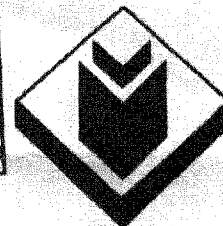




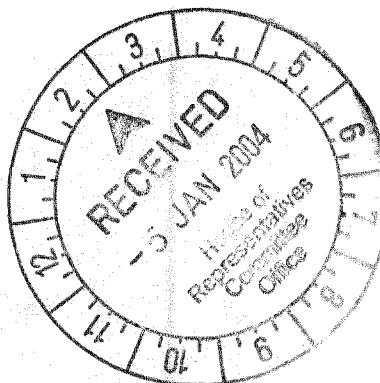
Australian Building Codes Board

Secretary... *Falder***RECEIVED**

12 JAN 2004

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Secretary
Environment and Heritage Committee
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



LEVEL 3
33 ALLARA STREET
CANBERRA ACT 2601
GPO BOX 9839
CANBERRA ACT 2601

TELEPHONE:
+61 2 6213 7240
FACSIMILE:
+61 2 6213 7287
E-MAIL:
ivan.donaldson@abcb.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

INQUIRY INTO SUSTAINABLE CITIES

I wish to bring to your attention the role and current activities of the ABCB that have a bearing on your Committee's deliberations in the inquiry.

The ABCB is a key body in technical and regulatory infrastructure that supports the building construction industry. It provides the community with nationally consistent, cost effective and efficient regulations for people's health, safety and amenity in the design, construction and use of new buildings and buildings subject to major refurbishment throughout Australia. It also has an important role in initiating and driving regulatory reform which can be a powerful mechanism for changing industry culture.

The ABCB is a joint initiative of all levels of Australian Government, in cooperation with the building industry. The Board was established by an inter-government agreement in March 1994 and reaffirmed in July 2001. Its function is to coordinate and integrate reform activities to ensure consistency of approach and to encourage consolidation into the Building Code of Australia (BCA) of all mandatory requirements affecting buildings.

The BCA is a performance-based code that sets the minimum acceptable requirements for the design and construction of buildings. Thus, it can be used as a tool to promote innovation in building practice. It is adopted by all States and Territories through their building laws.

The ABCB's response to the Inquiry focuses on the Inquiry objective concerned with incorporating eco-efficiency principles into new building and housing.

Across Australia, both government and the private sector have been tackling building-related sustainability issues. However, these initiatives are operating using different methodologies which have the potential to create confusion within industry.

As increasing numbers of sustainability issues arise for the building industry, e.g., water efficiency, choice of materials, waste management, etc it makes sense to have a national flexible framework in place to deal with these in a systematic manner. Therefore, a consolidated national approach is needed if Australia is to avoid costly duplication and confusion within the community and the building industry in particular.

The concept of sustainability already appears in some State and Territory 'built environment' legislation. For example:

- the NSW EP&A Act 1979 has 'the encouragement of ecological sustainable development' as an object;
- South Australia's Development Act 1993 includes as an object 'to encourage the management of the natural and constructed environment in an ecologically sustainable manner'; and
- Queensland's Integrated Planning Act 1997 establishes a 'framework to integrate planning and development assessment so that its effects are managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable'.

Further, there are numerous sustainability tools currently available or under development in Australia. This also adds to the confusion within industry and the community in trying to clearly define sustainability as it relates to building construction. Examples of the tools available are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| - Environment Australia | NABERS |
| - NSW Sustainability Council | BASIX |
| - Green Building Council | Green Star Rating Tool |
| - Brisbane City Council | Sustainable Housing Code |
| - CRC for Construction Innovation | LCADesign Tool |

In this increasingly complex environment, industry is seeking strong government leadership in the implementation of building-related sustainability issues. Industry looks to government to ensure that there is a level playing field, to establish minimal standards and to give guidance on which sustainability issues are relevant.

The Board is one body through which sustainability in building can be consistently addressed. To date we have taken the following steps to address sustainability and incorporate eco-efficiency principles into the regulations that affect building and housing.

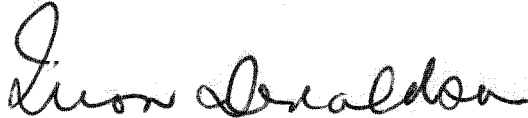
Minimum mandatory energy efficiency measures are being introduced progressively into the BCA. Measures for housing have already been implemented and adopted by a number of States. The measures could be expected to reduce the CO₂ equivalent of 1.5 million tonnes for the period 2003 to 2010. Measures for multi-residential, public and commercial buildings are currently being developed and are expected to be completed by 2005.

The ABCB has also carried out research on the implementation of sustainable development principles in building construction. It is currently considering whether sustainability should be adopted as an underlying principle and/or a goal for the BCA.

Following on from this research, a conceptual framework is being developed by the Board to incorporate eco-efficiency principles into building and housing regulation in an integrated and consistent manner. Sustainability issues are to be examined to decide whether it is appropriate to regulate or rely on suitable guidelines or other non-regulatory responses to particular aspects of sustainability.

Should the Committee wish to have further information on these initiatives we would be pleased to assist. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ivan Donaldson".

Ivan Donaldson
Executive Director

19 December 2003