



Green Star Review 2012-13

Helping us build a better rating system

A report on how we're improving Green Star
by incorporating your feedback.

June 2013



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Introduction

The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) would like to thank all the Green Star users and industry leaders who took the time to tell us what they think of Green Star as part of our annual review. This report outlines what we have learnt from the submissions, 180+ interviews and consultation with our Green Star Review Committee, which met in June. This feedback will shape the work we have planned for improving Green Star over the next two years - the Green Star 2014 project.



Feedback

You told us you're engaged with the GBCA.

Most (84%) of you are aware of the changes we made to Green Star as part of the Green Star Revolution initiative in 2011-12. You have been visiting the GBCA website, reading the *Green Building Voice* newsletter and participating in Green Star courses.

There is a widespread perception that the GBCA is more engaged with the industry than it has been in the past. Project contacts are particularly satisfied with their communication with GBCA staff (67% are satisfied; only 6% are dissatisfied). Some commented on the improvement in communications in recent years, particularly in relation to access to technical expertise.

While there is a high level of awareness of the Green Star Revolution, you have told us you would like to see more progress made, particularly the delivery of Green Star online rating tools, the release of Green Star – Performance, and reducing the cost of using Green Star. Our approach to achieving each of these goals and other initiatives for improving your Green Star experience are outlined below.

Green Star – Performance

You said you're looking forward to the release of the Green Star rating tool for building operations. There is excitement about the expansion of the market that will come with the uptake of an existing building rating tool.

We are making final preparations for the launch of the Green Star – Performance rating tool, including building and testing the online delivery platform and compiling technical guidance. Expressions of interest in pilot phase participation are now open and the rating tool will be launched as a pilot in October 2013. The Green Star team will be conducting workshops to familiarise you with Green Star - Performance credits from July.



180+

Interviews & submissions received.



67%

of project contacts are satisfied with our communications.



84%

of respondents are aware of the changes made to Green Star as part of the 'Green building Revolution' initiative in 2011-12.

Moving Green Star online

You told us you are looking forward to Green Star moving online. You told us you envision the online system empowering contractors to upload documents, thus reducing the time spent by teams compiling documentation. You also see the system enabling project teams to upload documents once and reference them for multiple credits within their submission.

Moving all Green Star rating tools online is one of the GBCA's key strategic projects. Green Star – Performance will be launched online later this year. The new Green Star – Design & As Built rating tool will be built on the same system, with the launch scheduled for the latter half of 2014.

Green Star rating tools that have already been released will not be left out. A simple online submission process is now being developed for Green Star – Interiors and Green Star - Communities. This will cut back on the need for project teams to send physical media to the GBCA. In addition, the GBCA is exploring other mechanisms to use existing software and other online systems to simplify calculations, modelling and documentation.

Making Green Star more cost-effective

You told us Green Star is too expensive to use. While there is a perception that the market price of Green Star assessment hasn't increased, cost is being seen as a barrier to use, particularly in newer markets. You've confirmed that people are using the rating tools without registering for Green Star certification. Over a quarter of our active project contacts, that is, people who are a designated contact for a registered project, think that Green Star certification offers poor value for money.

In most cases, perceptions of the cost of Green Star are focused on consulting fees, including the time taken to prepare submissions and undergo certification, rather than the Green Star certification fee itself. You told us there are three main areas that drive up consulting fees: the documentation requirements, the time taken to undergo certification and inconsistent assessment results. You said that if we fix these three areas, you'll find working on Green Star projects more interesting and more rewarding.

Reducing the cost of using Green Star and demonstrating the value of certification are central components of the Green Star program of works for 2014. A simple compliance pathway is being developed to make it easier for projects to move from a 'Design' rating to an 'As Built' rating. You can read more on this below in the 'Reducing documentation' section.

