

ATHA Monthly Update

*Our monthly(ish) newsletter on the Australian Tiny House Association
and changes in the tiny house movement*



Image of ATHA Business Member - [Tiny Solar Homes](#)' tiny home, Photograph by Trent Blackmore

Hi to all our ATHA members, subscribers and fans of tiny living,

We hope you and your loved ones enjoyed the long Easter Weekend!

This month's update includes John's in-depth dive into understanding moveable tiny house compliance, a must read for those who want to learn about this complex area. In addition we have the usual state, team and expo updates.

*Please note, our next committee will be meeting on **Wednesday 17 April at 7.30pm.** We welcome any tiny house enthusiast who wants to be part of shaping tiny living for the better to get actively involved in ATHA. If this sounds like you, please send an email to admin@tinyhouse.org.au to express your interest in joining the ATHA committee.*

- Rochelle Ryan, ATHA President

In NSW there has been a lot of movement in the tiny house sector, including Shell Harbour Local Council voting to approve a 2 year trial for tiny houses. They are exempt from building approval if there is an existing approved dwelling on the block of land. There are an additional 12 local government areas in NSW that are considering doing the same.

QLD update

The Queensland Government have released "The Economic Development and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024."

The Bill includes a range of proposed changes, with a focus on four key areas:

- Housing supply, affordability and diversity
- Introduction of Place Renewal Areas and Framework
- New corporate structure for EDQ
- Operational refinements to existing functions and powers.

Read the full document

here: <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2024/5724T406-F987.pdf>

What's happening in Tasmania

Tasmania's State Government have recognised that tiny homes need to be addressed. However this means mixed news. They have recognised tiny homes, releasing a [Regulatory Note for Tiny Houses on Wheels and Skids](#). However, there is bad news in relation to the [plumbing of tiny houses](#), this is addressed in John's update.

Please see the links below for more information:

[Tasmanian Gov 'Tiny Houses' Regulatory Note](#)

[Tasmanian Gov Prefabricated buildings – Plumbing approvals process Regulatory Note](#)

ATHA Team news

Sadly, Paul Pritchett who was voted in as our Treasurer at October's AGM, has resigned. We wish Paul all the best in his future endeavours and appreciate his ongoing assistance relating to tiny home loans and insurance. Our previous Treasurer - Martin Vana has graciously agreed to continue in his previous duties until the next AGM.

We also welcome Mel Sparkle as our interim volunteer social media co-ordinator for the next 10 weeks. She brings a wealth of skills to the role which we are happy to lean on. Please give her a warm welcome when interacting with the email address moomoodesign@bigpond.com

Mornington Expo

We had a cracker of a weekend at the Mornington Tiny Homes Expo. Thank you to Paul, Joanne, Nic, Dee and David for being the voice of ATHA at the Mornington Tiny Home Expo. The weekend was full of great conversation with the tiny house curious through to those deep into living and building tiny. The builders had a range of tiny homes on display - from highly creative, to stunning quality, to smart budget options too. We were also energised by Elle Paton who spoke of tiny house living considerations and intentional communities, as well as Stephen Yarwood who shared his civic planning knowledge as well as inspired us to think of the future of how we live.

It was great to be able to touch base with some of our ATHA business members too, including: [Treehab](#), [Humble Tiny Homes](#), [Base Cabin](#), [Tiny House by Hangan](#), [Piccolo Living](#), [Evergreen Homes](#), [Alphaline](#), [Unplgd](#), and [Add-A-Bathroom](#).



Fraser Coast and Hawkesbury volunteer call out

The next [Tiny Home Expos](#) are coming up at the **Fraser Coast, QLD** on the 19-21 April, and **Hawkesbury, NSW** on the 24-26 May.

We run an ATHA stand on the Saturday and Sunday of each expo. In exchange for being a friendly face at the ATHA stall for a few hours, you will have free entry to the expo. We have an experienced volunteer and a lot of support materials to help you field any questions you may receive so it's not as daunting as it may seem!

