

CAN AUS-SPEC GO FURTHER?

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Abstract

Prior to the introduction of AUS-SPEC, Councils had adopted a variety of technical specifications for civil works, which would ultimately be accepted by Local Government as an asset. Both Council and the private sector identified the lack of clear standards for use by Local Government as a whole.

An initiative by SWR TM P/L to provide a uniform standard was implemented during the early 1990's in the form of DevSpec.

The benefits of such a detailed document was quickly realised by most NSW Councils. The CCI challenged the notion of a national standard which resulted in a suite of specifications created as a joint initiative by SWR and IMEA.

The suite of AUS-SPEC specifications available have now been through many updates, reviews and tested in the practical sense following implementation by various authorities.

We must now ask two clear questions, does AUS-SPEC meet Councils expectations? And can AUS-SPEC go further?

AUS-SPEC has provided a suite of documents that establishes a level playing field for its users, however is it being effectively implemented? Are Councils providing adequate resources for its implementation? Are assets being built to the standards specified? Are we using the controls suitable for Local Government works? There are several questions this paper shall seek to answer.

Key Words: Local Government, Private Sector, specifications, updates, reviews, implementation.

Introduction

Prior to the early 1990's Local Government relied on a variety of documents to define the standards of civil works associated with new development. The variation in requirements from one Local Government area to another was broad. This resulted in many areas of confusion for consultants and contractors resulting in the unnecessary waste of resources, delays and provision of non-conforming works.

With the implementation of AUS-SPEC 1, Councils have provided greater direction to the development industry in the design and construction of civil works to be accepted by Council as an asset.

Change

The standards previously adopted by Councils generally met the requirements of the day however amendments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act implemented during 1998 have also required Councils to review its processes in development approval.

We now have a process of development consent, approval of construction and compliance certificates along with occupation and subdivision certificates.

The implementation of AUS-SPEC has helped smooth this change.

However have we got the outcomes we hoped for? Are we getting a better product or are we just identifying who is responsible?

Performance

AUS-SPEC has for many Councils been in place for a number of years. We now need to look at the results achieved following its implementation.

Discussions with colleagues and in house experience confirm significant improvement in the quality and detail of information within the application and design process.

Issues still arise however in relation to interpretation of variations to the adopted standards, links to Councils Local Environmental Plan, Development Control Plans and policy.

Disagreement becomes more evident following the issue of construction certificates.

Examples of non-conforming works included the failure of road pavement, pipe infrastructure and concrete structures. In some cases design criteria or omissions were identified as contributing to the problems encountered.

Industry is of the belief as Council approves the Construction Certificate they accept responsibility for failures in design where Councils are of the opinion the design detail is "accepted" rather than approved and the Construction Certificate is issued in relation to detail provided being in accordance with standards specified

unless departure is identified and requested by the applicant.

The role of Superintendent supervising the project, ensuring the quality of works and compliance is yet to be fully addressed. In many cases the contractor remains the first point of contact with Council officers

Opportunities for Improvement

During 1998 The NOROC group of Councils introduced the first regional version of AUS-SPEC. This product provided a consistent standard spanning Local Government areas from the Queensland border to a Grafton. This provided industry with a uniform approach to development assessment, approval and asset acceptance.

Many Local Government organizations have followed this path. The challenge now is to look beyond the regulatory process and provide direction at all levels of asset provision.

During the assessment stage of development application, problems arose within Council with each officer undertaking their role in differing ways.

Hastings Council is currently plotting each activity and process at both Macro and Micro levels in the form of flow charts.

The final outcome is to provide clear direction for all from the initial conceptual stage through to construction and acceptance.

The Marco level provides an overview of process in addition to identifying the role and responsibilities for developers consultants, Council staff and contractors.

The micro level provides detailed process at all levels. Of major benefit, this process allows the review of the various application forms and supporting information required to ensure efficient assessment.

Applications under Section 68 of the Local Government Act for the provision of water, sewerage and drainage was the first full process to be completed as this was an area of constant debate. The result is clear guidance through each activity and its links to other acts such as Sections 305 and 306 of the Water Management Act.

Lismore City Council has also expanded the information within its adopted AUS-SPEC documents. The provision of detailed guidance for works within the road reserve under Section 138 of the Roads Act, in particular the design and construction of vehicular access. This document reflects the same format, key works and references as that of AUS-SPEC.

Great Lakes Council has also identified the need to improve process with the drafting of Internal auditing processes to address environmental issues. Construction checklists have also been created to bring together all hold points certification and conformance requirements in one easy to use document.

Mid Coast Water have also implemented improved manuals with the provision of a "Contractors Site Handbook".

This document provides checklists, material standards and inspection requirements. The handbook provides extensive photographs, diagrams and a plain English language clearly directed at the users needs.

This document provides an excellent model for the creation of other site construction guides.

The RTA has also looked at expanding prequalification requirements for contractors. The scheme looks to provide a framework to classify contractors, commensurate with their technical and managerial expertise. Whilst the RTA format may not suit all aspects of development construction

associated with Local Government, the concept may create the opportunities to improve the technical abilities and skills of contractors and include an education / training programme for the industry and Local Government alike.

The Civil Contractors Federation (CCF) has drafted a Civil Construction Management Code for prequalified contractors. This code looks to provide quality assurance programmes directed at the smaller contracting firms including training and skills development.

To support the issues raised in this paper, further areas of improvement were to be sought in the form of a questionnaire directed at Local Government and Industry representatives.

Initial feedback included the provision of detailed drawings, document management, additional specifications and provision of clear work methods. The issues raised were far too broad to accurately reflect the concerns of all. I therefore invite attendees of this session to table their concerns and recommendations to give direction to build on what AUS-SPEC has achieved so far.

Conclusion

AUS-SPEC 1 has laid the foundation for clear guidance in many areas of civil design and construction. Continuing improvements in technology, resources and changes in legislation demands dedicated management and review of documentation whilst meeting the needs and expectations of the community

The theme of this conference is "Winning the game". The strengthening of partnerships of Local Government and industry through improved documentation and training specifically aimed at the end user will ensure each sector of government and industry are winners.

Author Biography

Bob Hanby has worked within Local Government for 27 years.

The past 10 in managing the design and acceptance of civil engineering assets inherited by Council as a result of property development. He has developed various standards and practices to improve the quality of infrastructure accepted by local government.

Tweed Shire Council currently employs bob in the role of Senior Development Engineer.

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