

Safe, Healthy and Affordable

Labour's policy for Building and Construction 2008

Labour wants to ensure that New Zealanders have access to safe, comfortable and healthy homes and buildings that reflect our natural environment. Young families and couples getting into their first homes need to be secure in the knowledge their home is built by qualified professionals.

Construction standards for houses and buildings are fundamental to the health and safety of the community. They protect public safety and the investment New Zealanders have made in their home.

Standards have changed significantly during this decade to protect home owners from the lax regime put in place in the 1990s and to assist those who have been affected by leaky homes. There was immediate action to make sure the leaky buildings problem was not allowed to continue. Much of this work was done by setting benchmark standards across the building and construction sector and through local government.

A Weathertight Homes Resolution Service was put in place to assist leaky homes victims to seek redress and help resolve disputes.

Since then there have been further refinements of the rules and efforts have been made to create more flexibility in the Building Act while at the same time protecting owners of homes and buildings.

10 years ago... deregulation of the industry resulted in catastrophic failures across the building sector, leading directly to the leaky buildings problem.

Today... stronger standards are in place to protect the interests of home owners and prevent something like the leaky buildings crisis from happening again.

10 years from now... streamlined regulation and strong self-policing will mean lower construction costs while keeping homes and buildings safe, healthy and comfortable.

The building and construction industry is healthier and stronger now than it was at the beginning of the decade. The industry is better off with Labour because we are headed in the right direction with a common-sense approach to regulations.

But there is more to do. Labour will put in place further changes to building and construction standards to obtain good, safe buildings at reasonable cost.

Labour will simplify the Building Code requirements for the design and construction of all buildings while protecting health, safety and investment.

Simplifying the rules for simple building work makes it easier for DIY-builders to continue a Kiwi tradition without unnecessary red tape. We are also looking at ways to streamline approvals for 'starter' homes that meet the needs of families trying to get into home ownership for the first time. We have already commissioned designs and an architectural competition. Substantial savings for starter homes have already been identified.

Labour will work on developing and extending the successful starter homes portfolio of designs.

These changes will assist in making home ownership more affordable by accelerating the approval process, thereby reducing costs.

We intend to consult closely to ensure these changes work as effectively as possible. We will work with competent, experienced practitioners involved in building design and construction, and with those involved in administering building and construction standards both within the industry and in territorial authorities.

Labour will work with the industry to simplify legislation, organise appropriate training of practitioners throughout the industry, and safeguard quality, safety, and health.

This could involve looking at the effectiveness of current liability provisions in the building sector and investigating the possibility of self-certification by appropriately qualified and indemnified builders.

The inaugural building summit in Auckland in mid-2008 drew widespread agreement from industry leaders. They agreed to create a forum which will recommend changes to the consents process for large-scale construction. This would mean only a single consent would be required when developers want to undertake the large-scale construction of standard homes using the same general design. This will further assist with bringing down construction costs.

Labour will work with Territorial Authorities to develop centralised data bases to assist in consent processes and provide information on designs and building products.

Consistency in the sector is crucial to providing peace-of-mind and security for New Zealanders wanting to build new homes. One way we intend to achieve this is through encouraging greater uniformity across all local government and building consents authorities to ensure timely and cost-efficient processes and avoid duplication.

Labour will develop a nationwide set of guidelines on standards-setting to help improve consistency in the administration of different Building Consent Authority jurisdictions and in the rule-making of different Territorial Authorities.

Many New Zealanders today and in the future may not choose to own a home. Lifestyle choices mean an increasing number will choose to rent, live in apartments and other multi-unit properties or, for many elderly people, opt for the safe, comfortable and happy retirement village environment. Labour is committed to safeguarding and protecting the rights of all of these groups. We have already reviewed the code of practice for retirement homes to protect the interests of older people and their families

Labour will put in place changes protecting property rights and titles within **multi-units and high-rise apartments** by modernising the out-of-date laws governing this area.

The law covering the rights and responsibilities of both unit title owners and bodies corporate needs to be brought up to date because of changes in the way many New Zealanders are choosing to live, including the high number of people living in apartments and other high-density accommodation.

Labour will proceed with amendments to the Unit Titles Act to **provide security and fairness for stakeholders** in medium and high density accommodation.

As New Zealand renews and expands its housing stock, we also need to take account of our ageing population, with more people living longer into an active retirement. We need to ‘future-proof’ our houses so that residences remain liveable and accessible for people throughout their lives.

Labour will encourage, where reasonably possible, the design and construction of residences to ensure that a higher proportion of the housing stock is **suitable to meet the needs of people of all abilities** including the elderly.

Research is a vital component to ensuring the New Zealand building industry is among the best in the world, taking advantage of the most innovative and effective design and construction ideas.

Labour will work with and support the **Building Research Association of New Zealand** to ensure New Zealand stays abreast of innovation and effective future industry development.