

**Panel on Public Service and Panel on Planning, Lands and Works**  
**Joint Meeting on 17 July 2006**

**Written Submission**  
**of**  
**Association of Engineering Professionals in Society**  
**on**  
**Consultancy Study on Private Certification of Building Submissions**

The Association of Engineering Professionals in Society strongly objects to private certification of building submissions. The reasons are as follows.

1. For the whole development process, it is normally the approval of the general building plans by relevant government departments which is most vulnerable to delay to the development programme. It is understood that the private certification now under consideration applies to only structural and geotechnical submissions. The approval of such submissions normally is not a critical item and will only have minimal benefit from government's proposal.
2. The public has high confidence in the current system under the Buildings Ordinance. Indeed, Architectural Services Department and Housing Department have in recent years set up independent checking units, which generally follow the same model of the Buildings Department. Any change to this system may be a cause for concern to the public and may also undermine Buildings Department's standing and authority it currently enjoys in the community.
3. The engineering community in Hong Kong, in a way different to other developed countries, is closely knit. The vetting process by the Buildings Department provides a totally independent checking system that is free from commercial interests. This independent checking provided by Buildings Department relieves the engineering industry from potential conflicts of interest and external pressures. It is questionable whether such impartiality can be maintained under the private certification system.
4. At present, Buildings Department is in possession of all the engineering data for all the building works in Hong Kong. This ensures consistent engineering standards for all projects throughout Hong Kong. The Independent Checking Engineer and the private certification system will not have the benefit of approving building submissions based on ALL the information and data available. This would lead to the undesirable situation of inconsistency engineering standards for different projects in Hong Kong.

5. Under the current system, any practice as small as having only one registered structural engineer and/or registered geotechnical engineer can operate. Under the private certification system as proposed, such small practices may not be able to carry out private certification duties because of the heavy burden of substantial professional indemnity insurance.
  
6. It is well known that fee competition at present is but a cut throat exercise. Such a situation would worsen with a private certification system, and may lead to further unhealthy development of the whole engineering profession.

In conclusion, it is considered that the private certification system is not the correct approach nor will it be able to expedite the development process. Although there could be room for improvements to the current system, the latter, a long-established system, does provide a sound and credible checking system that has the confidence of both the public and the engineering community.