

## MAKING SURE YOUR SPECIFICATIONS ARE UP-TO-DATE

### INTRODUCTION

To be effective, project specifications should reflect current mandatory requirements and practices.

This TECHnote outlines some approaches to making sure your specifications are up-to-date using the NATSPEC system.

### NATSPEC AND AUS-SPEC UPDATES

NATSPEC *Templates* are updated twice a year in April and October. AUS-SPEC *Templates* are updated in October only. Each NATSPEC *Update* includes an *Update summary* listing major changes and PDFs of all worksection text with changes highlighted.

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

The best way of making sure a new specification is up-to-date is to use the latest NATSPEC *Template* as its basis.

If a specification is in the process of being developed when an *Update* arrives, it should be updated to incorporate any relevant changes included in the *Update*. This can be done by:

- Copying *Update* content into the sections of the document that have not already been edited or;
- Using the *Update Summary* and PDF files. See sidebar.

### OFFICE MASTERS

#### Master text

Some offices like to include standardised material (master text) in their specifications or customise the NATSPEC *Template* to reflect policies, procedures, approaches, or preferences they have developed. These include performance levels, standards of finish, material and product selections or administrative requirements regarding items such as submissions and witness points. They may also delete options they do not use.

If an office regularly does projects of a particular type, e.g. hospitals, they may have developed worksections or clauses to cover more specialised items not found in NATSPEC.

The same necessity to keep specification content up-to-date applies to master text. This can be assisted by using the *Update summary* and PDFs if they contain related material or by referring to *SPECnotes* for changes to standards that may be included in master text.

#### Master management

Merging NATSPEC *Template* content with office master text to create a specification needs to be well managed to avoid inconsistencies, contradictions or duplications, and to make sure everyone within an organisation is working on the current version.

SPECbuilder can be used to reduce the risk of these problems. See notes in the sidebar.

#### Recommendations and tips

- Store master text separately from NATSPEC *Templates* to simplify its review and updating.
- So master text can be readily located and copied to the right locations, organise it in the same way as NATSPEC content, i.e. in worksections ordered by the *National Classification System* and sections, headings and clauses following the NATSPEC *Template*.
- Consolidate and structure master text so it can be merged with NATSPEC content with the least effort, e.g. whole clauses, paragraphs or sentences rather than individual words scattered throughout the document.
- Categorise pieces of master text to reflect different types of office work, e.g. by client, market sector or building type.
- Use templates or patterns for assembling specifications for different purposes to establish a consistent approach across an organisation.



#### Update summary and worksection PDFs

These documents are available in SPECbuilder and the update USB under *Resources > Update info and Subscription downloads > Worksection PDFs with changes highlighted*.

The process of updating can be made easier in some cases by using the MS Word *Compare and merge documents* function. You may also reduce the amount of routine customising by telling NATSPEC what you are changing or adding so it can be considered for inclusion in future updates.

#### Office masters

An office master specification or master text is a reflection of office philosophy. Office masters may be created to:

- Incorporate text based on office policies and experience.
- Create new worksections for material not covered by NATSPEC.
- Reorder worksections to suit the office documentation system.
- Follow a house style.

#### SPECbuilder

SPECbuilder can be used as a repository for project specifications, office-edited worksections and master text files. This centralises specification resources and allows access to be managed.

For guidance see the *SPECbuilder Guide*, which can be downloaded from SPECbuilder after logging in.

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- To assist the updating process and track changes you can use font colour or highlighting to distinguish master text from NATSPEC text when they have been combined. Using a different colour for office-specific *Guidance* text is a good way of sharing corporate knowledge gained from experience and establishing office standards. Font colours can be unified before the specification is issued.
- Establish policies and procedures for merging master text and NATSPEC content.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for managing office specifications including updating.

### MERGING NATSPEC AND MASTER TEXT

#### Approaches

NATSPEC content and master text can be combined in several ways:

- Project-by-project: Insert relevant parts of master text into individual project specifications as needed.
- Modular: Merge all updated master text with the NATSPEC *Template* at each update to form:
  - A generic office master specification to be used for all projects.
  - A suite of office master specifications customised for different purposes, e.g. market sectors, building types.
- Consolidated: Merge master text with the NATSPEC *Template* to form an office master specification, or suite, and use the *Update Summary* and PDFs to update them at each update.

#### Selecting an approach

Selecting an approach to merging master text and NATSPEC content will be influenced by:

- The amount and distribution of master text (consolidated or scattered) throughout the NATSPEC *Template*.
- The complexity and variety of project types dealt with on a regular basis.
- How much specifications vary from project to project.
- The number of specifications written each year.
- How specification writing responsibilities are allocated within the office, e.g. written by a single individual or group for all projects or written by each project leader for their project.

Deciding the most appropriate approach for your organisation usually requires balancing the effort involved against the quality and reliability of the outcome. Keep in mind systems that require a lot of effort to maintain are often neglected.

#### Updating two-part specifications

At each *Update* NATSPEC publishes *Reference specifications* for mechanical, electrical and hydraulic services. These are supplied as PDF files together with MS Word *Schedules Templates*. Together they include all text in conventional NATSPEC services worksections.

A two-part project-specific specification is prepared by editing the respective *Schedules Template*. (*Guidance* on preparing two-part specifications is contained in the *Schedules Template* and NTN GEN 033).

Because the *Reference* PDF is not intended to be edited, office master text has to be maintained in the *Schedules* file. When a new NATSPEC *Update* is received, master text in the *Schedules* file should be checked to decide whether it needs amendment.