry-focussed research. That means it's vital the Australian Government renews its funding.

However, much more is needed.

The Property Council believes the solutions to safety, competitiveness and productivity improvement are linked. We've suggested a 10-step action plan for industry stakeholders to chew over.

Topping the list is a proposal for clients to more clearly specify performance goals for projects (and the industry).

The second is for the major property development CEOs to commit to a billion dollar demonstration program that drives reform based on these goals.

The Property Council has developed a working list of performance targets under the following headings:

- Safety
- Eco efficiency
- Economic reward and security of payment
- Collaboration
- Learning and skills
- Information
- R&D/Innovation
- Red tape reduction
- Quality management
- Design
- Growing the asset class
- Productivity and competitiveness.

For instance, the target for safety is to reduce deaths and injuries by 70 percent over the next six years.

We're working with peak industry and government bodies to refine these industry performance goals to ensure they are practical.

The next step is to convince clients to transform these industry goals into performance specifications relevant to individual projects.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you are interested in this long overdue project, or would like to know more about the 10-point plan.

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