

# Application of the Building Code of Australia to Farm Buildings

This updates the previous Practice Note No. 2014-67 issued October 2014.

Reference to the Building Code of Australia (BCA) in this Practice Note means Volume One and Volume Two of the National Construction Code Series.

## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Practice Note is to provide guidance to practitioners in determining the appropriate classification of a farm building and the exemptions and concessions to the BCA that may be applied.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Construction requirements for all types of buildings are fundamentally associated with their classification in accordance with clauses A3.2 and 1.3.2 of the BCA. Clause A3.1 and Clause 1.3.1 of Volumes One and Two of the BCA states that *“The classification of a building or part of a building is determined by the purpose for which it is designed, constructed or adapted to be used.”*

Regulation 112 of the Building Regulations 2006 (the Regulations) states *“if there is any doubt as to the classification of a building under the BCA, the relevant building surveyor must classify the building as belonging to the class it most closely resembles.”*

The classification of a farm building as a Class 7b or 8 requires the building to be designed and constructed in accordance with the relevant performance requirements of Volume One of the BCA.

The Building Amendment (Farm Buildings) Regulations 2014 commenced on 21 October 2014 and provides concessions and exemptions under certain conditions.

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

The Guide to Volume One of the BCA states the following in relation to the classification of farm buildings:

*“In some States or Territories, appropriate authorities may classify farm buildings as Class 10a, which covers non-habitable buildings. They would only make this decision if a classification of Class 7 or Class 8 would not be more appropriate.”*

*When making their decision they consider the building’s size, purpose, operations and the extent to which people are employed in the building.”*

Consideration of the proposed use of a building is critical including the use of the building as a workplace. If the proposed use is associated with farming and no process or commercial activity is to be undertaken in the building, the relevant building surveyor (RBS) may consider it appropriate to classify the building as a Class 10a. For instance, this would include a hay shed or farm machinery shed where a mechanic may attend occasionally to carry out repairs to equipment in the shed.

However if mechanical repairs were to be carried out on a commercial basis for other farmers, the RBS may decide the correct classification is Class 8.

Where persons are likely to be employed for the processing of produce, the RBS may determine the correct classification as Class 8. If a building is being occupied by employees engaged in the storage of produce for sale by wholesale, the RBS may determine a classification of Class 7b building.

For further guidance—

If persons are likely to be employed to stack materials/produce in a storage building or remove materials/produce from a storage building then a classification of Class 7b may be appropriate.

If persons are likely to be employed to pack or process materials/produce within a building then a classification of Class 8 may be appropriate.

If persons are likely to be employed to feed, clean or collect produce from animals or plants within a building then a classification of Class 8 may be appropriate.

## 4. EXEMPTIONS FOR CLASS 10 BUILDING USED FOR FARMING PURPOSES

In accordance with regulation 1804, the relevant council may exempt a Class 10 building that is to be constructed on farm land and used for farming purposes from all or any of the requirements of the Regulations.

As the regulation is providing a discretionary power, it follows that each application for an exemption must be assessed on a case by case basis for the particular circumstances.

## 5. CONCESSIONS FOR CLASS 7b AND CLASS 8 FARM BUILDINGS

These concessions commenced operation on 21 October 2014.

The Regulations modify the application of the BCA to provide three concessions from specific firefighting equipment and emergency lighting requirements for low occupancy farm buildings classified under the BCA as either a Class 7b or a Class 8 building.

For the purpose of these concessions, a farm building is a building used for farming, classified as either a Class 7b or Class 8 building and has an occupancy of no more than one person per 200m<sup>2</sup> of total floor area, up to a maximum number of six people.

Farming means agriculture, cropping, grazing, animal husbandry, intensive animal keeping, horticultural growing or dairy farming.

The three concessions provided in the Regulations are to BCA requirements for the installation of a fire hose reel system, a fire hydrant system and emergency lighting, if certain conditions are met. Details of these concessions are set out in this Practice Note.

## (a) Fire hose reel concession

The fire hose reel concession provides an exemption from the requirement to install a fire hose reel system in a farm building. A fire hose reel system is intended to allow occupants to fight a fire in its early stages to reduce the fire hazard and allow more time for evacuation and prevent structural damage. This concession allows installation of portable fire extinguishers as an alternative to the installation of fire hose reels.

## (b) Fire hydrant concession

The fire hydrant concession provides an exemption, if certain conditions are met, from the requirement for a fire hydrant system to be installed to serve a farm building. The objective underlying the installation of a fire hydrant system is to provide adequate water to allow the fire brigade to fight a fire in a building. The concession requires the provision of an adequate supply of water for use by the fire brigade instead of a fire hydrant system.

This concession provides two significant benefits to farming businesses. First, the removal of the obligation to install a fire hydrant system, and second, a reduction in the volume of static water required to be supplied for firefighting purposes from 288,000 litres per farm building, which is the current requirement, to 144,000 litres per farm building.

An acceptable source of water must be located on the same allotment as the farm building, have a minimum capacity of 144,000 litres per farm building, and be located not more than 60 metres away from the farm building. The water source must be situated so as to enable emergency services vehicles access to within 4 metres.

## Amount of water per farm building

Each farm building that seeks to qualify for the fire hydrant concession must have its own static water supply. This means to qualify for the concession, each farm building will need to have its own static supply of water of 144,000l in compliance with regulation 120(3) to (6). Multiple buildings cannot share the one source of water unless that one source meets the requirements of the regulations, for example, as far as volume of water goes, 3 buildings will need 3 x 144,000 litres.

Note: The volume of water of 144,000 litres is sufficient to protect one building.

The sources of water that are acceptable for the purpose of the fire hydrant concession are a water storage tank or tanks, a dam, reservoir, river, lake or seawater.

If a water storage tank is selected as the acceptable source of water to qualify for the fire hydrant concession, it must be fitted with at least one large bore suction connection to enable access to tank water by the fire brigade.

A large bore suction connection is defined in Australian Standard AS 2419.1- 2005, Fire hydrant installations, Part 1: System design, installation and commissioning.

## (c) Emergency lighting concessions

The third concession removes the requirement for the installation of emergency lighting in farm buildings in two circumstances. The first is where the building has no artificial lighting and the second is where automatic back-up power to supply lighting is provided by a fuel driven back up generator.

## 6. EXEMPTIONS FOR REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Part D3.4 of Volume One of the BCA provides exemptions to accessibility requirements where access would be inappropriate because of the particular purpose for which the building is used or the building would pose a health or safety risk for people with a disability. Reliance on these exemptions must be consistent with the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Further guidance can be obtained in the Guideline on the Application of the Premises Standards, published by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

## 7. ACCREDITATION OF BUILDING DESIGN

Manufacturers / suppliers and designers of farm buildings may apply to the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC) for accreditation of the building design. This will negate the need for an Alternative Solution or determination of the Building Appeals Board (BAB). The RBS must not refuse to approve a design that is accredited by the BRAC and the design complies with the accreditation.

## 8. USE OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

The BCA is a performance based code that, in association with the Building Act 1993 (the Act) and the Regulations, provides for the use of Alternative Solutions assessed in accordance with BCA Clauses A0.9 or 1.0.9 of Volumes One or Two of the BCA respectively.

In choosing an Alternative Solution, it may be appropriate to use design or guidance documentation specific to farm buildings. These documents may form the basis for a proposed alternative design solution to be assessed by the RBS as potentially meeting the Performance Requirements or as supporting information in relation to an application for modification to the Regulations made to the BAB.

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