

NATIONAL LETTERS

Cladding: Pity the owners trapped in cladding nightmare

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To submit a letter to The Age, email letters@theage.com.au. Please include your home address and telephone number.

As owners, we are trying to battle our way through the much publicised illegal cladding issue. That in itself is very taxing. But what astounds and frustrates us the most is this question: who in their right mind would think that private regulators, such as building surveyors and fire engineers, would work fairly? Of course they will turn a blind eye to breaches of codes to keep builders happy and thus generate future contracts.



Illustration: Cathy Wilcox

Which government came up with the idea of private regulators in an industry that builds our homes and public buildings, such as hospitals and schools? It, and all subsequent parliaments, that have allowed this very unhealthy situation to continue must bear full responsibility and provide owners with the money to rectify the illegal and unsafe cladding.

Kevin Opie, South Yarra

Financial compensation – but not from taxpayers

I am sympathetic to the plight of people in buildings affected by flammable cladding. But why talk of taxpayer-funded support? An individual home owner, in similar circumstances, would not expect a bailout from the government. There are industry and government requirements involved in constructing and approving buildings. The relevant people and organisations should be held accountable.

Builders belong to accredited bodies, pay fees and are covered for various liabilities. An inferior or unsafe product is an issue between the builder and supplier. If a product is correctly installed and still fails, then the various regulatory and monitoring bodies should be held accountable. An incorrectly installed product is an issue between the builder and the person who commissioned the work. If the builder is not part of, or covered by, a professional association, then the onus falls back on the owner.

When people buy an apartment in a high-rise tower, they have every right to expect that the developer, builder and owners incorporation have done their due diligence in relation to construction and modifications to the building. There should be adequate protection and financial compensation under the law and industry guidelines – but it should not become a taxpayer-funded issue.

John Circosta, Brighton East

Systems collapse and customers have nowhere to go

The problem in the building industry is not one of regulation, but one of timely policing of the regulations. To pass approval to private industry (building surveyors) means that compliance with regulation suffers. The result is that the government, and of course the taxpayers, have to bear the cost of poor work, both in building and inspection. The builders go for bankruptcy and the inspectors lose their registration, while the purchasers suffer.

This is becoming the norm in Australia. Regulations are introduced which are impressive. The policing of them is passed to the lowest tender who need better experience and training to do their job properly. State and federal governments shower praise on themselves for the regulations, demonstrating how effective they are, and then the system falls apart and the customers have nowhere to go. Both sides of politics are guilty.

Adrian Tabor, Point Lonsdale

Why was unsafe cladding allowed into our country?

Here is undeniable, Australia-wide evidence of the disastrous consequences of trying to outsource government regulation. Under the flimsy disguise of "moving forward" with less red tape, the business-style regulation (an oxymoron) offers daily opportunities for unethical surveyors to turn a profit-driven blind eye. Every shred of faulty cladding should have been stopped at the ports by government-employed inspectors. Through inexcusable irresponsibility by federal and state governments, an entire industry is now threatened with a multibillion-dollar

fallout lasting for years because dangerous materials were allowed into Australia. Thousands of residents are endangered with a nightmare scenario.

Roger Green, Ferntree Gully

THE FORUM

The greed of McDonald's

I was disappointed to read that McDonald's is seeking \$70.7million in compensation, almost \$40million more than it was offered, for the acquisition of its Swanston Street store which was demolished to make way for the Metro Tunnel (The Age, 27/6).

The tunnel is a key part of improving public transport and infrastructure in Melbourne – necessary if we are to continue to be a liveable, accessible city for millions of people. I am happy for my taxpayer dollars to be spent on improving this great city. But I am not happy for it to be used to pay a greedy multinational whose Australian franchisees turned over sales of \$1.01billion last year. Shame on you, McDonald's.

Alison Cleary, Brunswick

Doesn't it have enough?

McDonald's wants almost \$40million more from the state government for its compulsorily acquired store in Swanston Street. Isn't the unique privilege of having a store in the Royal Children's Hospital compensation enough?

Jon Rattin, Monbulk

The little guys miss out

It is difficult to see why Transurban should receive taxpayer compensation for lost CityLink revenue during the building of its West Gate Tunnel (The Age, 26/6) when small businesses that have been sent to the wall during construction of various road and rail works continue to receive nothing.

