



UNDERSTANDING THE CERTIFIER PERSPECTIVE

I have a friend of 15 years who had a long career in carpentry, building inspection and building education. He always enjoyed trying to shock me with stories from site, taking special pride in all the names he had been called. While I won't be repeating them here, the colourful variety in these insults paints a picture of the challenges that certifiers face trying to police the correct use of our frames, trusses, and connections.

It's an important perspective to understand for us to advance the interests of timber construction and realise the benefits of offsite frame and truss. The more we can do to streamline the process from your factory to a signed-off home ready for its occupants, the better placed we'll be to strengthen the position of timber and offsite prefab compared to other materials.

Builders will push back. A certifier must have something to back up everything they say.

A simple way to see things through the certifier's eyes is to assume things will go wrong and imagine you've been asked to prove to the builder how to do it correctly. You can also assume the builder will not back down easily. The NCC is a complex document, and even individual standards can be tricky to navigate on short notice. A little due diligence before anything goes to site, making sure the requirements of the design can be clearly traced back to specific clauses or diagrams, product literature and/or an engineer's letter or drawing, gives the certifier the tools they need to be effective enforcers on our behalf.

As an extension of this, we can do a lot to simplify those conversations by being clear about *why* we need things done a certain way. An engineer's signature is compelling, but it's less likely you and the certifier will need to rely on it if the builder understands the reasoning behind it.

While we're talking about completeness of documentation, one simple compliance check for fabricators is to make sure your detailers' training is up to date and that the deliverables you're issuing for construction provide clear proof the work was signed off by a competent person.

The ABCB protocol for structural software, which Craig from MiTek outlined in last month's Tech Talk, includes obligations for software providers to provide a way for certifiers to verify that the designer has been trained. Verification can be in the form of a letter/certificate, a unique training number shown on the construction documentation, and/or a list of trained people. Whichever pathway is being used, make sure that evidence is clear and readily accessible for when the request comes.

Translate the jargon. Don't just repeat it.

Codes and standards often aren't written in common language. If you need to refer to a standard or a clause, don't just quote it verbatim, and ask questions if you've been provided with technical advice that's not clear to you. Engineers should help their audience understand what things mean in practice and explain the 'why'. If it doesn't make sense to the fabricator then it's unlikely to be any clearer to other stakeholders.

Together, we can make life easy for the certifier by seeking clarification before anything goes out, and not relying on them to play translator.

An example is this important statement from the preface of AS1684. "This standard does not preclude the use of framing, fastening or bracing methods, or materials other than those specified. Alternatives may be used, provided they satisfy the requirements of the Building Code of Australia."

I've had several certifiers push back on details that weren't explicitly shown in AS1684. What this statement means in practice is that engineers can call on other standards referenced in the Code, such as using AS1720 to design nailed and screwed connections. Of course, this links back to the first point about making sure every solution has a clear and accessible technical justification.

Orderly sites inspire confidence and make inspections simple. Disorderly sites provoke questions.

As an industry we should be prescriptive with our instructions around when to send things to site, how they should be unloaded, where they should be stored, how they should be protected, and how to verify that they are still fit for purpose come installation time.

This information is laid out in generic terms in AS4440 (Installation of nailplated timber roof trusses) and your nailplate supplier will have supporting guides that cover any specifics outside the scope of that document.

At the time of writing, the FTMA is also finalising a best practice document to accompany your deliveries. It goes into the specific details of proper product handling, storage, and actions to take for frames and trusses that have been stored on site for extended periods of time.

All of these are valuable references for certifiers and help them arrive on site informed, confident in what good practice looks like, and able to call out incorrect use of your finished products.

