



Building newsflash

Improving sustainable housing in Queensland discussion paper—approved policy outcomes

Purpose

To advise the Queensland Government has approved mandating 5-star housing from 1 March 2009 and advise of other decisions relating to the *Improving sustainable housing in Queensland* discussion paper.

Background

The *Improving sustainable housing in Queensland* discussion paper provided the community and industry with an opportunity to comment on a range of proposed new housing measures.

Eleven measures were canvassed in the discussion paper, targeting sustainable design and construction and installation of improved energy and water efficiency of fixtures and fittings.

Community and industry consultation on the discussion paper was carried out from 16 June to 12 September 2008. This included community forums and shopping centre displays across 12 locations in Queensland—Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Longreach, Hervey Bay, Mackay, Toowoomba, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Mount Isa, Rockhampton and Caboolture. An online survey was also available via the Department of Infrastructure and Planning (DIP) and Get Involved websites.

Notes from each of the community forums are available on the Department of Infrastructure and Planning's website at www.dip.qld.gov.au

Consultation results

A total of 284 responses to the discussion paper were received, including 51 written submissions and approximately 3600 hits were recorded on the Department of Infrastructure and Planning's website.

The consultation results highlighted broad community and industry support for significant improvements to Queensland housing standards. There was between 59 per cent and 95 per cent support (either 'strongly agree' or 'agree') from the community for almost all of the proposed measures.

The two measures which received the most support from the community were the minimum 4-star energy rating for air-conditioners (95 per cent) and the prevention of real estate covenants that restrict energy efficient design and features (95 per cent).

The community and peak industry bodies such as the Queensland Master Builders Association (QMBA), the Housing Industry of Australia (HIA), the Building Designers Association of Queensland (BDAQ), the Property Council of Australia (PCA) and the Association of Building Sustainability Assessors (ABSA), also strongly supported preventing the use of restrictive covenants that impact on sustainable designs and the use of sustainable building features.



Other measures that were strongly supported by the community included the star rating for pool pumps (91 per cent), the 5-star minimum energy equivalent rating for new houses and units (90 per cent), and increased requirements for energy and water efficient fittings in new and renovated houses and units (88–93 per cent).

The community supported compulsory rather than voluntary completion of the sustainability declaration, particularly at point-of-sale. The mandatory introduction of this measure was also broadly supported by stakeholders, including HIA, BDAQ, QMBA, Energex, Ergon Energy, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Clean Energy Council. The PCA and Real Estate Institute of Queensland were opposed to the sustainability declaration. Industry concerns were related to affordability, reliability of owner declarations, liability issues and the ease of monitoring compliance. However, the educational benefits and the principle of addressing the sustainability of existing houses were seen as positive potential outcomes.

There was also broad industry and key stakeholder support for the majority of other measures. QMBA, HIA, BDAQ and PCA all supported the minimum 5-star energy equivalent rating for new houses and recognising the benefits of outdoor-indoor connections in Queensland building standards.

Despite having broad community support, one of the more contentious measures among key stakeholders and industry was the investigation of requiring photovoltaic (solar) energy to be installed on new large houses. Views were polarised among stakeholders regarding this proposed measure—whilst some industry groups opposed the measure, others showed in-principle support for higher performance standards in large homes but sought further details regarding the method of implementation.

Sustainable housing measure outcomes

5-star energy equivalent rating for all new houses

For new houses (Class 1 buildings) and major renovations (where practicable), a minimum energy equivalence rating of 5 stars (out of 10) will be mandatory from 1 March 2009. This will initially be implemented through the Queensland Development Code (QDC) MP 4.1—Sustainable Buildings, and then transitioned to the Building Code of Australia (BCA) 2009, effective from 1 May 2009.

To coincide with the requirement from 1 March 2009, only software which complies with the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) Protocol for House Energy Rating Software Version 2006.1 (i.e. BERS Pro, AccuRate or FirstRate5) will be able to be used when assessing compliance through verification method V2.6.2.1 of the BCA. An additional compliance option, involving peer review by an expert, will be also made available from 1 March 2009.

5-star energy equivalent rating for all new units

For new units (Class 2 buildings), a minimum energy equivalence rating of 5 stars (out of 10) will be mandatory for new units and major renovations (where practicable) from 1 March 2010. This will initially be implemented through the QDC and then transitioned to a Queensland variation in the BCA from 1 May 2010.



