

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. This topic is of the most pressing importance to the building industry that we represent. It is timely that we are meeting today to discuss regulation, controls and ultimately protecting the consumer.

Today, the building industry is steadily increasing new buildings and housing supply to meet the demands of the Irish population after nearly a decade of inactivity. This committee and our industry have a key role in ensuring the building regulation, control and consumer protection regime deliver quality construction and sustainable growth across the industry.

As President of the CIF, I represent about 1350 construction companies operating across the economy. On behalf of my members, at the outset, I want to reaffirm our commitment to BCAR and other regulations targeted at delivering quality construction. The CIF has played a positive role in the formulation of BCAR in 2014 because our members and the wider industry will ultimately benefit when these regulations are applied to *all* those operating in the industry. The CSO calculates that there are over 46,000 construction-related companies and about 46,000 self-employed operating in the sector. Even though, we represent only a fraction of these companies, it's our interest to ensure that there is a robust building regulation and control system in place to ensure that only reputable builders can operate in the industry.

By 2014, we had seen numerous high profile cases arising from building control issues during an unprecedented period of building activity. The CIF believed that these highlighted the real need for a more robust building control regime. We engaged extensively with the Department and other stakeholders including the RIAI, SCSi, Engineers Ireland and ACEI when the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 were being formulated.

BCAR has introduced greater transparency, traceability and accountability across all companies in the construction industry. A key issue CIF identified was the ineffective system of certification that applied prior to the economic collapse. These opinions were often based on inspections of buildings after construction and with caveats to the opinions expressed offering little to no consumer protection.

Thankfully, this system has now changed.

BCAR now requires that competent builders and professional work together to an inspection plan, with certification of compliance on completion for all stages of the construction process. This has introduced significant discipline into every stage of the construction process from detailed design to ordering of materials to inspections and certification of relevant works as they progress and come to completion.

In addition, commencement notices must now be accompanied by:

- Outline Plans and Documentation
- Certificate of Compliance (Design)
- Certificate of Compliance (Undertaking by Assigned Certifier)

An Assigned Certifier must be a registered Architect, a Registered Building Surveyor, or a Chartered Engineer.

- Certificate of Compliance (Undertaking by Builder) confirming his competence and the competence of his team.

The builder must also undertake:

- to construct the works in accordance with the plans and specifications supplied;
- to cooperate with the inspections carried out and
- to certify the works comply with the Building Regulations.

Before works on a building can be opened, occupied or used, a valid Certificate of Compliance on Completion must be included on the statutory register maintained by the relevant building control authority. The Builder and the Assigned Certifier must sign this document and it must be accompanied by the Inspection Plan as implemented by the Assigned Certifier.

So, it is safe to say that there is a much more rigorous certification process at each stage of construction for new construction in the state.

To further embed these practices throughout the entire construction industry, the CIF, in conjunction with the Department of Housing Planning Community and Local Government developed the register of builders CIRI (Construction Industry Register Ireland).

CIRI has a high threshold for quality that will essentially exclude those inexperienced or ad-hoc builders securing registration. This will mean that consumers can seek out builders on the register to carry out works. CIRI reinforces the building regulations and drives standards by showing the consumer which builders are up to the required standards. I would ask the committee for its support for the introduction of CIRI on a statutory footing.

A few key points about CIRI:

- CIRI has an independent board including a chairman and ten members to assess the eligibility of applicants for registration.
- The Chairman of this board is appointed with the consent of the Minister for Housing Planning Community and Local Government.
- Government departments and agencies appoint five other board members, two are registered professionals while the remaining three are representatives of building contractors, house builders and specialist contractors

- CIRI registration will be contingent on compliance with building regulations, track-record, financial standing, current level of expertise and competence on a category basis etc.

To further ensure that standards are adopted across all the industry, the Government should legislate so that self-builders cannot 'opt out' of BCAR for one-off houses. Considering that up to fifty percent of building activity since 2014 has been one-off, we cannot understand the decision to create an opt-out provision for BCAR at that time.

This 'Opt Out' provision means that these builders do not need to appoint designers, competent builders and assigned certifiers nor is there any requirement for development of an inspection plan. This is unacceptable. I won't be popular for stating this but all one-off builders should be subject to the standards set out in BCAR. There must be a level playing field in terms of regulation if the consumer is to be truly protected.

In conclusion, the CIF fully supports the implementation of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 as an effective tool to protect consumers and ensure compliance with the Building Regulations. Further legislation is now required to put the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) on a statutory basis. This will provide the mechanism for assessment of builders' competence and experience for registration, and also provide a means to penalise registered builders where breach of obligations under building control arises. This can include removal from the register.

As CIF President, I reaffirm our commitment to standards in the industry and will work with the wider breadth of stakeholders to ensure our building regulations stimulate sustainable quality construction for the consumer.