

Information Sheet 3 – July 2021**Introduction**

Much of the beauty associated with a solid timber floor comes from it being a natural product. The colour, grain and features present, are individual to your floor. We also need to understand that seasonal movement is also natural and that changes in appearance as the floor ages will occur. These aspects along with installation, sanding and coating may cause you to question the acceptability of your floor. Therefore, if you have a solid timber floor, it is suggested that you first read ATFA Information Sheet 1 'Owner expectations – Solid timber floors' which outlines reasonable owner expectations for a newly completed floor.

Others of you may have a laminate, engineered or bamboo floor that is floated. A floated floor does not describe the product, rather its method of installation. Boards in floating floors are fixed to each other, not the subfloor, and rest on a foam underlay over the subfloor. As all boards are joined together, each floor area acts as a "raft" floating on the underlay, and as these floor rafts also experience seasonal movement, they must be able to move freely in all directions for the floor to perform properly. Concerns with floor performance can occur if the movement allowance provided is insufficient or the subfloor has not been prepared adequately. Alternatively, both engineered and bamboo floors may be adhesive fixed to the subfloor, but again, with varying seasonal climate the performance and appearance of the floor can change with time. These aspects relating to floor movement, and also those relating to product installation, can lead to concerns with the floor that may cause you to question its acceptability. Therefore, if you have a floor of these types, it is suggested that you first read ATFA Information Sheet 92 'Owner expectations – Engineered, Laminate and Bamboo Floors' which outlines reasonable owner expectations.

Vinyl-based board products with a timber appearance are a more recent addition and include products known as Hybrid, SPC, WPC, and LVP. Unlike timber, these flooring types do not expand or contract with humidity; however, they do respond to changes in temperature, and in fact, they react very quickly where shrinkage or swelling can be significant. Rapid movement can create a situation where damage and gapping at end joints can be a concern. Concerns with this type of flooring are also assessed by ATFA.

It is not uncommon for some floors to need readjustment or repairs as a result of movement, or due to other aspects affecting appearance. But note that techniques have been developed to address many concerns. A substantial benefit of purchasing a 'timber floor' is that it can often be repaired if need be, and that this is an accepted part of the industry. However, it is also important to be aware of acceptable repair methods and noting that such repairs often add to the life of the floor, without the inconvenience of replacing it. Re-sanding and coating is an acceptable remedial option; it should be accepted that there will be some reduction in the life of the floor – this is the nature of the product – but with the benefit that the refurbished floor will look like new again. ATFA Information Sheet 102 'Repairs to timber floors' outlines repair

methods acceptable to the industry for many of the flooring types mentioned above, and this may therefore be beneficial to read if you have concerns with your floor and remedial work is being suggested.

The steps to take if you have a concern with your floor

If you believe you have a problem, firstly contact the company your contract of work was/is with, as they may have a right of rectification for minor repairs under Australian Consumer Laws. Put simply, they may be quite satisfied to address your concerns immediately.

If you do not get action and still feel strongly about your concerns or if similarly, the contractor disagrees, it can often assist to get a second opinion. The options for inspection are:

1. Should you be uncertain about your concerns – unsure if it does or doesn't meet industry expectations, you can contact an ATFA Accredited Inspector for a 'Onsite verbal meeting' (after completing the online registration – link here <https://www.atfa.com.au/request-an-inspection/>). Before submitting an online form, please first **PHONE** the chosen inspector to ensure they are available to carry out your inspection.

The minimum cost is \$350 (though may be higher if additional travel and/or time is warranted) and will provide you with verbal comment regarding the floor or practices used; though such comments are not to be used for any further negotiations as only the written report is an acceptable tool. If you believe the inspector's comments warrant a full inspection with a written report, this may be undertaken at the time of the onsite verbal meeting or by informing the inspector within two weeks of that meeting, with the cost being the difference between that already paid, and the cost for a full inspection with written report, and provided that the inspector does not need to make a return visit to obtain further data and information.

Please note, if you choose not to proceed with a full inspection after two weeks, then you will be subject to the full fee.

2. If you know that a problem exists with your floor, instead of an onsite verbal meeting, you can contact an ATFA Accredited Inspector (after completing the online registration – link here: <https://www.atfa.com.au/request-an-inspection/>).

Before submitting an online form, please first PHONE the inspector to ensure they are available to carry out your inspection to undertake a full assessment of your concerns with the floor. This will result in a full written report, usually returned to you within ten working days of the visit. The fee may be higher if additional travel and/or time is warranted). Should the report confirm that workmanship or materials have contributed to the problem, we recommend that you contact the service provider or supplier, as applicable, in the first instance to advise them of the outcomes of the impartial report and look to use the report to assist in negotiating an acceptable outcome. If no resolution occurs at this stage you can seek assistance with your Consumer Affairs Authority, Licensing Authority or seek legal advice. In all these circumstances the written report should provide you with an essential tool.

3. Should your situation be complex in nature and the issue has already turned into a legal dispute, or has multiple parties involved or is particularly involved, your situation may require a specialised written report. On these occasions you will be assigned an ATFA Accredited Inspector (after completing the online registration), as the report will require additional time and involvement for the inspector, and liaison with lawyers. The cost for this service will be quoted based on an analysis of the case and discussion with the parties.

What to expect from a full inspection?

Inspections conducted by ATFA Accredited Inspectors are undertaken objectively, assessing and analysing the available information factually. The inspector will prepare a report from an impartial perspective where the history, observations, measurements and testing of the floor under inspection are used to determine a logical explanation of what they consider has occurred with the floor and why it has occurred. Aspects relating to remedial options will also be outlined as applicable.

Organising an inspection

To see a step-by-step instructional video of how to book an inspection, follow the link: <https://www.atfa.com.au/request-an-inspection/>). Here you will also find useful reference information including the information sheets mentioned above, schedule of fees, inspector guidelines and conflict of interest policy.

When you scroll down, fill out your name, mobile number and email address prior to clicking "Continue". which will take you to a new page where you can then select an Inspector in your area from the pull-down menu at the bottom of the page. You then need to PHONE your chosen inspector before you complete and submit your request, to ensure they are available to carry out the inspection. If not, you would need to contact another inspector.

Inspectors accredited by ATFA are to act impartially, are subject to a code of conduct, a conflict-of-interest policy and carry professional indemnity insurance. They have undergone intensive training and carry an accreditation card to verify their credentials.