

Teleworking at the Building Commission

A Building Commission submission
to the Australian Telework Advisory Committee
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Contents

Who we are	3
Our values	3
Achieving work-life balance	5
Telecommuting arrangements at the Building Commission	6
Benefits to the Commission	7
Measurement of the success of Alternate Work Location	8
Appendix 1: AWL forms	9

Who we are

The Building Commission is a statutory authority that oversees the building control system in Victoria. We ensure the safety, liveability and sustainability of our built environment.

The Commission does this by bringing vision, innovation and leadership to the Victorian building industry. The Commission oversees building legislation, regulates building practices, advises government, and provides services to the industry and consumers.

The Commission aims to deliver:

- Strong industry leadership through
 - Partnering and issues leadership
 - Industry outcomes measurement
 - Informed consumers
 - Building sustainability
- Better building control through
 - Continuous practitioner development
 - Renewal of building quality assurance
 - Building knowledge management
 - Business-like organisation

To fund the building control system in Victoria, the Building Commission derives revenues from a levy on building permits. The Commission is located in Melbourne and has regional offices in Ballarat, Sale and Wangaratta.

The Building Commission works closely with four statutory bodies, Building Appeals Board (BAB), Building Advisory Council (BAC), Building Practitioners Board (BPB) and Building Regulations Advisory Council (BRAC) to provide industry leadership and regulate building quality. The associated statutory bodies and a variety of stakeholders assist the Commission in carrying out its various functions.

The Building Commission is a relatively small organisation with a total of 108 employees. There are:

- 98 full time staff
- 9 part time staff and
- 1 casual staff

Our values

Our organisational values reflect our attitude to the community, our services, our business and each other. The Building Commission and its employees are committed to the following core values and behaviours:

- Life balance
We acknowledge personal needs and responsibilities
- Leadership and vision
We strive for excellence
- Teamwork
We achieve common goals by working together
- Integrity
We are principled in our relationships

- Making a positive difference

We achieve enduring benefits for our customers

Our core values are summarised in the following work-life balance and well-being wheel.

Figure 1: Broad spectrum of life balance and well being initiatives at the Building Commission



Achieving work-life balance

A survey undertaken in the Commission in 2001 drew attention to work load issues. In 2003 a more detailed study of work and well being identified that Building Commission staff were seeking fulfilment of other dimensions in their lives.

This led to a need to develop a corporate ethic and a systematic approach to the development of a work-life strategy commencing in late 2003. A life-balance team was established with specific intent that:

- CEO champions the strategy
- There is broad representation across every division, consisting of managerial and non-managerial staff
- Existing life-balance arrangements are fine-tuned and processes for implementation put in place to ensure consistency across the Commission
- New initiatives are established
- Training is provided to staff as appropriate
- Qualitative and quantitative measurements are established to monitor and review trends and measure results.

The Building Commission believes that employees with a good life balance will work more effectively to achieve the goals of the Commission. We anticipate a flexible and motivated work force will be more productive.

Life Balance Team 1

The first Life Balance Team called LBT1 was very successful in establishing a positive culture of life-balance in the organisation. They achieved the following:

- Alternate Work Location (AWL), that is *teleworking* Policy, Guidelines and forms
- Life-balance handbook
- Provision for breast feeding in the work place

These new initiatives were achieved with consultation from in-house human resources expertise and support from senior management.

During the tenure of the LBT1, the Building Commission won the **National Work & Family Rising Star Award (2004)** and the **Workplace Excellence Award for Better Work and Family Balance (2004)**.

Life Balance Team 2

The present Life Balance Team called LBT2 is building on the work of LBT1 and focusing on “making it happen”. The goal is to further progress towards creating a workplace culture that consistently supports staff to manage their diverse work and family/life responsibilities and demonstrating the Commission benefits from this management approach. LBT2 has achieved the following:

- Developed a policy, guidelines and forms for Compressed Work Arrangements
- Developed a policy, guidelines and forms for Corporate Volunteering
- Draft broadband policy

These will become effective from July 1, 2005.

An effective communication, education and marketing strategy has been identified as the number one priority of LBT2. A life balance options guide and a life balance in focus program for managers and staff are in train.

Performance targets, performance measures for managers and members of the LBT2 are also in progress. Other new initiatives in progress include:

- job share policy and guidelines
- a review of workload issues
- a program for older workers.

Integration is key

The key to the life balance strategies success has been the way in which broader employee relations and wellbeing strategies of the Commission build on one another. The Commission has established contemporary human resources practices, which have been recognised as exemplary. Well being is taken in the broadest possible context and is supported by providing access to a range of benefits for its diverse workforce, including:

- sponsored gym membership
- health and well being seminars
- top to toe health assessments
- flu vaccinations
- diet and nutrition advice, and
- sleep and well being seminars.

Extensive measurement metrics have been established to monitor the impact of programs and initiatives and productivity as well as employee perceptions. These measures will be used to map trends and monitor the effectiveness on the Commission's long term objectives.

Telecommuting arrangements at the Building Commission

Valuing the individual, celebrating diversity and promoting flexibility are values that have been practiced at the Building Commission. Ad hoc arrangements for telecommuting have been in place even before the establishment of the life balance teams. Individual arrangements were made between staff and management -- there were no policies in place. Since the establishment of the new AWL policy from 1 July 2004, there is now a process in place for staff wanting to work at an alternate location.