Recognition of outdoor-indoor areas in Queensland's building standards

For new houses (Class 1 buildings) and major renovations (where practicable), energy efficiency benefits of outdoor living areas in certain climatic zones of Queensland will be recognised in the QDC from 1 March 2009. In climate zones 1 (tropical) and 2 (sub-tropical), as prescribed in the BCA, a credit will be made available towards the energy equivalence rating of a house where a home has an outdoor living area that meets specified requirements e.g. at least 3 m by 4 m, fully covered and immediately connected to an indoor living area. The applicable credit is intended to be in the range of 0.5- to 1-star, subject to consultation with industry over coming weeks.

Star rating for building materials

Ongoing consultation will continue with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Building Products Innovation Council and the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction and Innovation for Queensland to contribute to the investigation and development of a national rating scheme, assessment tools and building product database.

Further investigation will also be undertaken regarding the feasibility of a framework for providing credits towards an energy equivalence rating under the BCA for the use of sustainable materials.

Prevention of residential estate covenants that restrict the use of energy efficient design features and fixtures

Legislative amendments will be enacted as soon as practicable to:

- render invalid any new covenants and body corporate provisions which restrict an owner or body corporate from using selected features e.g. owners will be able to select light roof colours, an appropriate minimum floor area for their intended use requirements, locate garages on western side of the house and not be restricted in the locations available for roof-mounted solar hot water systems
- render invalid selected existing covenants and body corporate provisions which restrict an owner or body corporate from installing or effectively operating specific energy efficient features such as roof-mounted solar hot water systems.

Requiring 4-star toilets, 3-star tapware and 80 per cent energy efficient lighting in new houses and units

All new houses and units will be required to install minimum 4-star Water Efficiency Labelling Standards (WELS) scheme-rated toilets, 3-star WELS-rated tapware to kitchen sinks, bathroom basins and laundry taps and energy efficient lighting to 80 per cent of fixed internal lights. These measures will be effective from 1 March 2009, and implemented through the QDC MP 4.1—Sustainable Buildings. Also, where irrigation systems are installed they will be required to be water efficient from 1 March 2009.

Phase-out of electric hot water systems from 2010

The phase out of electric hot water systems was announced as part of the state government's *ClimateSmart 2050* strategy in June 2007. From 1 January 2010, the Queensland Plumbing and Wastewater Code will prevent the installation of electric resistive hot water systems in existing houses (Class 1 buildings only, not units) located within a gas reticulated area. This measure will only apply when the electric system requires replacement. Where a hot water system is replaced it will need to be replaced with a greenhouse-efficient hot water system i.e. gas, solar or heat pump.



Further investigation will be undertaken into phasing-out electric hot water systems at time of replacement for existing houses (not units) located in non-gas reticulated areas.

Sustainability declaration

The completion of a sustainability declaration will be mandatory when selling a house or unit from 1 January 2010. The sustainability declaration will not form part of the contract of sale, but will be used as an information tool to inform prospective buyers about the sustainability features of the dwelling. The declaration will be able to be completed by the property owner or a suitably qualified person (e.g. building inspector), and must be made available to prospective buyers while the property is on the market. This requirement will not apply for rental properties.

Preventing the sale and installation of inefficient air-conditioners

From 1 July 2009, new and replacement air-conditioners with a Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) energy label will be required to have a minimum energy rating of 4-stars. Legislation will also be enacted to prevent the sale of air-conditioners in Queensland which do not meet these energy efficiency standards.

Further investigation will be undertaken regarding the potential inclusion of requirements for energy load control (e.g. demand response enabling devices) to be incorporated as part of installation requirements with air-conditioners in Queensland.

Requiring photovoltaic (solar) energy to be installed on new large houses

This measure has not been approved for implementation. Further investigation will be undertaken regarding energy saving options for large homes such as requiring potential higher energy consumption or the installation of air-conditioning or swimming pools to be offset by higher performance standards.

Requiring minimum energy star rating for swimming pool pumps

This measure will be implemented once the development of MEPS for pool pumps is finalised by the Commonwealth Government. Investigations will continue on the potential to require new pool pumps to be connected to controlled tariffs.

Following results of consultation, investigations into minimum energy efficiency standards for rainwater tank pumps will also be undertaken.

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