



NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF  
**ARCHITECTS**  
I N C O R P O R A T E D

## **SUBMISSION TO THE CANTERBURY EARTHQUAKES ROYAL COMMISSION**

The New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), which represents more than 90 per cent of New Zealand's registered Architects, welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission.

In particular, the NZIA wishes to address the topics of:

- 1) Unreinforced Masonry Buildings, a subject especially relevant to the Royal Commission's Issue 2 – Inquiry into buildings in the Christchurch CBD, and
- 2) The role of Architects in designing the next generation of New Zealand's buildings, a consideration apposite to Issue 6 – Future measures.

While these topics are immediately pertinent to Christchurch, the NZIA recognises they have national relevance.

### **1) Unreinforced Masonry Buildings**

- 1.1 In respect of this building type, which is both an important component of New Zealand's built heritage and demonstrably highly vulnerable, if inadequately strengthened, to seismic activity, the NZIA agrees that the preservation of life must be the paramount concern when considering the fate of any Unreinforced Masonry Building, in Christchurch and all New Zealand cities.
- 1.2 We concur with what is, post the earthquakes, the generally held view that New Zealand's Unreinforced Masonry Buildings should be strengthened beyond existing code requirements and that this strengthening should be carried out more expeditiously than has been the case.
- 1.3 Any new rules or regimes governing building strengthening will have implications for Architects: the NZIA will welcome and support measures that improve the safety of Unreinforced Masonry Buildings and the viability of this building type.

In regards to the benefits, as opposed to the risks, of Unreinforced Masonry Buildings, the NZIA submits:

- 1.4 Unreinforced Masonry Buildings are integral to the heritage of Christchurch and most New Zealand's towns and cities and they contribute significantly to the character of our urban environments.
- 1.5 The type, which was undervalued and neglected in our recent history, is now appreciated, and there is widespread popular support for the retention of Unreinforced Masonry Buildings, and for their adaptation for contemporary use.
- 1.5 In a nation dominated by lightweight and relatively ephemeral architecture, these buildings provide historical continuity.
- 1.6 Unreinforced Masonry Buildings are of a scale suited to an important stratum of urban economic activity, including smaller-scale retail and hospitality enterprises, and start-up businesses.
- 1.7 In their function and their often ornate forms, these buildings contribute to lively streetscapes and, where groups of them survive, they shape attractive and successful precincts, such as the area centred on Auckland's High Street. A virtue of the type is that offers both individual variety and collective coherence.
- 1.8 It was already evident in the pre-earthquakes Christchurch CBD that many Unreinforced Masonry Buildings were not well maintained. The NZIA believes the question of building maintenance is, generally, an issue that should be addressed in New Zealand. The condition of our building stock would be significantly improved if it was more strongly recognised that building sustainability depends upon lifetime upkeep.
- 1.9 Recognising that our cities' built heritage is a public good, and also acknowledging building owners' rightful responsibilities, the NZIA believes it would be worthwhile to explore ways, for example, through the taxation and rating systems, to encourage owners to strengthen and adapt Unreinforced Masonry Buildings with heritage and urban design significance.
- 1.10 As a result of the earthquakes and subsequent demolition, most, if not all, Unreinforced Masonry Buildings will be gone from the Christchurch CBD. The NZIA does not recommend they be replaced with replica buildings, but the role these buildings performed in the city was important, and the Royal Commission might consider ways to reassert their scale and place-making properties.
- 1.11 Such guidance would be helpful in the re-establishment of streetscapes in the Christchurch CBD. It is unlikely that the historical pattern resulting from rows of abutting heritage buildings will be reinstated, given the requirements for building

separation; however, the population of sites with closely proximate buildings is desirable for the city's streetscapes and wider urban context.

- 1.12 The Royal Commission might investigate ways to encourage such development, which may include measures such as land swaps or exemplar projects on Council-owned land, in order to alleviate the effects on the city of piecemeal development accompanied by the long-term presence of derelict lots on sites throughout Christchurch.
- 1.13 The Christchurch earthquakes have demonstrated the huge public cost of widespread building failure, and recovery will be hugely expensive and complex. In these circumstances, the NZIA believes the public appetite, in Christchurch and throughout New Zealand, for more assertive and sophisticated design direction is now more highly developed.
- 1.14 The NZIA believes it is time to establish national Urban Design Panels, and suggests the Royal Commission gives guidance on the issue of the scope, remit, authority and composition of these panels.
- 1.15 The NZIA believes New Zealand would benefit from the establishment of the position of Government Architect, which now exists in most Australian states. This position would provide high-level design direction, assist in the formulation of national urban design strategies, advise on issues such as productivity and procurement, and perform a critical advisory and advocacy role in circumstances, such as the Christchurch earthquakes, which challenge local resources and necessitate central government involvement.

## **2) The role of Architects in designing the next generation of New Zealand buildings**

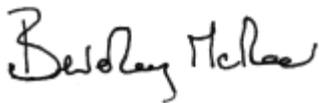
- 2.1 The NZIA recognises that there will be changes in the design and construction of buildings in earthquake-prone locations.
- 2.2 Such changes will in turn require changes in what are currently common normal design processes and practices.
- 2.3 For any new building a variety of formal and structural solutions integrating earthquake resistance are conceivable.
- 2.4 The NZIA understands that the achievement of these solutions is dependent upon a close collaboration between Architects and Engineers in the early stages of building projects. Architects and Engineers may have to work together in a more self-conscious way, in terms of roles, responsibilities and communication, than they do at present.

- 2.5 Close collaboration between Architects and Engineers in the course of the design process already occurs as a matter of best practice; the Royal Commission might give guidance as to how best practice becomes common practice.
- 2.6 The Royal Commission might consider investigating the adequacy of the structural information presented in the planning approval stage of building projects.

The NZIA wishes the Royal Commission well in its deliberations, and would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Royal Commission and speak to the points presented in this submission.



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