For the Fraser Coast Expo please email Mel at: moomoodesign@bigpond.com

For the Hawkesbury Expo please email Bec at: membership@tinyhouse.org.au

Moveable tiny house considerations for compliance in Australia. With Ipswich, QLD as a case study.

from John Cameron, ATHA Vice President

We have received a response this month to our July 2023 submission to the City of Ipswich Planning Scheme Review. Whilst this update relates specifically to Ipswich, there is much here in common with other jurisdictions in Queensland and probably also to other States and Territories.

Our submission advocated for the specific recognition of and provision for moveable tiny houses as a unique dwelling typology in the new Planning Scheme.

We submitted that;

"The proposed wording of the scheme, fact sheets and other supporting information provided for consultation are all silent on moveable tiny houses and the key concepts and principles that differentiate them from conventional fixed dwellings.

Moveable tiny houses are an attractive option for those who don't want or need a typical suburban home, townhouse or apartment. Indeed, many singles, young couples and retirees are looking for housing opportunities without high land and construction costs, massive energy bills and crippling mortgage repayments.

Given this growing interest in tiny house living and the consequent volume of enquiries likely to arise during the life of this new planning scheme, the Australian Tiny House Association (ATHA) submits that tiny house specific definitions and policies need to be included in the new scheme to enable their adoption in any situation where residential dwelling is a permitted use.

Remaining silent on moveable tiny houses will put the City of Ipswich at risk of missing out on the potential social and economic benefits of such a dwelling typology and thus being left behind while the rest of Australia moves to embrace and adopt the concept."

The review received 506 submissions in total. Ours is number 128 if you want to look it up.

<https://ipswichcc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/6c7eed697add4c9c8a2e80782446f7c1>

We received this response to our submission;

"The scheme expands the possibilities for secondary dwellings on a single lot with such uses no longer considered a material change of use in many circumstances. Neither the current planning scheme or the draft include policy limitations on the development of tiny homes.

Managing wheeled secondary dwellings would more appropriately be by the application of a dedicated local law."

What does this mean for tiny houses in the City of Ipswich going forward?

Firstly, an expansion of the possibilities for secondary dwellings on a single lot is a positive outcome generally and may even benefit tiny houses. Such uses are no longer considered a material change of use (in many circumstances) which is planning speak for "no development application required". This is another positive outcome as it reduces cost, time and uncertainty in the approvals process. This will be discussed further below. Secondly, a dedicated local law is mooted as a more appropriate management tool for "wheeled secondary dwellings." Another potentially positive outcome, if followed through. We will discuss this further as well.

No Development Application Required?

Our interpretation of this response is that a secondary dwelling on a single lot in Ipswich will, in most cases, not require a development application, sometimes called a town planning application. Good news for reducing red tape, however, any secondary dwelling will likely be required to obtain a building permit. Planning and building are two distinct approval processes. Planning approval is sometimes a pre-requisite for a building approval, but not always.

We expect that all secondary dwellings in Ipswich will require a building permit, as is the case across most of Australia. A building permit will include or require approval to connect to infrastructure, such as water supply and sewer. Building approvals will be subject to the provisions of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and this is a potential

problem for some moveable tiny houses that have been built without the paper-trail of evidence necessary to demonstrate BCA compliance.

We encounter this response quite frequently across the country; “There is no barrier to a tiny house on wheels, you just need a building permit.” Obtaining a building permit for a moveable tiny house on wheels that has been built as a vehicle to VSB1 can be difficult, if not impossible, unless BCA compliance was committed to before construction commenced.

Some of the challenges frequently encountered when seeking BCA compliance for any moveable tiny house include;

- Obtaining energy efficiency compliance
- Plumbing fixtures and fittings installation/type compliance
- Electrical systems compliance
- Bushfire attack level (BAL) rating
- Minimum space requirements
- Structural integrity and wind rating certification

These are discussed in more detail below, but for many tiny house owners, these can become insurmountable barriers when a building permit is required by Council.

A Dedicated Local Law?

Councils establish local laws to help manage a range of community safety and public health issues as well as for protection of local amenities and regulating activities on council-controlled land and roads. Local Laws are not part of a Planning Scheme; therefore, they are beyond the scope of this review. Effectively this part of the response is a hand-ball to another area of Council.

