

Vinyl Council Australia

SUBMISSION NO. 24

Vinyl Council of Australia

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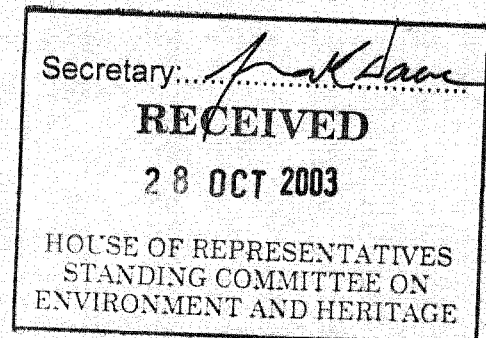
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a PACIA initiative

28 October 2003

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: environment.reps@aph.gov.au



RE: Inquiry into sustainable cities

Dear Committee Members

The Vinyl Council represents Australian companies that provide PVC products that are used in pipes, cable insulation, floor coverings, windows and a range of other important applications. The Council and its members are building a sustainable industry through such initiatives as the Product Stewardship Commitment that was launched in November 2002 by the Hon Dr Kemp, Federal Minister for the Environment. This public and voluntary commitment binds 33 signatories to deliver specific environment outcomes associated with the manufacture, use and disposal of PVC products in Australia.

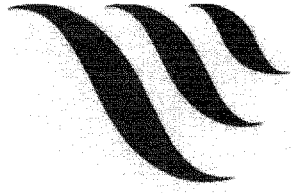
We are responding to the planned inquiry into the development of sustainable cities and its potential eco-efficiency principles for new buildings and housing.

PVC has been used in the building and construction industry for more than 50 years and is the material of choice for many applications.

Nevertheless there is a certain amount of misinformation and even strong bias against PVC, particularly from some activist lobby groups. Advocates of what is now regarded as 'green building' are often the least informed on the science behind PVC and have sometimes accepted easy assumptions against our material.

PVC is the most widely used polymer in building and construction due to its versatility, exceptional performance and cost-effectiveness. What is often less fully appreciated is how PVC also contributes to sustainable building and infrastructure. When evaluating materials through life cycle assessment and other science-based approaches, a CSIRO study (April 2001) reported: "there is little conclusive evidence, including LCA information available, that shows that PVC in its building and construction applications has significantly more effect on the environment than its alternative materials." Indeed, in respect of thermal efficiency, uPVC window profiles consistently rate five stars under the Australian Window Energy Rating Scheme, and this in addition to low maintenance and long-term durability.

PVC has been thoroughly researched and the subject of many life cycle assessment studies. In fact, the environmental credentials of many alternate products that are sometimes recommended over PVC building products have seldom been challenged or tested to the extent that PVC has undergone.



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The Vinyl Council advocates selecting all products on the basis of their merits in terms of performance, environmental impact and cost for the use at hand, and that reputable science should be used to assess environmental impact. Restrictions against PVC in the construction of the Sydney 2000 Olympics facilities resulted in \$16m in additional costs to NSW taxpayers for no environment gain – a waste of money and an important reminder of the need for science-based decisions over the expedient or emotive.

The Willoughby Council in Sydney in 2001 developed a draft Development Control Plan that included a number of anti-PVC proposals.

In September of this year, after submissions from the CSIRO, companies and industry associations, it reversed its position and removed all anti-PVC proposals. In explaining the change, the Council's Strategic Planning Department said the following:

"The revised DCP does not refer to the substitution of PVC in the Sustainability Scorecard on the basis that it is acknowledged that there are arguments such as durability, longevity and practicality as well as the fact that sometimes PVC may be the most appropriate product for particular situations."

While the Vinyl Council supports the need for ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement, prescriptive rating tools and labelling schemes are seldom sufficient to reflect the complexity of a material such as PVC. These are also easily subject to misinterpretation, hence we recommend against the Commonwealth using such an approach or mechanism to bring about urban development reform.

We are forwarding some relevant information on PVC, particularly for its applications in building and construction. We would be happy to offer any technical assistance to answer any questions about the performance and environmental credentials of PVC. Our website, www.vinyl.org.au, also contains information about PVC in building which we trust will be of interest.

We look forward to participating in the proposed round-table forums or other dialogue, as appropriate.

Yours faithfully

Laurie David
Manager Communications & Environmental Affairs