

Changes to national construction code open opportunities for mid-rise timber

Wider range of options and combinations for builders, developers

CHANGES to the 2019 National Construction Code (Vol. 1) increase the range of buildings up to an effective height of 25 m in which fire-protected timber construction systems can be used.

The new classes add schools, retail premises, hospitals and aged care facilities to the previously approved multi-residential, hospitality accommodation and office buildings.

In 2016, following extensive work and a successful submission by Forest and Wood Products Australia, the industry services company behind the WoodSolutions Program, a deemed-to-satisfy solution was introduced to the NCC permitting, for the first time, construction in fire-protected timber building systems to an effective height of 25 m (typically eight



1/ Big benefits for timber... changes to National Construction Code.

2/ Boris Iskra... new concessions include reductions in fire resistance levels.

storeys) for Class 2, 3 and 5 buildings.

In the 2019 edition, these concessions will be extended to include all classes of buildings, enabling the use of timber building systems in accommodation for the aged,

schools, retail and hospitals. Timber building systems include traditional lightweight timber framing and the newer mass timber options, including CLT, LVL and glulam. FWPA national codes and standards manager Boris Iskra who led the submission process for the 2016 and the current 2019 NCC changes, said that due to the new provisions, builders and developers wanting to use

timber would no longer have to undertake time-consuming and expensive 'performance solutions' to gain building approval, as long as their designs meet the deemed-to-satisfy requirements.

"In effect, it opens the door to a wide range of options and combinations," Mr Iskra said. "For example, designers can now create mixed use mid-rise timber buildings with residential upper levels and lower levels used for office space or retail."

Another change to the code will require all Class 2 and 3 buildings four stories or above in height to be sprinkler protected.

According to Boris Iskra, sprinkler systems will substantially enhance fire safety and the cost of putting sprinklers in will be significantly offset by greater flexibility provided by new concessions for sprinkler protected Class 2 and 3 buildings.

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Code clears way to expand use of mass timber products in US

MASS timber construction in the US is clearing code obstacles as local governments eye the potential to help their forest products sectors while reducing the environmental impact of tall construction.

The International Code Council (ICC) is clearing the way to expand the use of timber building products such as CLT and allow their use in taller buildings.

The move is viewed as a boon to the budding industry that manufactures CLT, now limited to a small handful of producers in the US and Canada. Implementation of new building codes that incorporate mass timber construction are only a few short years away.

The ICC, which develops

model building codes that are adopted by most US states and communities, in December released the unofficial voting results on proposed code changes it considered in 2018. They included passage of the entire package of 14 proposed code changes for tall mass timber construction, according to the American Wood Council, a trade organisation serving the wood industry.

The proposals create three new types of construction that set fire safety

requirements, allowable heights, areas and number of stories for tall mass timber buildings. The three new types of construction would permit mass timber buildings ranging from nine to 18 storeys tall.

Official results are expected to be announced during the first quarter of 2019, and the new provisions would be included in the 2021 International Building Code, says the American Wood Council.

Currently only one state – Oregon – allows CLT in tall building construction up to 18 storeys, having modified its building code in 2018. Washington has taken similar action, and it will be effective in March this year.

“BOON TO THE BUDDING CLT MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

From P 2

These new concessions include some reductions in fire resistance levels and extended travel distances, which will translate to potentially improving lettable space within buildings.

Mr Iskra provided the example of a building that will now require one fire stairway, whereas it previously might have required two. He pointed out that there are also modifications to hydrant protection that may also deliver cost savings, further offsetting the additional cost of sprinkler protection.

“IMPROVING LETTABLE SPACE WITHIN BUILDINGS



Opening doors... designers can now create mixed use mid-rise timber buildings with residential upper levels and lower levels used for office space or retail.

“If you have a mid-rise project in the pipeline, there’s never been a better time to consider timber and there’s an expert resource to help you explore the most suitable options and realise the many benefits they can deliver,” he said.

The WoodSolutions mid-rise advisory team pilot program now has representation in Brisbane, providing free consultancy services. More information about the team and on designing and building with timber systems, is available at woodsolutions.com.au



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