Having a specific local law for managing wheeled secondary dwellings, or better yet, moveable tiny houses, could help to realise our goal for the specific recognition of and provision for moveable tiny houses as a unique dwelling typology, but there is no such local law currently in place.

Currently in Ipswich the most relevant local law reference is to permits for Temporary Homes.

“Permanent living in any temporary home is not supported in the local laws (i.e. not the intent of it). Permanent living in temporary accommodation is only permitted in a caravan park.

Temporary home permits are granted for two main reasons and generally have a time-limit of 12 months with the possibility of a 6-month extension (at no extra charge) to be granted on request.

The maximum term is 18 months with no renewal.

A permit will be given if the person wishes to live temporarily e.g. in a caravan, tent, etc. on their block of land while building (and building approval for the permanent house must be in Council's records in order for the permit to be issued) or in exceptional circumstances, e.g. looking after a terminally ill relative.”

We will need to see a completely new local law specific to “wheeled secondary dwellings” which does not have any time restriction and hopefully avoids the requirement for a building permit and allows for connection to municipal infrastructure. Lobbying for such reform will be a separate process to the planning

scheme review, so if you have a stake in this, please contact Mayor Teresa Harding to flag the issue. ATHA will be contacting the mayor as well.

Mayor Teresa Harding
Phone: 07 3810 6011
Email: mayor@ipswich.qld.gov.au
Facebook: TeresaHardingIpswich
Instagram: mayorteresaharding
Address: PO Box 191, Ipswich QLD 4305

As mentioned earlier there are some challenges frequently encountered when seeking BCA compliance for any moveable tiny house. Following is some discussion of a few of these.

Energy Efficiency Compliance

Compliance for buildings is assessed assuming a fixed location (climate zone) and solar orientation. This can only be determined once a parking spot is locked in, so how do we allow for this during construction in another location?

Assessment is also complicated by the small footprint of a tiny house which often means that the glazing ratio is very high compared to that of a fixed building, resulting in excessive energy transfer through the enclosure envelope. Glass is a poor insulator and no amount of additional insulation in the floor, walls and roof can compensate for a high glazing ratio. Expensive high-performance glass and even double glazing may not be enough to get the assessment over the line.

A lack of beneficial roof overhangs (eaves) or other window shading can also throw the rating assessment out.

Let's consider the objectives with energy efficiency assessment which are;

1. to reduce energy consumption and energy peak demand, and;
2. reduce greenhouse gas emission, and;
3. improve occupant health and amenity.

A small tiny house under 50 m² connected to power with a 15-amp caravan cable is simply not capable of consuming the energy of a fixed dwelling with direct mains electricity supply, so gross consumption and peak demand are automatically lower than most other dwelling options. That said, if the air-conditioning unit is working hard to compensate for poor insulation or awkward solar orientation, that is not a good energy outcome.

The addition of solar PV can be an excellent supplement to reduce consumption and peak demand from the grid. A stand-alone power system fully satisfies the first objective, if there is enough space available for panels and their orientation is optimal.

Reducing greenhouse gas emission can be achieved by using less "dirty" energy, either by efficient consumption or by a renewable supply, or a combination of both.

Improving occupant health and amenity in a tiny space needs careful consideration. Thermal comfort is part of this. Indoor air quality and condensation management are another part. An appropriately insulated and oriented enclosure is crucial to efficient thermal comfort, but as discussed, this can be a challenge within a small footprint. Air quality and condensation management go hand in hand. Tiny spaces are quickly

impacted by human activities such as breathing, cooking and showering. Avoiding the build up of foul air and humidity is crucial. Exhaust equipment venting to the outside air for bathroom and kitchen spaces is a must.

Plumbing fixtures and fittings installation/type compliance

We have recently seen in Tasmania a ban on the use of composting toilets in tiny houses, leading to at least one builder closing their business. The safe disposal of human waste is vital to health, for people and for the environment. Connecting to suitable infrastructure, such as municipal or on-site sewerage systems is the only acceptable outcome for most building permits.

Many tiny homes use alternative systems that are not recognised or permitted by local health officers.

If your tiny house will be moved over time, a permanent connection to sewer infrastructure may not be the best outcome. Each local government has their own set of requirements for wastewater connections. Without a lawful method of disposal of wastewater, occupancy will not be allowed.

