

## **New Body to Monitor Quality of Reinforcing Steels**

Due to the strong focus on quality and safety in the Australian construction industry, local builders have come to expect construction materials to comply with all relevant Australian standards.

However, with reinforcing steel and prestressing strand now being sourced from various suppliers within Australia and from other parts of the world, designers, specifiers and contractors can no longer necessarily assume that the reinforcing steel delivered to site will continuously meet their requirements.

Because of this, various groups from the construction industry including:

- Australian Constructors Association (ACA)
- Master Builders Association (MBA)
- Housing Industry Association (HIA)
- Association of Consulting Engineers Australia (ACEA)
- Steel Reinforcement Institute of Australia (SRIA)
- National Precast Concrete Association of Australia (NPCAA)
- Concrete Institute of Australia (CIA)
- Austroads
- Australasian Wire Industry Association (AIWA)

have supported the establishment of a new voluntary product certification scheme, the Australian Certification Authority for Reinforcing Steel (ACRS).

ACRS is chaired by Professor Graham Hutchinson from The University of Melbourne, with the SRIA's Mark Turner fulfilling the role of Executive Director.

“The globalisation of the steel industry and the increase in the number of domestic processors has created the potential for the supply of reinforcing steel of unconfirmed origin and quality,” said Professor Hutchinson.

“It is essential that Australia has an independent product certification scheme to ensure that we do not allow our construction standards to be eroded through the supply of potentially non-complying materials,” he said.

“With the onus being on the builder to ensure the construction materials being used meet Australian quality standards, the ramifications of using non-complying products could be substantial.

“That is why ACRS has been formed. We need a system in place, which guarantees the quality of materials specified and delivered to site, irrespective of origin, and we are seeking the support of the local construction industry to help us make it happen,” added Professor Hutchinson.

There is a world-wide trend toward third-party product certification with over 20 countries operating schemes applying to steel reinforcement and strand.

ACRS has been modelled on CARES, the UK scheme established in 1984 to provide the construction industry with confidence that certified producers and processors of reinforcing steels would consistently meet specifications. The market for reinforcing steel in the UK is only around 10% greater than Australia, so the need for an Australian scheme is well justified in volume terms. By 1998, CARES-approved materials accounted for 98% of all reinforcing and prestressing steel used in the UK, which shows that voluntary schemes with the full support of the industry can be very successful.

ACRS is hoping that there will be similar acceptance of the concept by the Australian building/construction industry and by Australia’s reinforcing steel and prestressing manufacturers and processors, plus any overseas steel makers who wish to supply product into the market.

Professor Hutchinson concluded by stating: “An important point to emphasise is that ACRS is voluntary and inclusive of imported steel. Our goal is simply to ensure that reinforcing and prestressing steels are quality-approved materials, which comply with Australian Standards,

thereby maintaining confidence in reinforced concrete as the pre-eminent building material in Australia.”

ACRS has issued its first batch of Certificates of Product Compliance to a number of manufacturers and processors. Full details of the various certifications can be found at [www.acrs.net.au](http://www.acrs.net.au)

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