

Before the Building Practitioners Board

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| | BPB Complaint No. CB25501 |
| Licensed Building Practitioner: | Christopher Cox (the Respondent) |
| Licence Number: | BP 134455 |
| Licence(s) Held: | Foundations – Concrete or Timber Pile |

Decision of the Board in Respect of the Conduct of a Licensed Building Practitioner

Under section 315 of the Building Act 2004

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| Complaint or Board Inquiry | Complaint |
| Hearing Type: | On the Papers |
| Hearing and Draft Decision Date: | 23 November 2020 |
| Final Decision Date: | 2 February 2021 |

Board Members Present:

Mr C Preston, Chair (Presiding)
Mr D Fabish, LBP, Carpentry and Site AOP 2
Mr B Monteith, LBP, Carpentry and Site AOP 2
Mr R Shao, LBP, Carpentry and Site AOP 1

Procedure:

The matter was considered by the Building Practitioners Board (the Board) under the provisions of Part 4 of the Building Act 2004 (the Act), the Building Practitioners (Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures) Regulations 2008 (the Complaints Regulations) and the Board's Complaints and Inquiry Procedures.

Disciplinary Finding:

The Respondent **has** committed a disciplinary offence under section 317(1)(b) of the Act.

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Summary of the Board’s Draft Decision

- [1] The Respondent has carried out building work in a negligent manner by failing to ensure a building consent was obtained, and in the manner in which he carried out building work. He is ordered to pay a fine of \$3,500 and costs of \$2,000.

The Charges

- [1] On 25 August 2020, the Board received a Registrar’s Report in respect of a complaint about the conduct of the Respondent. The Board considered the report and referred it back to the Registrar for a Technical Assessor’s report on the building work. A direction was issued that the report was to include an assessment of whether the building work was compliant with the Building Code; and whether the work fell under Schedule 1 of the Act or if a Building Consent should have been obtained before the work was undertaken.
- [2] The complaint was then referred back to the Board with the Technical Assessor’s report on the 24 November 2020 for consideration.
- [3] Under regulation 10 of the Complaints Regulations the Board must, on receipt of the Registrar’s Report, decide whether to proceed no further with the complaint because regulation 9 of the Complaints Regulations applies.
- [4] Having received the report, the Board decided that regulation 9 applied to aspects of the complaint but not to all of the allegations.

Regulation 9 Decisions

- [5] The complaint to the Board also contained allegations that the Respondent had failed, without good reason, in respect of a building consent that relates to restricted building work that he or she is to carry out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervise, or has carried out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervised, (as the case may be), to provide the persons specified in section 88(2) with a record of work, on completion of the restricted building work, in accordance with section 88(1) (s 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act).
- [6] With regard to that allegation, the Board decided that regulation 9(a) of the Complaints Regulations applied. It provides:

Complaint not warranting further investigation

A complaint does not warrant further investigation if—

- (a) it does not come within the grounds for discipline; or*

- [7] The reason for that decision was that a record of work is only required when building work is carried out under a building consent. As no consent had been sought or issued, the provisions in section 88(1) of the Act did not apply.

Disciplinary Offences to be Investigated

- [8] On the basis of the Registrar's Report, the Respondent's conduct that the Board resolved to investigate was that the Respondent had carried out or supervised building work or building inspection work in a negligent or incompetent manner (s 317(1)(b) of the Act). Under regulation 10 the Board is required to hold a hearing in respect of that matter.

Draft Decision Process

- [9] The Board's jurisdiction is that of an inquiry. Complaints are not prosecuted before the Board. Rather, it is for the Board to carry out any further investigation that it considers is necessary prior to it making a decision. In this respect, the Act provides that the Board may regulate its own procedures¹. It has what is described as a summary jurisdiction in that the Board has a degree of flexibility in how it deals with matters; it retains an inherent jurisdiction beyond that set out in the enabling legislation². As such, it may depart from its normal procedures if it considers doing so would achieve the purposes of the Act, and it is not contrary to the interests of natural justice to do so.
- [10] In this instance, the Board has decided that a formal hearing is not necessary. The Board considers that there is sufficient evidence before it to allow it to make a decision on the papers.