Elizabeth Douglas, Melbourne

Putting the family first

I abhor all forms of violence against women and the texts sent by John Setka were appalling, as he has admitted (The Age, 27/6). However, full credit to him for having counselling and advocating for other men and couples to seek help before problems escalate.

His wife, Emma Walters, has called for privacy "to heal our marriage, protect our children" (The Age, 13/6). Her plea must be respected so this family can recover and also so other men see that taking responsibility for change is rewarded with

support, not humiliation. Above all, there are children involved whose futures are dependent on the efforts their parents are making, and who are impacted by the conduct of the media and other parties.

Barbara Chapman, Hawthorn

Such brutal messages

If John Setka sent texts like this to his wife, heaven help anyone else.

Pam McDonald, Berwick

Building real friendships

Mobile phones have become the staple of social interaction amongst young people. Every day, every lunch break, every recess, I wander down the halls of my school to the sight of teens on screens. We are supposed to be the connected generation, but in many ways we have grown further apart.

Having good friends and meaningful relationships increases our life satisfaction and happiness, but the lack of face-to-face communication is taking that away from many of us.

At this phase of our lives, we need nurture and support from our peers, yet social media provides a place for us to stake our self-confidence and self-worth on people we hardly know.

We, the youth, need to take back control over our lives and happiness. The ban on mobile phones in Victoria's state schools is a crucial step in that direction. The pain of losing your device lasts a week, but the friends and social skills that you learn will last a lifetime. Besides, you can always go back on your phone after school.

Jack Walton, 16, Newport

Try the direct approach

Dennis Fitzgerald wrote: "Students do use their phones for educational purposes. As a teacher, I had a student send a message to their parent who rang the school and contacted a co-ordinator, who then sent me an email to discuss the student's concern and that was all before the end of the 50-minute lesson" (Letters, 27/6).

Huh? Am I missing something here? Wouldn't it have been easier for the student to simply raise their hand and talk to the teacher, face-to-face, about their concern?

Andrew Pupillo, Northcote

A mindless distraction

Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, would roll in his grave if he were to experience social media today (Comment, 27/6). Full of phonies and fake news, there is sometimes but a grain of truth in posts. And which part is true? It is lightweight entertainment; if only people did not take it seriously. Too many believe all of what they see, and feel inadequate because of the glorified good times and achievements.

"Facebook is good for two things: bragging and snooping," summed up a friend recently. Treat it as that and it's a mindless distraction.

Mary-Jane Boughen, Murrumbidgee

In praise of our BYOs

Andrew Leonedas, the owner of Carlton Yacht Club Bar, believes it is time to say "farewell, old friend" to BYO restaurants (Good Food, 25/6). His analogies to other industries do not make sense.

He says, "an additional spend of say, \$20 to \$50 a head on liquor can make a huge difference to the success or otherwise of any establishment". Who can afford this? He is running a bar, which is different to a restaurant.

I have a surprise for you, Andrew. You are there for the customer first and foremost. They do not need their BYOs to have "a swift bullet to the head". Of course you must make a profit but BYOs will be with us for a while.

Jan Marshall, Brighton

Read documents carefully

Letters from an ancient notable (Paul) to ancient societies are not the best resource for life in the 21st century. Paul was criticising Gentile communities who professed belief in Jesus Christ, but were maintaining attendance at Roman religious festivals, including the use of temple prostitutes. The relevant Greek words refer to sexual relations with those prostitutes. Neither Paul nor anyone else in those days had heard of terms such as "sexual orientation" or "homosexuality". The message is: read ancient documents very carefully.

Reverend Dr Lorraine Parkinson, Doncaster

Significant silence

Yes, you are right, John Weymouth (Letters, 26/6). The other people named – drunks, liars, fornicators, thieves and adulterers – have kept rather silent on the matter. Then again, they do have a bit of choice on their behaviour. As for atheists, well, why would they care? I do agree that those wretched idolaters have remained strangely quiet though.

Paul Sands, Sunbury

Show lawyers the money

Three points on the Israel Folau saga. Subject to the law he should be free to say what he wants, even if others find it annoying or insulting. His employer should not be permitted to curtail his freedom of speech. Personally, I find his views stupid and primitive. But if he wishes to make a fool of himself, he should be allowed to do so.

