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MEDIA RELEASE—NSW property owners beware of inspection licensing changes

Those who own or are thinking of purchasing property in New South Wales need to be aware of new legislation affecting the licensing of building consultants.

NSW Government legislation (Office of Fair Trading), effective mid last month, removed the need for building consultants to carry a licence to perform pre-purchase building inspections for buyers or sellers. The owner of the South Coast's Property Works, Bruce Cohen, says abolishing the requirement leaves consumers—especially buyers—vulnerable. 'It means inspectors don't have to pass rigorous testing to perform this professional, speciality line of work. Virtually anyone can do it.'

'There are three good reasons to get a building inspection report done before you purchase,' says Cohen. 'To determine in advance what the problems are, to use the information to negotiate a lower price if repairs are needed and for reassurance that you have specialist advice about issues (major or minor) that will affect your investment and recommendations on how to solve them.'

In NSW inspectors are expected to comply with the Australian Standard for building inspection (AS 4349.1), although there is no license in place to enforce it. This issue also is what qualifications the inspectors bring to the table in assessing properties against the standard and whether they write clear, meaningful reports, says Bruce: 'Inspecting houses and buildings is an area of expertise in its own right. Not even all builders have extensive experience in understanding the faults that can occur after construction.'

Property Works, which was licensed for years before the NSW Office of Fair Trading changed requirements and which remains officially accredited through the stringent requirements of its insurance company, says consumers need to protect themselves by asking inspectors important questions. 'First and foremost is experience, years in the business, the number of properties they have inspected and even if they have ever been licensed in NSW,' says Bruce. 'Second is whether the inspectors carry professional indemnity insurance. It's difficult for consumers to take legal action against an inspector who was negligent or whose report isn't accurate or complete if they are not insured. And it can cost a property owner thousands of dollars if the inspector doesn't do their job.'

Other protection questions include how the inspector carries out duties. 'Do they inspect the roof and subfloor as well as the main structure?' asks Bruce. 'Do they write detailed reports or just provide a 'tick and flick form'? How much time do they spend inspecting? Are they prepared to provide a sample report? Are they members of professional bodies such as the Housing Industry Association or the Master Builders Association?' A property is a huge investment and one that deserves to be protected,' says Bruce. 'The inspections have therefore got to be thorough and accurate.'

Property Works is a fully accredited company that has handled thousands of professional property inspections in New South Wales (Ulladula to Far South Coast) and in the ACT and surrounding regions. www.property-works.com.au

ACT

A First Floor, Unit 6, 31 - 37 Townshend Street, Phillip ACT 2606

P 1300 767 741 • **F** 02 6282 7163

E actsales@property-works.com.au

Property Works Pty. Ltd. Trading As
Property Works (ACT) ABN 72 107 817 121

NSW

A 45 Pyang Avenue, Malua Bay NSW 2536

P 02 4471 3175 • **F** 02 4471 1736

E southsales@property-works.com.au

Austco Building Services Trading As
Property Works (South Coast) ABN 81 097 333 849