

I've been hung out to dry

Cowboy builders dodge and weave

CAULFIELD woman Lana Zaitzen said she had been failed by the Building Commission, which took the unprecedented step in June of signing an agreement with her and the Planning Department to ensure her house — mired in problems since work began on it two years ago — would be completed if she remained with her builder. The house remains exposed to the elements with timbers rotting and its basement flooded. It's a builder, who has so far been paid \$1.2 million, has not visited the site in months and will appear before the Board this year. "The commission has done nothing," Mrs Zaitzen said. "They could have directed the builder to do work and they didn't." Many owners talked of collusion between builders and surveyors, but feared being identified because of the threat of being sued or assaulted by builders.

Heartbroken homeowners of 21 items 17 months ago, have told of their frustration in dealing with the commission when builders had walked away from homes riddled with serious defects. They said commission staff had often refused to intervene, handballing them to Consumer Affairs and VCAT, where owners can be forced to spend more than \$100,000 to seek a resolution powers they need. They just don't use them," he said. Phil Dwyer, head of pres-sure group the Builders Col-lective, said most owners found home construction an emotional investment, yet building company rectify-ing the industry to be run with little regulation. Building Commissioner Tony Arnel said he accepted that there was room for im-provement.

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Still waiting: Geoff and Rosemary Thomas, of Caulfield North, in their unfinished bathroom. Picture: NORM OORLOFF

and conflicts of interest. He said the commission had wide powers as a regulator, yet claimed it had little authority to intervene.

Auditor-General Des Pearson said building surveyors. Auditor-General Des Pearson said building surveyors. Auditor-General Des Pearson said building surveyors.

VICTORIA'S building industry watchdog has deregistered just 13 dodgy builders in the past three years. Consumer groups say the state's 21,000 registered builders and surveyors include a host of cowboys and common whose work creates problems at one in six home building projects. Yet authorities have taken the licences off an average of just four rogue builders a year — a fraction of the number expelled in NSW and Queensland. Another 81 have been prosecuted. The Building Commission was savaged in a recent report by the Auditor-General for its failure to regulate the industry and monitor the work of builders and private

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