¹ Clause 27 of Schedule 3

² *Castles v Standards Committee No.* [2013] NZHC 2289, *Orlov v National Standards Committee 1* [2013] NZHC 1955

- [11] The Board does, however, note that there may be further evidence in the possession of persons involved in the matter or that the Board may not have interpreted the evidence correctly. To that end, this decision is a draft Board decision. The Complainant and the Respondent will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the Board's draft findings and to present further evidence prior to the Board making a final decision. If the Board directs or the Respondent requests an in-person hearing, then one will be scheduled.

Evidence

- [12] The Board must be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the disciplinary offences alleged have been committed³. Under section 322 of the Act the Board has relaxed rules of evidence which allow it to receive evidence that may not be admissible in a court of law.
- [13] The focus of the Board's considerations was the Technical Assessor's report produced by Mr John Rennie of Maynard Marks dated 22 October 2020. The focus for the report was set out in the Board's resolution dated the 25 August 2020. *"The review is to include an assessment of whether the building work was compliant with the Building Code; and whether the work fell under schedule 1 of the Act or if a Building Consent should have been obtained before the work was undertaken."*
- [14] In appendix A of the Technical Assessors report Mr Rennie sets out each of the issues he observed, references to the relevant parts of the Building Act and Building Code, any non-compliance and the implications of this non-compliance on building performance.
- [15] The main observations were as follows (summarised):
- (a) based on a response from the Respondent to the question as to how many piles had been replaced, being all of them, there would have been a need for a building consent. Schedule 1 of the Building Act would not have applied to the building work;
 - (b) based on an [Omitted] report provided by the Complainant and based on the photos in that report a number of parts of the building work do not appear to comply with the New Zealand Standard for Timber Framed Buildings (NZS 3604:2011), including instances of inadequate or unsupported bearers, and incomplete pile connections.
 - (c) the baseboard cladding was more than likely asbestos mixed into fibre cement sheets. This was referred to in the quote that the Respondent provided the homeowner. There was no evidence of a plan to determine if asbestos was present or to deal with its removal and disposal if it was present.

³ *Z v Dental Complaints Assessment Committee* [2009] 1 NZLR 1

- [16] The Respondent provided a written response by way of his legal representative. The response traversed commercial matters and submitted that the complaint was an abuse of process. The response noted that there was insufficient information to determine whether a building consent was required. It was on this basis that the Board sought the Technical Assessor's report.

Draft Conclusion and Reasoning

- [17] The Board has decided that the Respondent **has** carried out or supervised building work or building inspection work in a negligent manner (s 317(1)(b) of the Act) and **should** be disciplined
- [18] The Board's considerations in relation to negligence relates to the failure to obtain a building consent as well as the manner in which the building work was carried out.
- [19] Under section 17 of the Act, all building work must comply with the building code. The building code is contained in Schedule 1 of the Building Regulations 1992 (the Building Code).
- [20] All building work must also be carried out in accordance with a building consent. Section 40 of the Act provides:
- 40 *Buildings not to be constructed, altered, demolished, or removed without consent***
- (1) *A person must not carry out any building work except in accordance with a building consent.*
- (2) *A person commits an offence if the person fails to comply with this section.*
- (3) *A person who commits an offence under this section is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$200,000 and, in the case of a continuing offence, to a further fine not exceeding \$10,000 for every day or part of a day during which the offence has continued.*
- [21] Building consents are granted under section 49 of the Act. A building consent can only be granted if the provisions of the Building Code will be satisfied. Section 49 provides:
- 49 *Grant of building consent***
- (1) *A building consent authority must grant a building consent if it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the provisions of the building code would be met if the building work were properly completed in accordance with the plans and specifications that accompanied the application.*
- [22] The process of issuing a building consent and the subsequent inspections under it ensure independent verification that the Building Code has been complied with and that the works will meet the required performance criteria in the Building Code. In

doing so the building consent process provides protection for owners of works and the public at large. This accords with the purposes of the Act as set out in section 3:

3 Purposes

This Act has the following purposes:

