

ARE NATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS ACHIEVABLE?

NATIONAL PRECAST CONCRETE ASSOCIATION IS CALLING FOR AN AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS-BASED APPROACH AS ROADS AUTHORITIES DEVELOP AND REVISE TECHNICAL PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS AND AUSTRROADS PROGRESSES SPECIFICATION HARMONISATION.

As the peak body for the precast construction industry, National Precast has for many years called for state road authorities to put Australian Standards at the forefront. The calls serve as reminders to authorities as they review, develop and revise technical specifications for products used in the construction of roads and bridges. According to National Precast's CEO Sarah Bachmann, road authority specifications at a state level are in a constant state of evolution as they are

developed and periodically revised. Each jurisdiction has, over time, developed its own series of specifications, which has resulted in different rules applying in every state or territory. Different rules can result in varying manufacturing requirements as well as inconsistent performance outcomes such as durability, strength and safety. "There's a natural inefficiency in that, especially given that many product suppliers supply across borders," Ms. Bachmann says.

REQUIREMENTS MUST BE JUSTIFIED
"We understand that due to climatic and other geographic considerations, there can be a need to impose requirements in addition to those found in Australian Standards. These need to be properly justified to minimise inefficiency," she says. Ms. Bachmann explains that Australian Standards are comprehensive, as they establish minimum requirements to define quality and safety criteria. "Standards have been and are developed by an exhaustive cohort of industry, academia, professionals,

unions and government authorities." Ms. Bachmann adds that cost implications arise when specifications impose requirements that have not been subject to a deliberate justification process based on factual evidence, research and sound engineering judgement. "Any perceived benefit, implemented in specifications, must be fully measured against additional cost," Ms. Bachmann states. "Australian Standards are subject to a transparent development and review process. They offer an ample framework, ensuring minimum requirements are robust and well tested. We shouldn't underestimate their value," she says.

EFFORTS TO HARMONISE SPECIFICATIONS
As government and industry look to both Australian Standards and different jurisdictional specifications, Austroads is currently developing National Technical Specifications (NTS). The NTS will apply to products that are used in the construction of roadworks and bridgeworks across Australia. The NTS is part of an effort to reduce complications for road and bridge building. This will offer certainty for businesses working in the sector and simplify processes for suppliers that work across state borders. "This is a good move and the benefits of harmonisation would be significant," Ms. Bachmann says. She adds that many of National Precast's members operate in more than one state. "Simplifying the approach with one set of rules should ultimately reduce costs. In an ideal world, this is what should be. "Harmonisation is something we have been encouraging for some time now, not just in this space. It is equally important and beneficial in other areas like work health and safety and even in sectors outside the construction industry."

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUY-IN
While Ms. Bachmann commends the Austroads board's decision to commission the work, she questions whether there will be widespread uptake. She says it is important that the development of the NTS is undertaken with full involvement with comprehensive industry input.

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"For true harmonisation to take place, the new national specifications should be implemented in each jurisdiction without amendment." Ms. Bachmann says developing these national specifications is a positive move but that the measure of success should be adoption in every state without modification. "Otherwise, let's revert back to Australian Standards, along with minimal additional state-based requirements in jurisdictional specifications that are well consulted, well researched and include requirements that can be properly justified." Ms. Bachmann says National Precast members are invested in ensuring their products are good quality, fit for purpose and deliver the required performance parameters. Members of the association follow Australian Standard requirements, which helps to ensure industry confidence in quality and safety. "Just as roads authorities want durable

products that meet strength and durability requirements, so do our members. Their reputations are on the line," she states. **GIVING MANUFACTURERS A VOICE**
As well as representing the precast concrete industry on over 20 Australian Standards' committees, National Precast frequently works with government on the development and review of specifications. "Our contribution to Australian Standards is significant. All precasters, members or not, benefit from this work," Ms. Bachmann says. She invites precasters who are not currently members of the association to consider membership and to become involved in industry developments. "We are now also offering precasters access to Australian Standards as part of their membership," she says. "Our work with government is very important to our members as well. Being able to have a say and be heard through our collective voice is a key benefit of membership that is highly valued." She says when it comes to government, National Precast has proved that a more collaborative approach offers positive outcomes for government and industry. "When industry and government work in collaboration and both understand one another's priorities, solutions can be sensibly discussed, agreed and implemented. We've experienced this a number of times. Everyone walks away happy." ■



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