Types of telecommuting arrangements

Broadly, two types of telecommuting arrangements have been identified at the Building Commission: Regular and Casual.

Regular arrangement: In a regular arrangement, the employee spends a regular portion of working hours working either from home or other locations and requires regular use of an electronic link with the Commission.

Occasional / Casual arrangement: In a casual arrangement, the employee works away from the office when on business trips, during emergencies, or to complete a specific piece of work.

Policy and processes

AWL is available to all staff at the Building Commission except those on casual arrangements and those on probation. Generally, employees spend 60% of their time in the office and the remaining on an approved AWL arrangement if they are full time members of staff. Pro-rata percentages apply for part time staff. Greater time spent in the work place allows employees to maintain contact with their peers and maintain the social aspects of their job. Regular reviews are part of the AWL arrangement that is agreed in each case between the employee and manager.

The AWL application form is presented in Appendix 1. It is divided into three parts. The applicant formally initiates the process by completing part 1. Part 2 is completed in a dialogue between applicant and

manager, while part 3 provides for an OH&S check on the intended work location, which is usually the officer's home office.

The purpose of asking staff to complete the first part of the form is to encourage them to think about their role in some depth and consider all aspects of their work role and to gauge its suitability for telecommuting. The applicant and manager discuss the details of the work role, performance expectations, communications, times of work, review dates and similar matters to complete part 2 of the form. When all parts have been completed, the Director approves the application on the manager's recommendation.

The completed form is then forwarded to the Commission's Organisational Effectiveness Unit. If required by the application an independent OH&S consultant assesses the appropriateness of the designated AWL space for carrying out the work at the intended location. Changes may be suggested to ensure that the designated work space is risk-free or of low risk. A photograph of the designated work space is recorded on the employee's file to show the AWL location in the agreement between the employee and the Commission.

For regular AWL users, the Building Commission provides a laptop and usually provides broadband connection to the Commission's network. The Commission is also considering how it might permit the use of existing broadband connections and how it would reimburse employees using those connections for Commission purposes.

Employees engaged in casual AWL are provided a laptop for the occasions in which it is needed and are provided with dial-up connection or broadband if it is needed and justified in the circumstances of the AWL agreement.

Broadband policy

The Broadband policy stipulates that broadband internet is provided to staff who have an approved Regular AWL agreement in place. This applies to staff not currently having broadband internet access at their alternate work location. If a staff member on Regular AWL already has a broadband connection, the Commission agrees to provide financial support to cover the "business use" portion of the account.

The need for broadband internet access and the type of arrangement is negotiated between the staff member and the manager. Regardless of the arrangement the staff member chooses, they must work in accordance with the Public Service Code of Conduct and Building Commission IT&T user guidelines.

Satellite working centres

Our regional offices in Ballarat, Sale and Wangaratta function as satellite working centres for the Building Commission. The regional offices are co-located with offices of the Plumbing Industry Commission (PIC). The Building Commission has only one officer at each office and that officer has the benefit of working in company with PIC staff. However, in practice, the Building Commission officer often works on the road. The regional officers also have home offices and are AWL beneficiaries.

State of play

Depending on the role of the position, telecommuting suits some roles and not others. Hence, the official take-up of AWL in the Commission has been modest. However, the Commission has for many years employed investigators in a "road warrior" role and has permitted informal teleworking arrangements. These informal arrangements are now being converted to contemporary AWL arrangements. As at the present time, the overall uptake of informal and formal AWL arrangements is 25 employees, being 23 % of the total numbers. There are 4 members of staff who are awaiting completion of Part 3 - OH&S check.

Benefits to the Commission

As already indicated, regional officers and some employees at the Building Commission were using informal telecommuting arrangements before the establishment of a formal AWL policy. The benefits of AWL have not been formally measured, either in economic or social perspectives.

Since the development of the life balance strategy, the Commission has been committed to the implementation of these strategic initiatives. The development of a culture and acceptance of life-balance including telecommuting in the Building Commission is new for both staff and management. While there are few concerns about the adoption of AWL, it will take some time for the new culture of flexibility to become the norm.

In implementing AWL in the Building Commission, the following benefits were contemplated:

- improved work-balance and quality of life for staff
- reduced absenteeism
- improved employee retention -- especially for employees returning from maternity leave or where caring issues arise
- reduced staff turnover -- including costs of employing new staff and retaining the knowledge base in the organisation
- improved/high staff morale -- staff feel valued that their individual needs are met while business goals are achieved/maintained
- reduced environmental impacts through reduced traffic congestion.

Impediments to the implementation of AWL could include cultural factors such as:

- mistrust by managers
- criticism from colleagues.

Other issues identified include:

- personal security issues
- data privacy, data security and access to information issues
- equipment and utility costs
- OH&S considerations.

Measurement of the success of Alternate Work Location

The Building Commission has not measured the costs and benefits of AWL at this time. As previously indicated, the measurement metrics are in place. The underlying hypothesis in developing and implementing the AWL policy has been that it would benefit staff and would maintain if not improve the Building Commission's business outcomes. Both tangible and intangible benefits are expected to accrue.

The Commission reviews each AWL arrangement after implementation and surveys opinions of the points of success or failure of each agreement.

Appendix 1: AWL forms