

Where did the quality in quality assurance go?

G Webb¹

¹GR Webb Consulting Pty Ltd, Hobart, TAS

Quality Assurance (QA) in contracts was introduced into Tasmanian government procurement for major civil construction works during the late 1980's, with third party certification of QA management systems becoming a requisite for pre-qualification of tenderers in the early 1990's.

In 1994 Austroads published 'Quality Assurance in Contracts'. The preamble stated the two main reasons for the introduction of QA contracts was to improve the way business is conducted, and the quest for greater national productivity.

In the nearly 30 years since the introduction of QA contracts for the procurement of major public infrastructure works, there have been many instances where those optimistic and hopeful expectations of better business conduct and greater productivity have not been realised.

The need for the publication of Austroads Guide to Construction Quality Assurance (AGPD05 2018) is a salient reminder that expectations of quality outcomes cannot be assumed on the basis of good project management procedures alone.

The amount of re-work and repairs both during and post-construction of major road construction and resurfacing works undertaken in Tasmania over the last five years would suggest the current delivery method when weighed in the balance is found wanting.

The situation is certainly not limited to state government works, nor is the observed deficiency in system adequacy confined to Tasmania, with numerous cases of system failure identified in jurisdictions around Australia.

As the recent Royal Commission into the banking industry in Australia has shown us, without appropriate checks and balances in place, people and organisations will not, under their own volition, always do the right thing.

This paper discusses some of the challenges facing procurement agencies during a time of diminishing internal technical expertise and aims to provoke thought about what has been lost and where to find it.