The BCA also stipulates requirements for potable water installations, fixtures and fittings, all of which must comply with Australian Standards and efficiency rating schemes. Compliance can only be demonstrated by a certificate from a suitably qualified person (a licensed plumber). No approval can be issued unless such a certificate can be supplied to Council.

Electrical systems compliance

Electrical standards for caravans are different to those for buildings. AS/NZS 3000:2018 Electrical installations (known as the Australian/New Zealand Wiring Rules) applies to fixed buildings. AS/NZS 3001.2:2022 Electrical installations - Connectable electrical installations and supply arrangements, Part 2: applies to caravans and the like.

If your tiny house is going to be stand alone or with only a 15-amp caravan connection for power, then AS/NZS 3001.2:2022 Electrical installations is likely the most applicable standard. If you want to be grid connected, for example to export surplus solar power, or for a permanent situation, then AS/NZS 3000:2018 is the only way to go.

Whichever way you go, be sure to obtain an electrician's certificate clearly stating system compliance.

Bushfire attack level (BAL) rating

For compliance with the BCA dwellings in designated bushfire prone areas must have a resistance to bushfires in order to reduce the danger to life and minimise the risk of the loss of the building; and if occupied by people who may be unable to readily evacuate the building prior to a bushfire, need to be constructed so as to provide its occupants shelter from the direct and indirect actions of a bushfire.

Designated bushfire prone areas will be identified by Council as an overlay in their mapping system. Many rural areas will have bushfire prone locations. The bushfire attack level (BAL) is established by a specific site assessment. BAL ranges from zero, through a series of heat flux levels, to flame zone (FZ) where the structure is directly impacted by the flame front. In the intermediate heat flux zones, it is radiant heat and ember attack that are the main risks to be mitigated. If you are planning on moving

your tiny house into a designated bushfire prone area, you may need to have it BAL rated. This is something that needs to be decided before construction commences. For example, you may choose to contract with your builder for a BAL 29 rating certification. This will mean that you can demonstrate to Council that it is safe to occupy your tiny house in a bushfire prone area where the hazard level is assessed at BAL 29 or lower. Insurers may also be interested in the BAL rating of your tiny house.

Minimum space requirements

Tiny houses sometimes include innovative design ideas such as sleeping platforms or snug spaces with low head-room. Some building certifiers see these as non-compliance for minimum ceiling height clearances.

Ceiling clearances in some designs may rely on a BCA performance solution where functional spaces are located one above the other. Sleeping platforms are included in some designs. These are not automatically discrete habitable spaces, rather they can be the equivalent of built in furniture, for example a bunk bed, with access provided by a ladder or "steps" that are part of the furnishing and not "stairs" as defined in the BCA. Edge protection and barriers can also be provided as they might be for a free-standing bunk bed or similar, rather than deemed-to-satisfy building code provisions. BCA compliance is now, or soon will be, linked to the provision of universal access to and within dwellings. In a small moveable tiny house, it will be very difficult to satisfy all of these access requirements, in which case a full building approval cannot be obtained.

Structural integrity and wind rating certification

A tiny house on wheels has to be strong to withstand the strain of being towed at speed down a bumpy road. The engineering design and method of construction to achieve that may be fine for a vehicle, but that doesn't automatically translate to compliance with the BCA. For that you will need certificates of design and construction to building standards. There is also the question of tethering a tiny house so that it doesn't get blown over in high winds once parked. This means a certificate of installation in addition to the construction certificates.

A tiny house can be safe and sound without a building permit and many are. The problem is that Council compliance officers often have no option but to insist that all the boxes required for a conventional building are ticked in order to grant or accept a building permit, certificate of occupancy, or whatever administrative instrument applies in their area.

What we need is a local law, or other regulatory provision, that allows for the permanent occupation of a moveable tiny house without full BCA compliance certification.

There is a precedent for this in the Queensland Development Code MP 3.3 that applies to temporary accommodation buildings, which are intended for private and domestic residential use that need to comply with a reduced range of BCA provisions to do with occupant health and safety.



ATHA Member portal

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