

## **Reform of Building Regulation Green Building Council of Australia Submission April 2004**

This submission represents the Green Building Council of Australia's support for the continuation of:

- National Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB)
- Federal Government involvement, coordination and funding for ABCB
- State & Territory Government participation, administration of a nationally coordinated Building Code of Australia (BCA)
- Current industry representation on ABCB
- National agenda and international relevance for BCA
- National agenda on sustainability for the building and development industry
- Adoption of sustainability performance benchmarks code as a matter of priority

The Green Building Council supports the original objective of an Australian Building Codes Board.

The Council believes a national building code is even more relevant and important today to ensuring State and Territories administer national regulation contributing to a coordinated administrative system.

Without a nationally funded, focused code each state and territory will be required to fully fund, administer, research and implement their own minimum standards and regulation. The building industry already deals with wasteful examples of uncoordinated regulation and the property industry is calling for regulation to be good practice and national.

The drivers for the residential and commercial property sectors to adopt more sustainable practices need to move beyond the approaches to date. This must be an industry and government partnership.

The Building Codes Board has an agenda which requires support - a new performance based code is needed - one which will provide a national framework in response to national issues such as energy and water efficiencies, waste minimization and other important health and well being sustainability issues such as indoor environment quality.



Buildings consume one third of the world's resources; they use 42% of Australia's energy; 12% of our water demand is consumed by buildings; up to 40% of waste going to landfill is from construction and deconstruction activities (predominantly the churn of interior refurbishments); and 40% of Australia's air emissions are from buildings. Refer to Attachment *OECD Environmentally Sustainable Buildings - Challenges and Policies, March 2003*.

Green or sustainable buildings use key resources like energy, water, materials, and land much more efficiently than buildings that are simply built to code. They also create healthier work, learning, and living environments, with more natural light and cleaner air, and contribute to improved employee and student health, comfort, and productivity. Benefits of building green include elements easy to quantify - such as savings in energy and water usage, as well as those that are less easily quantified, such as improved indoor environmental quality.

Comprehensive, nationally coordinated regulation which addresses the impact of buildings on the environment and health and wellbeing of occupants is supported by the Green Building Council.

There is an increasing ask for sustainable development and there is a great need for a national regulatory approach. The Federal government's 'State of the Environment Report' and state based community sentiment polls conducted by Environment Protection Agencies give evidence to an increase in public concern for the environment. 2004 is the 'Year of the Built Environment' and politicians are starting to link in sustainability strategies to the property and construction sector rather than traditional environment protection or preservation actions.

One of the most demanding roles of the Green Building Council is trying to facilitate the coordination of state and federal initiatives to the industry and to reinforce the need for national collaboration and consistency.

Our national standards and in particular the Building Code of Australia are rapidly being overtaken by a proliferation of state based schemes. Local government too, is adding to the proliferation of sustainability demands. Often under-resourced and desperate for improved practice within their local area, many local governments are producing checklists and requirements that, although well meaning, often do not guarantee an environmental outcome and, with the costs of administration, are the very reason planning approvals are delayed.

The Property Council of Australia stated in 2003 that 80% of development consent delays were a result of environmental issues, concern and debate.



If we are serious about tackling the environmental issues associated with development then we need to:

- legislate good practice using a coordinated Building Code of Australia to address sustainability;
- create a level playing field for mandatory disclosure of building environmental performance;
- ensure government commitment to leading industry and supporting innovation and investment in sustainability;

The Green Building Council of Australia supports the continuation of the Australian Building Codes Board beyond 2005. The Australian Building Codes Board has made a significant contribution to the design, construction and development industries and is the right vehicle to fund, facilitate and coordinate a national regulatory framework to continue the reform of building regulation.

The Inter Government Agreement on building regulation reform objectives continue to be relevant and needed. The Australian Building Codes Board and the Building Code of Australia has produced gains for the industry and the Australian economy. The members of the property industry want nationally coordinated good practice regulation for building standards.

International and National community expectations for health, safety, amenity in the design construction and use of buildings are increasing. Australian needs nationally consistent building codes, standards and regulatory systems.

The Council wishes to convey the need for the Australian Government to continue its support for the Australian Building Codes Board and the progression of the current code to address environmental and occupant health using performance criteria as a matter of priority with the support of States and Territories.