- (a) *to provide for the regulation of building work, the establishment of a licensing regime for building practitioners, and the setting of performance standards for buildings to ensure that—*
 - (i) *people who use buildings can do so safely and without endangering their health; and*
 - (ii) *buildings have attributes that contribute appropriately to the health, physical independence, and well-being of the people who use them; and*
 - (iii) *people who use a building can escape from the building if it is on fire; and*
 - (iv) *buildings are designed, constructed, and able to be used in ways that promote sustainable development:*
- (b) *to promote the accountability of owners, designers, builders, and building consent authorities who have responsibilities for ensuring that building work complies with the building code.*

[23] In *Tan v Auckland Council*⁴ the High Court, whilst dealing with a situation where no building consent had been obtained, stated the importance of the consenting process as follows:

[35] The building consent application process ensures that the Council can check that any proposed building work is sufficient to meet the purposes described in s 3 (of the Act). If a person fails to obtain a building consent that deprives the Council of its ability to check any proposed building work.

[24] The same applies to the ongoing verification of building work. A failure to notify the Council of changes to the consented documents defeats the purpose of the process. Moreover, undertaking building works that vary from those that have been consented can potentially put person and property at risk of harm.

[25] Justice Brewer in *Tan* also noted:

[37] ... those with oversight (of the building consent process) are in the best position to make sure that unconsented work does not occur.

[38] ... In my view making those with the closest connection to the consent process liable would reduce the amount of unconsented building work that is carried out, and in turn would ensure that more buildings achieve s 3 goals.

[26] The *Tan* case related to the prosecution of a project manager of a build. The project manager did not physically carry out any building work. The High Court on appeal,

⁴ [2015] NZHC 3299 [18 December 2015]

however, found that his instructions to those who did physically carry out the work amounted to “carrying out” for the purposes of section 40 of the Act.

- [27] There are limited exceptions to the requirement for a building consent. These are provided for in section 41 of the Act. The main exception is building work described in Schedule 1 of the Act and this is further provided for in section 42A of the Act. The burden is on those that seek to rely on an exception to show that the building work comes with that exception.
- [28] It should also be noted that whilst a certificate of acceptance can be granted by a building consent authority for building work that is not carried out under a building consent or an exemption it does not relieve a person from the obligation to ensure building work is carried out under a building consent. Section 96(3) specifically provides:

96 Territorial authority may issue certificate of acceptance in certain circumstances

(3) This section—

(a) does not limit section 40 (which provides that a person must not carry out any building work except in accordance with a building consent); and

(b) accordingly, does not relieve a person from the requirement to obtain a building consent for building work.

- [29] The Board considers the Court in *Tan* was envisaging that those who are in an integral position as regards the building work, such as a licensed building practitioner, have a duty to ensure a building consent (or an amended building consent) is in place prior to building work being carried out. It follows that failing to do so can fall below the standards of care expected of a licensed building practitioner.
- [30] The question for the Board to consider is whether, at the time the building work was undertaken by the Respondent, he knew or ought to have known that a building consent was required for what was being undertaken and if so whether the Respondent has, as a result of the failing, been negligent or incompetent.
- [31] Negligence and incompetence are not the same. In *Beattie v Far North Council*⁵ Judge McElrea noted:
- [43] Section 317 of the Act uses the phrase “in a negligent or incompetent manner”, so it is clear that those adjectives cannot be treated as synonymous.
- [32] Negligence is the departure by a licensed building practitioner, whilst carrying out or supervising building work, from an accepted standard of conduct. It is judged against those of the same class of licence as the person whose conduct is being inquired

⁵ Judge McElrea, DC Whangarei, CIV-2011-088-313

into. This is described as the *Bolam*⁶ test of negligence which has been adopted by the New Zealand Courts⁷.

