

IPSWICH COURTHOUSE PROJECT

CASE STUDY

The Companies

Ed Ahern Plumbing Pty Ltd is headquartered on the Gold Coast and undertakes a wide range of work throughout south-east Queensland. The Queensland office has a large team that includes site foremen, leading hands, plumbers, apprentices, labourers and plant operators, plus office and administrative staff. A separate branch covers metropolitan Sydney and southern New South Wales.

Electrical contracting, engineering and data communications firm Stowe Australia Pty Ltd was established in Sydney in 1910. Through its national branch network, including Queensland offices in Brisbane, Mackay and on the Gold Coast, the company undertakes work for a diverse range of clients in the retail, commercial, residential, government, communications and defence sectors. Stowe employs about 300 people, including 90 apprentices, at its Brisbane base.

TAC Pacific Pty Ltd is the Australian subsidiary of the international Swedish-based TAC Group, which specialises in building management systems. Queensland Branch Manager Chris Harris said the Brisbane office employs 80 staff designing and supplying hardware and software to control “anything that can make a building work”. Mr Harris said TAC’s expertise covered closed-circuit television systems, security and building automation systems, remote access control, motion detectors and other IT-based automated system components, “from lift interfaces to controls for chiller plants, air-conditioning, lighting and alarms”.

The Opportunity

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Justice, engaged national engineering and construction firm Abigroup Contractors Pty Ltd to build a new \$111 million courts and police precinct at Ipswich, west of Brisbane.

The new facilities, being built on the site of a former TAFE college in the Ipswich CBD, will include a five-storey, \$92 million courthouse accommodating eight Magistrates’ Courts and three District Courts. Existing court facilities in Ipswich have only four Magistrates’ Courts and two District Courts.

The new courts building will include public waiting areas, videoconferencing facilities and closed-circuit television systems allowing vulnerable witnesses, such as children and victims of crime, to testify in privacy and safety. A 23,000-litre rainwater tank will be installed to reduce the demand on Ipswich city water supplies. In addition to the new courts, the precinct will incorporate offices for the Director of Public Prosecutions, the State Reporting Bureau, the Dispute Resolution Bureau and a marriage room for civil ceremonies.

A new, 24-hour Ipswich police station and watchhouse, costing \$18.9 million, is part of the new complex.



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The project, due for completion in early 2009, was announced in the June 2006 State Budget and construction started in August 2007.

Government Projects Manager for ICN Queensland, Steve Jones, said the network had approached the Department of Justice & Attorney-General before the project began to offer assistance finding suppliers for the head contractor. "We were quite proactive in letting the department know of the services and benefits we could offer," Mr Jones said.

The Results

Mr Jones said Abigroup had engaged Ed Ahern Plumbing to supply "all the plumbing, bathroom and tapware" for the Ipswich courts complex. He described Ed Ahern Plumbing as "quite a go-ahead company, doing all the right things".

Ed Ahern Plumbing's Estimator and Contract Administrator Craig Fry said the project had some specialised requirements. "The tapware and basins in the watchhouse and each of the cells have to be specialised, with increased safety measures," he said. "We will provide detention-type tapware and fixtures. The rest of the plumbing is pretty straightforward."

Mr Fry said his firm had up to 10 staff directly involved in plumbing and fixture installation at the Ipswich site at any one time.

He said ICN's assistance was appreciated and had helped further improve Ed Ahern Plumbing's already strong relationship with Abigroup. "Our relationship with Abigroup is good. We've just picked up another job with them, doing the RAAF live-in accommodation at Amberley Air Force Base. The more work we get, the more we grow as a company." Mr Jones said Stowe Australia had secured a contract from Abigroup for electrical services at the Ipswich project.

He said Stowe Australia had "done a few high-profile projects, like the Gold Coast Stadium, so they know what they are doing".

Stowe Australia's Brisbane Manager, Bruce Hooper, said his firm had supplied all electrical installations for the courthouse complex, including electrical fire-detection systems and data communications cabling.

"We do projects worth anything from hundreds of dollars to multi-million-dollar contracts. The only thing we don't do is domestic electrical work, but we do all other commercial, industrial or infrastructure work," he said.

Mr Hooper said an average of seven or eight Stowe Australia employees had worked on the Ipswich project, with up to a dozen engaged during peak periods.

Mr Jones said TAC Pacific was "experienced in the security area" and was supplying and installing security cameras and control systems in the courthouse and police watchhouse.

"There are some fairly stringent security requirements, because it's a courthouse, and there are also facilities on site to hold prisoners," he said.

TAC Pacific's Chris Harris said his firm had undertaken work for Abigroup in the past and with other large construction companies that required specialised security work.

He said head contractors would not normally consider smaller companies for a "significant project", such as the Ipswich courts complex, relying instead on firms with proven track records. "With our size, we like to think our position in the marketplace means we are capable of doing those sorts of jobs. But any job that substantial is fantastic for TAC," Mr Harris said.

Abigroup identified cost savings as one outcome of the process undertaken by ICN to identify potential subcontractors.

Abigroup's Design Manager for the Ipswich project, Andrew Richmond, said ICN's list of possible subcontractors and suppliers could include firms already known to the construction company. "Some of them we have worked with before," Mr Richmond said. "But [ICN] does identify companies we may not be aware of."

Having a wide list of potential suppliers helped achieve better tender prices.

"Opening the field to more tenderers usually helps deliver a more competitive tender situation," Mr Richmond said

According to the *Manufacturing Sector Impacts Report 2007*, compiled by ICN and Australian Economic Consultants Group, every \$1 million of manufacturing business retained in Australia or freshly generated by Australian companies creates 12 full-time jobs. Every \$1 million of manufacturing business retained or generated by Australian manufacturers also generates \$394,000 in taxes and charges, which benefits Australians as the government can reinject it into the economy.

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