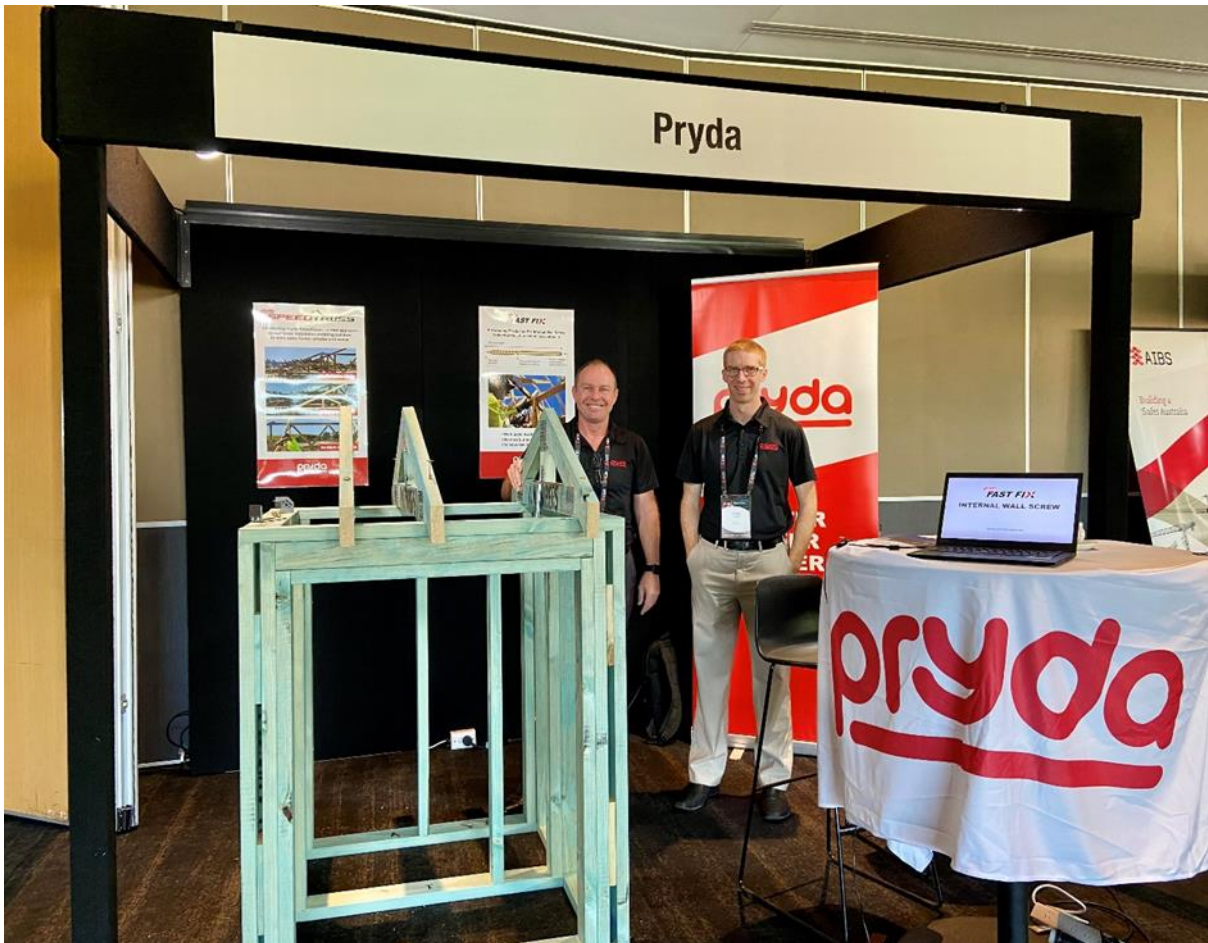
Certifiers will support change that they understand.

Given the potential for colourful insults, it's easy to imagine why certifiers would balk at new building solutions, especially if they're simultaneously seeing them for the first time and being asked to give them the OK.

Behind the scenes, engineers from your nailplate and EWP suppliers are busy laying the groundwork to prevent any surprises, stepping certifiers through the process of product design, supply, installation, and certification.

For example, employees from F&T industry suppliers were on hand at this month's Australian Institute of Building Surveyors (AIBS) chapter conference in South Australia to demonstrate new products, learn about the changing expectations of building surveyors (both in number of inspections and their professional conduct), educate certifiers on the engineering fundamentals of trusses and truss inspection, and keep them informed of upcoming standards changes that impact the design of timber framing.

From the conversations I had there, those certifiers like seeing timber on site as much as we do. We can keep it that way by always taking a moment to see things from their perspective, laying out a clear paper trail from design to installation, and ticking all of our own compliance boxes to inspire confidence rather than provoke questions.



Above: Rob Moore (left) and Adam Dawson (right) were joined by other F&T suppliers at the AIBS South Australia chapter conference in March, spending two days talking to certifiers about timber framing compliance and learning about changes in regulations that will impact inspection and sign off.



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