- [33] The New Zealand Courts have stated that an assessment of negligence in a disciplinary context is a two-stage test⁸. The first is for the Board to consider whether the practitioner has departed from the acceptable standard of conduct of a professional. The second is to consider whether the departure is significant enough to warrant a disciplinary sanction.
- [34] When considering what an acceptable standard is the Board must have reference to the conduct of other competent and responsible practitioners and the Board's own assessment of what is appropriate conduct, bearing in mind the purposes of the Act⁹ which are outlined above. The test is an objective one, and in this respect, it has been noted that the purpose of discipline is the protection of the public by the maintenance of professional standards and that this could not be met if, in every case, the Board was required to take into account subjective considerations relating to the practitioner¹⁰.
- [35] Turning to seriousness in *Collie v Nursing Council of New Zealand*¹¹ the Court's noted, as regards the threshold for disciplinary matters, that:

[21] Negligence or malpractice may or may not be sufficient to constitute professional misconduct and the guide must be standards applicable by competent, ethical and responsible practitioners and there must be behaviour which falls seriously short of that which is to be considered acceptable and not mere inadvertent error, oversight or for that matter carelessness.

- [36] Looking at the matter before the Board a building consent was not applied for, and there was no evidence that any meaningful investigations were undertaken or that any inquiries had been made of the Council as to the need for one.
- [37] The Board was of the view that, given the total replacement of the foundation piles a building consent was required. Clause 1 of Schedule 1 of the Building Act did not apply. Clause 1 of Schedule 1 allows for general repair, maintenance and replacement but it cannot be relied on where there is a complete or substantial replacement of any component or assembly contributing to the building's structural behaviour. The Technical Assessor has noted that there was a complete or substantial replacement. Given the extent of the building work to be undertaken, and the fact that Schedule 1 could not be utilised, the Respondent should have

⁶ *Bolam v Friern Hospital Management Committee* [1957] 1 WLR 582

⁷ *Martin v Director of Proceedings* [2010] NZAR 333 (HC), *F v Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal* [2005] 3 NZLR 774 (CA)

⁸ *Martin v Director of Proceedings* [2010] NZAR 333 (HC), *F v Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal* [2005] 3 NZLR 774 (CA)

⁹ *Martin v Director of Proceedings* [2010] NZAR 333 at p.33

¹⁰ *McKenzie v Medical Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal* [2004] NZAR 47 at p.71

¹¹ [2001] NZAR 74

enquired as to the need for a building consent prior to undertaking the building work. As he did not take any such steps, the Board finds that he was negligent.

- [38] In the case of the building work itself, the Board finds that the Respondent has not taken the required care and a number of aspects of the work were below an acceptable standard and could put the building at risk of structural failure. The building work was not complex and should have been able to have been undertaken and completed to an acceptable standard by any competent person.
- [39] No evidence was provided in the case of the possible presence of asbestos in the baseboard cladding. There was no plan to identify it and, if present, a way of removing it and disposing of it. Given it is highly likely, given the age of the building, that the cladding did contain asbestos, the way it was handled could have posed a risk to not only the Respondent but others in close contact.
- [40] Given the above factors the Board, which includes persons with extensive experience and expertise in the building industry, considered the Respondent has departed from what the Board considers to be an accepted standard of conduct and that the conduct was sufficiently serious enough to warrant a disciplinary outcome.

Draft Decision on Penalty, Costs and Publication

- [41] Having found that one or more of the grounds in section 317 applies the Board must, under section 318 of the Act¹, consider the appropriate disciplinary penalty, whether the Respondent should be ordered to pay any costs and whether the decision should be published.
- [42] The matter was dealt with on the papers. Included was information relevant to penalty, costs and publication and the Board has decided to make indicative orders and give the Respondent an opportunity to provide further evidence or submissions relevant to the indicative orders.

Penalty

- [43] The purpose of professional discipline is to uphold the integrity of the profession; the focus is not punishment, but the enforcement of a high standard of propriety and professional conduct. The Board does note, however, that the High Court in *Patel v Complaints Assessment Committee*¹² commented on the role of “punishment” in giving penalty orders stating that punitive orders are, at times, necessary to provide a deterrent and to uphold professional standards. The Court noted:

[28] I therefore propose to proceed on the basis that, although the protection of the public is a very important consideration, nevertheless the issues of punishment and deterrence must also be taken into account in selecting the appropriate penalty to be imposed.

