

FIELD RESOURCE

Building and Pest Report Explainer

How to read a Brisbane building and pest report

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A building and pest report can be 50 to 80 pages of dense, conservative language. The conservative tone is by design: inspectors are protecting themselves legally. Almost every report on a Brisbane property will contain findings. The skill is knowing which findings are normal wear, which are minor maintenance, and which are genuinely worth negotiating on. This guide walks through each section in plain English.

How a building and pest report is structured

Most reports follow a similar structure even though templates differ between inspectors. Knowing the structure makes the report much easier to read.

- Summary or major defect summary: a short list of the inspector's most significant concerns. Read this first.

- Site and external: roof, gutters, fascia, eaves, walls, foundations, fences, retaining walls, paths, driveways, gardens.

- Internal: walls, ceilings, floors, doors, windows, kitchen, bathrooms, laundry, cabinetry.

- Roof void: timber framing, insulation, evidence of leaks, vermin activity.

- Subfloor or slab: ventilation, drainage, evidence of moisture, evidence of termite activity.

- Pest section: evidence of current termite activity, past activity, conducive conditions, treatment history if known.

- Limitations and caveats: areas the inspector could not access. These matter when interpreting the rest of the report.

Defect categories explained

Most reports use a categorisation system. The terms vary by inspector but the broad categories are similar.

- Major defect: a finding that affects the structure, safety, or major function of the property. These are the items worth negotiating on.

- Minor defect: cosmetic or small functional issues. Most properties have dozens of these. Examples: cracked tiles, sticky doors, dripping taps.

- Maintenance item: routine upkeep that is the new owner's responsibility. Examples: gutter cleaning, lawn maintenance, repainting.

- Conducive condition (pest): a condition that makes termite activity more likely. Examples: timber to ground contact, garden beds against the house, leaking taps. These are warnings, not findings of damage.

- Active termite activity: live termites detected on the property. This is significant and almost always requires immediate treatment.

- Past termite activity: evidence of previous termite damage that has been treated. The risk depends on whether treatment was completed correctly.

Common findings in Brisbane homes

Brisbane's climate and housing stock produce a recognisable set of common findings. Most are not deal-breakers.

- Stumps and bearers: typical for Queenslander homes. Many original stumps will be flagged. Replacement is routine and not a deal-breaker.
- Subfloor moisture: very common in lower-set homes, particularly in wetter months. Manage with ventilation, not panic.
- Roof tile or sheet displacement: common in older properties. Usually a minor maintenance item.
- Gutter and downpipe issues: common across all stock. Usually maintenance.
- Cracking in render or brickwork: hairline cracks are normal. Cracks wider than 5mm or with stepped patterns warrant a structural engineer's opinion.
- Timber pest conducive conditions: garden beds against external walls, mulch piled against timber, weep holes covered. Easy to fix.
- Past termite activity in subfloor or fence timbers: very common in Brisbane. The question is what was done about it.

Findings that genuinely matter

A small number of findings move from minor concern to genuine negotiation territory. These are the ones to focus on.

- Active termite activity, particularly in primary structural timbers. Confirm with the inspector and a separate pest specialist if needed.
- Significant moisture damage with rot in structural timbers (bearers, joists, wall studs). Repair scope can be large.
- Major roof structural issues: sagging ridge, cracked rafters, significant water damage in roof void.
- Foundation movement: stepped cracking in masonry, doors and windows that no longer close, sloping floors. May require structural engineer assessment.
- Asbestos, particularly in pre-1990 homes. The presence is not necessarily a problem, but management and disclosure obligations apply.
- Significant retaining wall failure, particularly walls on or near boundaries.
- Major plumbing or electrical defects flagged in the report (these usually require a separate trade inspection to confirm scope).
- Drainage issues that direct water toward the building.

Reading the inspector's language

Inspectors use cautious, defensive language. Reading it without understanding the convention can make ordinary findings sound alarming.

- "Inspector recommends further investigation by a qualified [trade]" appears frequently. It usually means the issue is outside the scope of a visual inspection, not that something is necessarily wrong.
- "Indicates the possibility of" or "may suggest" are caution flags, not confirmations.
- "At the time of inspection" is a standard caveat. The inspector reports what was visible on the day, not what may be hidden.
- "Unable to access" appears when an area was inaccessible. Common for parts of the roof void, subfloor, or behind built-ins. The findings exclude those areas.
- "Active termite activity" is unambiguous and serious. So is "significant structural movement".
- "Within acceptable limits" or "consistent with the age of the building" are reassuring phrases. Pay attention to what is not described this way.

How sellers should respond to a report

When a buyer's report comes back with findings, the response is half negotiation, half information management.

- Read the full report yourself, not just the summary. Inspectors often soften findings in summary that are stronger in the body.
- Get a second opinion from a trusted trade for any major item before agreeing to a price reduction or remedial work.
- Decide whether to fix the issue, offer a price reduction, or hold firm. Each has trade-offs.
- Fix-it agreements: get all work done by qualified trades with paid invoices. Document everything.
- Price reductions: agreed in writing through your conveyancer, applied to the contract price.
- Holding firm: appropriate if the buyer is being unreasonable or the report findings are minor. Be ready for the buyer to walk.
- For pre-sale inspections: getting your own report before listing removes most of this surprise. Issues can be fixed or disclosed in advance.

When to commission your own pre-sale inspection

Pre-sale inspections are not common in Queensland but are increasingly worth considering, particularly for older or character homes.

- Worth considering if your home is pre-1980 or has had significant renovations.
- Worth considering if you suspect there are termite, structural, or compliance issues.
- Worth considering if you intend to sell at auction. Auction is unconditional, so buyers want certainty.
- Worth considering if you cannot afford a contract to fall through after a poor buyer's inspection.
- A pre-sale inspection costs \$400 to \$800 in Brisbane. The price is small compared to the cost of a fall-through.
- Findings can be fixed before listing, disclosed in the campaign, or used to set realistic expectations with buyers.

Most building and pest reports look worse than they are on first read. Take the time to understand what the inspector means and you will negotiate from a position of clarity, not fear.

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