

Herald Sun

EDITORIAL

When dream turns nightmare

THE great Australian dream of a home of our own is both a cliché and a reality.

But an INSIGHT report in the *Herald Sun* revealed yesterday that it can also be a nightmare.

Grave shortcomings in the regulation of builders are putting at risk the life savings of Victorians. The Office of Fair Trading is investigating complaints that thousands are falling victim to rogue and incompetent operators.

Homebuilders have been fleeced of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A confidential State Government report blames a new registration system that allows almost anyone to register as a qualified builder, even if they have few formal qualifications.

Unbelievably, INSIGHT discovered, the system allows criminals, bankrupts and unqualified tradesmen to obtain registration. There are no requirements in the new laws for police to check on the financial dealings of applicants.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that figures obtained by the *Herald Sun* show that complaints to the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs have risen dramatically.

Moreover, it is clear that the qualifications required for registration — as little as a 60-hour TAFE course — are woefully inadequate.

These shortcomings are compounded by the fact that the supervisory body, the Building Control Commission, believes the new registration system is both seriously under-resourced and less efficient than the previous Housing Guarantee Fund system which it replaced in May 1996.

Though the present legislation allows homebuilders redress after the event, it provides no protection before work starts against rogues and incompetents.

In this regard, the laws are as ramshackle as some of the homes they build.