¹² HC Auckland CIV-2007-404-1818, 13 August 2007 at p 27

- [44] The Board also notes that in *Lochhead v Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment*¹³ the Court noted that whilst the statutory principles of sentencing set out in the Sentencing Act 2002 do not apply to the Building Act they have the advantage of simplicity and transparency. The Court recommended adopting a starting point for a penalty based on the seriousness of the disciplinary offending prior to considering any aggravating and/or mitigating factors.
- [45] The Board was of the view that the matters were serious and that collectively the Respondent had shown a disregard for the building process and the safety of himself and others. It adopted an appropriate starting point of a fine of \$3,500 which reflects the serious nature of the failings and lack of process to deal with issues such as the need for a building consent and the identification of asbestos. It did not consider that there were any mitigating factors.

Costs

- [46] Under section 318(4) the Board may require the Respondent “to pay the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.”
- [47] The Respondent should note that the High Court has held that 50% of total reasonable costs should be taken as a starting point in disciplinary proceedings and that the percentage can then be adjusted up or down having regard to the particular circumstances of each case¹⁴.
- [48] In *Collie v Nursing Council of New Zealand*¹⁵ where the order for costs in the tribunal was 50% of actual costs and expenses, the High Court noted that:

But for an order for costs made against a practitioner, the profession is left to carry the financial burden of the disciplinary proceedings, and as a matter of policy that is not appropriate.

- [49] The Board notes the matter was dealt with on the papers. There has, however, been costs incurred investigating the matter, producing the Registrar’s Report and in the Board making its decision. In addition, a Technical Assessor’s report was required. The costs have been less than those that would have been incurred had a full hearing been held. As such the Board will order that costs of \$2,000 be paid by the Respondent. The Board considers that this is a reasonable sum for the Respondent to pay toward the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.

Publication

- [50] As a consequence of its decision, the Respondent’s name and the disciplinary outcomes will be recorded in the public register maintained as part of the Licensed Building Practitioners’ scheme as is required by the Act¹⁶. The Board is also able,

¹³ 3 November 2016, CIV-2016-070-000492, [2016] NZDC 21288

¹⁴ *Cooray v The Preliminary Proceedings Committee* HC, Wellington, AP23/94, 14 September 1995, *Macdonald v Professional Conduct Committee*, HC, Auckland, CIV 2009-404-1516, 10 July 2009, *Owen v Wynyard* HC, Auckland, CIV-2009-404-005245, 25 February 2010.

¹⁵ [2001] NZAR 74

¹⁶ Refer sections 298, 299 and 301 of the Act

under section 318(5) of the Act, to order publication over and above the public register:

In addition to requiring the Registrar to notify in the register an action taken by the Board under this section, the Board may publicly notify the action in any other way it thinks fit.

- [51] As a general principle, such further public notification may be required where the Board perceives a need for the public and/or the profession to know of the findings of a disciplinary hearing. This is in addition to the Respondent being named in this decision.
- [52] Within New Zealand, there is a principle of open justice and open reporting, which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights Act 1990¹⁷. The Criminal Procedure Act 2011 sets out grounds for suppression within the criminal jurisdiction¹⁸. Within the disciplinary hearing jurisdiction, the courts have stated that the provisions in the Criminal Procedure Act do not apply but can be instructive¹⁹. The High Court provided guidance as to the types of factors to be taken into consideration in *N v Professional Conduct Committee of Medical Council*²⁰.
- [53] The courts have also stated that an adverse finding in a disciplinary case usually requires that the name of the practitioner be published in the public interest²¹. It is, however, common practice in disciplinary proceedings to protect the names of other persons involved as naming them does not assist the public interest.
- [54] Based on the above, the Board will not order further publication.

Draft Section 318 Order

[55] For the reasons set out above, the Board directs that:

Penalty: Pursuant to section 318(1)(f) of the Building Act 2004, the Respondent is ordered to pay a fine of \$3,500.

Costs: Pursuant to section 318(4) of the Act, the Respondent is ordered to pay costs of \$2,000 (GST included) towards the costs of, and incidental to, the inquiry of the Board.

Publication: The Registrar shall record the Board's action in the Register of Licensed Building Practitioners in accordance with section 301(I)(iii) of the Act.

In terms of section 318(5) of the Act, there will not be action taken to publicly notify the Board's action, except for the note in the Register and the Respondent being named in this decision.

