

This updates the previous Practice Note-2014-64 issued October 2014

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

Purpose

The purpose of this practice note is to provide guidance to practitioners in determining the appropriate classification of buildings (including accommodation, farming or other buildings) and methods of addressing the requirements of the BCA.

Further to this Practice Note, the NCC Guide to Volume 1 Part A3 provides additional guidance to help determine the classification of buildings.

Background

Classification is a process for understanding risks in a building or part, according to its use. Building classifications categorise buildings of similar risk levels based on use, hazard and occupancy. 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 state 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 13 of the Building Regulations 2018 (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”.

Building Classifications

Information required when classifying a building

The application for a building permit must include a statement of the use or intended use of all buildings shown on an allotment plan in accordance with regulation 25. If required, the RBS should request further information to clarify the proposed use of the building prior to determining its classification.

Multiple classifications - Mixed use buildings

A designer may wish to design a building to suit more than one use. For example, an investor/developer may wish to construct a building that could be used by a future tenant or occupant as a Class 2 or Class 3 building. The RBS must ensure that the design complies with the requirements for each classification prior to issuing a building permit. The Occupancy Permit must then reflect the classifications and approved multiple uses.

Classification of Accommodation buildings

Buildings consisting of residential accommodation or where part of the building has a residential component are classified as Class 1a, 1b, 2, 3, or Class 4. Below is a general guideline for understanding residential building classifications.

Class 1a building-is a single dwelling that is a detached house; or one of a group of attached dwellings such as townhouses.

Class 1b building-is a building that has a floor area less than 300 m², and usually has less than 12 people living in it. A Class 1b is used for short-term holiday accommodation such as a boarding house or guest house. It can also be four or more single dwellings located on one allotment

Class 2 buildings-are apartment buildings. They are typically multi-unit residential buildings where people live above and below each other.

Class 3 buildings-are residential buildings that are not Class 1 or Class 2 buildings. They are a common place of long term or transient living for a number of unrelated people.

Class 4 building-is a dwelling or residence within a building of a non-residential nature.

Where classification is unclear, the RBS has discretion to decide the appropriate classification. This decision will factor in the likely fire loads, and consequences of any risks to safety, health and of people using the building.

Classification of farm buildings

The NCC Guide to Volume One states the following:

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 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.

Exemption for Class 10 buildings used for farming purposes

In accordance with Regulation 280, 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.

Classification and Floor area

Every part of a building must be separately classified. However, where a part has a different purpose and is not more than 10% of the floor area of the storey it is on, then it may be considered to be ancillary to the major use under A3.3 (a) of BCA Volume One.

For instance, if a single storey warehouse (Class 8) has an office (Class 5) which takes up only 8% of the floor area, the whole building can be classified as a Class 8. However, if the office takes up 12% of the floor area then the building has mixed uses and the warehouse (Class 8) and office (Class 5) must be classified separately.

Further information on the application of the clause and exemptions that apply are under A3.3 of the Guide to NCC Volume One.

Issues not related to classification

Identification of low fire load, low occupant risk and low risk of fire spread should not be used as justification for choosing a less stringent classification for a building. These issues should be utilised when formulating a Performance Solution design or as supporting information when applying for:

a determination of the Building Appeals Board (BAB) under s160 of the Building Act 1993 that a modification of the Regulations should apply; or

an accreditation by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC).

Use of Performance Solutions

The BCA is a performance based code that, in association with the Act and Regulations, provides for the use of Performance Solutions assessed in accordance with Clauses A0.5 or 1.0.5 of Volumes One or Two of the BCA respectively.

In choosing a Performance Solution, it may be appropriate to use design or guidance documentation specific to farm buildings. These documents may form the basis for a proposed performance 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.

An example is the South Australian Minister's Specification SA H3.2 Concessions and additional requirements for farm buildings.

Accreditation of building design

Manufacturers/ suppliers and designers of farm use buildings may apply to the BRAC for accreditation of the building design. This will negate the need for a Performance Solution or determination of the BAB. An RBS must not refuse to approve a design that is accredited by the BRAC and the design complies with the accreditation.

Further information

Want to know more?

If you have a technical enquiry, please email technicalenquiry@vba.vic.gov.au or call 1300 815 127.

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