

HOUSING APPROVALS

Statement by Minister for Commerce

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Commerce) [3.07 pm]: Last week, I advised the house of the urgent steps I have taken to address the decline in building applications and approvals that is causing serious cash-flow concerns for the housing industry. Changes to regulations and forms are now in place and are helping local governments speed up their approvals. The ministerial order under the Building Act is also in place to allow builders in some circumstances to start work straightaway.

These urgent steps represent what could be done quickly. For any complex problem there is no simple answer, and I continue to work with my ministerial colleagues and industry groups to find both quick fixes and longer-term solutions to this decline. The Minister for Planning and the Minister for Housing joined me yesterday in a meeting with the Master Builders Association of WA, the Housing Industry Association, the Australian Institute of Building Surveyors and the Western Australian Local Government Association to review what has been done so far, look at what is still causing problems, and work out how to fix them.

The government is working with key local governments, which deal with volume housing approvals, to help them get whatever is on their desks out the door as quickly as possible. I am writing to local government CEOs to ask them to deal directly with their building departments to make this happen. The Building Commission is working closely with industry to identify and rectify the reasons behind the delay in submitting applications. In addition, I have spoken with several lending institutions and I am working with them to ensure that we have a process in place to recognise the intent of the ministerial order and to facilitate the release of funds. The government is considering amendments to the Building Act and other legislation to address short-term issues and give long-term benefits. I will report on these to the house as we continue our efforts to support the housing industry.