Also, the money he cadges from his followers will go mainly to line the pockets of lawyers. I have no objection to this.

Michael Challenger, lawyer, Nunawading

So cruel and provocative

Australia is a progressive society which seeks to limit discrimination and disadvantage and, in certain instances, it will constrain or place a burden upon those such as Israel Folau whose words impinge on the rights of others.

As an unmarried, hetero, old lady who has enjoyed plenty of sex and wine, I realise he has condemned me to hell on several grounds. Since I neither believe in his god, nor his hell, I find it laughable. But a young, gay person, already at risk of suicide, will not necessarily be so easily amused. In Folau's church, such expression, albeit of hatred, may be acceptable to his congregation, but on public electronic spaces it is unacceptable, deliberately provocative and cruel.

Maggie Emmett, Norwood

Creating a hell on earth

I thought we had finished with all this until Israel Folau came along. A 69-year-old gay man, I was forced to sell my home of many years because a homophobic neighbour subjected me to vile, public, verbal abuse. The police were thoughtful and kind but could do nothing because he had not threatened to actually kill me.

"I don't want to alarm you, but these issues usually don't end well," I was told. So I moved. Counselling and medication did their work and now I am almost back to happiness.

What I despise about Israel Folau and his ilk is the ammunition they give to the haters and homophobes, now armed to do their worst against uncertain children and any one else who does not fit their warped ideals. If Israel Folau believes Jesus condemns me to hell, that is his business. However, his desire to create a hell on earth must be mine.

Name and address withheld

Doomed to hell, too?

I am an atheist, but I can cherry-pick the Bible just as well as Israel Folau – "Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Glenda Jones, Carlton

Report on beautiful game

Whilst disappointed to see our wonderful Matildas eliminated from the FIFA Women's Soccer World Cup, I am even more disappointed that The Age seems to think that this event finished with them. Would daily reporting on the FIFA Men's World Cup finish once the Socceroos were eliminated? I think not. Please resume daily analysis of this amazing tournament of skill, athleticism, beauty, drama and heartbreak.

Bronwyn Petrie, Portland

Please, just explain it

I have been hanging on with bated breath for someone to answer Mick Webster's question (Letters, 26/6): "How does the clue 'pantheon contains nothing but merchandise' become 'warmonger' in Monday's cryptic crossword?" Come on, someone – anyone – (perhaps crossword compiler RM?) – put us out of our misery.

June Collini, Diamond Creek

AND ANOTHER THING

Mobile phones

For a decade I waged a war against phones in the classroom. Now retired, I'm always looking at mine.

Patrice McCarthy, Bendigo

Why does it take legislation to adopt the evidence base on this? Unfortunately, the ban is limited to state schools.

Jan Sommers, Albury

How about parents teach their children about respect, good manners and the appropriate use of technology?

Raeleene Gregory, Ballarat East

Politics

If the CFMMEU is being threatened with deregistration for breaching the laws, the banks should be too.

Brent Baigent, Richmond

The government appears to think religious freedom is important but freedom of the press isn't.

David Zemdegs, Armadale

Re Iran: ScoMo, don't meddle in what is none of your business.

Susan Daniel, Blairgowrie

Scott, think back to Howard rushing into Iraq. Just say no.

Hugh McCaig, Blackburn

The election is over but Bandt is still grinning at me from placards. Any other pollied who won't go away?

Nic Barnard, Fitzroy North

Furthermore

So Setka's torrent of abuse was aimed at his wife. That's OK then. His supporters must be relieved.

Ronel Redman, Blairgowrie

In his defence of "truth", Israel Folau could explain where hell is in these post-medieval days.

Bill Pell, Emerald

Common sense tells me Folau is not worthy of getting any cents from me.

Bill Keneley, Grasmere

Thank you, Bob Murphy (27/8), for bringing further sunshine on a Thursday morning.

Brian Kidd, Mount Waverley

Melissa Singer (26/6), tear up your Michael Jackson T-shirt and use the pieces for washable cleaning cloths.

Amanda Brown, Fitzroy

For Saturday's Target puzzle, try "truncheon". It just hit me.

John Howard, Lower Templestowe

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