¹⁷ Section 14 of the Act

¹⁸ Refer sections 200 and 202 of the Criminal Procedure Act

¹⁹ *N v Professional Conduct Committee of Medical Council* [2014] NZAR 350

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *Kewene v Professional Conduct Committee of the Dental Council* [2013] NZAR 1055

- [56] The Respondent should note that the Board may, under section 319 of the Act, suspend or cancel a licensed building practitioner's licence if fines or costs imposed as a result of disciplinary action are not paid.

Submissions on Draft Decision

- [57] The Board invites the Respondent and the Complainant to:
- (a) provide further evidence for the Board to consider; and/or
 - (b) make written submissions on the Board's findings. Submissions may be on the substantive findings and/or on the findings on penalty, costs and publication.
- [58] Submissions and/or further evidence must be filed with the Board by no later than the close of business on **1 February 2021**. They are only to relate to the Board's Conclusion and Reasoning and on matters of penalty costs and publication. Submissions are not sought with regard to the Board's decision not to proceed with an allegation because regulation 9 of the Complaints Regulations applies. The Complainant should note that if new compellable evidence that was not available at the time the regulation 9 decision not to proceed was made then a further complaint in respect of the matter may be made .
- [59] If submissions on the Board's Conclusion and Reasoning or on matters relating to penalty costs and publication are received, then the Board will meet and consider those submissions.
- [60] The Board may, on receipt of any of the material received, give notice that an in-person hearing is required prior to it making a final decision. Alternatively, the Board may proceed to make a final decision which will be issued in writing.
- [61] If no submissions or further evidence is received within the time frame specified, then this decision will become final.

Request for In-Person Hearing

- [62] If the Respondent, having received and considered the Board's Draft Decision, considers that an in-person hearing is required then one will be scheduled, and a notice of hearing will be issued.
- [63] A request for an in-person hearing must be made in writing to the Board Officer no later than the close of business on **1 February 2021**.

Right of Appeal

[64] The right to appeal Board decisions is provided for in section 330(2) of the Actⁱ.

Signed and dated this 22nd day of December 2020



Mr C Preston
Presiding Member

This decision and the order herein were made final on 2 February 2021 on the basis that no further submissions were received.

Signed and dated this 11th day of February 2021



Mr C Preston
Presiding Member

ⁱ **Section 318 of the Act**

- (1) *In any case to which section 317 applies, the Board may*
 - (a) *do both of the following things:*
 - (i) *cancel the person's licensing, and direct the Registrar to remove the person's name from the register; and*
 - (ii) *order that the person may not apply to be relicensed before the expiry of a specified period:*
 - (b) *suspend the person's licensing for a period of no more than 12 months or until the person meets specified conditions relating to the licensing (but, in any case, not for a period of more than 12 months) and direct the Registrar to record the suspension in the register:*
 - (c) *restrict the type of building work or building inspection work that the person may carry out or supervise under the person's licensing class or classes and direct the Registrar to record the restriction in the register:*
 - (d) *order that the person be censured:*
 - (e) *order that the person undertake training specified in the order:*
 - (f) *order that the person pay a fine not exceeding \$10,000.*
- (2) *The Board may take only one type of action in subsection 1(a) to (d) in relation to a case, except that it may impose a fine under subsection (1)(f) in addition to taking the action under subsection (1)(b) or (d).*

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- (3) *No fine may be imposed under subsection (1)(f) in relation to an act or omission that constitutes an offence for which the person has been convicted by a court.*
 - (4) *In any case to which section 317 applies, the Board may order that the person must pay the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.*
 - (5) *In addition to requiring the Registrar to notify in the register an action taken by the Board under this section, the Board may publicly notify the action in any other way it thinks fit.”*

ii Section 330 Right of appeal

- (2) *A person may appeal to a District Court against any decision of the Board—*
 - (b) *to take any action referred to in section 318.*

Section 331 Time in which appeal must be brought

An appeal must be lodged—

- (a) *within 20 working days after notice of the decision or action is communicated to the appellant; or*
- (b) *within any further time that the appeal authority allows on application made before or after the period expires.*