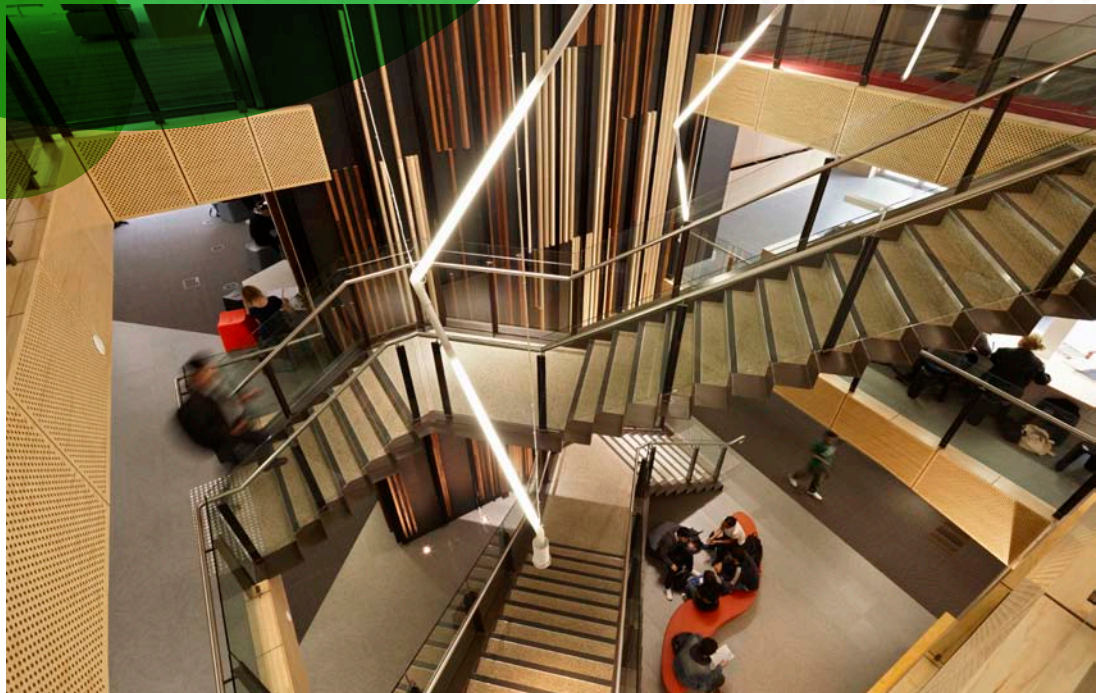
We are currently scoping ISO 9001 certification for Green Star, which will improve our governance and quality assurance management and reduce the cost of certification.

New editions of the technical manuals will be released online, incorporating all revised credits and rulings, making the manuals easier to use. Submission templates and examples will be expanded to include all credits. These will provide clear guidance on format and content requirements, making the compilation of submissions quicker and easier.

We have published research demonstrating the environmental benefits of Green Star. *The Value of Green Star: A decade in environmental benefits* was released in June 2013, providing independently reviewed, quantitative data on the average energy, water, waste and greenhouse gas savings of Green Star certified buildings.



New Green Star
rating tools
will have fewer
credits and less
documentation,
but we won't
compromise on
rigour



Innova 21 - 6 Star Green Star - Education Design v1
Photography: Dianna Snape



Reducing documentation

While you commented on the reductions in documentation requirements in place as part of the Green Star Revolution, you told us that documentation requirements remain a concern. From your feedback we know the amount of documentation varies by project team, with some compiling extensive submissions while others provide less information.

You told us that the focus on onerous documentation requirements rather than meeting the intent of the credits impacted negatively on project teams' morale.

To reduce the documentation we are reviewing how to recognise projects that are seeking an As Built rating, when that same project has already achieved a Green Star - Design rating. Where there is little likelihood of a change between the design of a project and its finished construction, it is proposed that credits will be automatically awarded rather than being reassessed.

As part of the long term development of Green Star, we are reviewing credits to ensure we are assessing the sustainability issues that are relevant to today. New Green Star rating tools will have fewer credits, with an equal reduction in documentation (more on this below).

We are also investigating alternate assessment models. The ideas for alternate assessment models include the assessment of individual credits, volume certification for projects with common attributes, pre-assessment of documents verifying compliance that can be used for multiple projects and requiring less documentation where there is sign off from pre-approved service providers. We also plan to further explore the feasibility of alternative certification models used by LEED, BREEAM and the BCA, and enabling face-to-face meetings of Assessors and project contacts.





**We are investigating
alternate assessment
models, to improve
your experience
working on Green
Star submissions**

Many credits need changing

You took the time to suggest a number of changes to the credits within Green Star. Some common suggestions included:

- **Energy modelling** – Simple energy calculators could be made available online for project teams, and a list of components to include in energy models could be provided.
- **Energy** – Changes were suggested for the ‘Peak Energy Demand Reduction’ credit, using a modelled peak average for the hottest day of the year.
- **Energy** – The introduction of separate calculations of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions reduction in future Green Star rating tools.
- **VOC levels** – A review of the IEQ-13 and IEQ-11 credit criteria for the VOC levels in paints was suggested, due to new technologies and changes in the best practice specification of sustainable paints.
- **Commissioning** – The ‘Commissioning & Tuning’ credit could be redesigned to reward optimal building performance.
- **Waste** – Changes to waste management credits to consider volume, rather than percentages.
- **Points** – The allocation of fractional points, or points on a sliding scale, to reward the partial achievement of credits, for example fractional points could be allocated based on the percentage of recycled timber used.
- **Weightings** – Introducing different category weightings for urban and suburban areas in regional areas. The need for weighting was questioned by some stakeholders, who argued ‘a point should be a point’.

All of this was very valuable feedback as we move towards developing the new Green Star – Design & As Built rating tool. For this new rating tool, we are removing credits you’ve told us are no longer relevant (such as ‘High Frequency Ballasts’ and ‘Insulant ODP’) and are aligning methodologies between existing rating tools (such as the way we measure greenhouse gas emissions and potable water). Some of the issues raised above are already being tested in Green Star – Interiors, Green Star – Performance, Green Star – Communities and the Green Star – Custom rating tools.



Both Green Star – Communities and Green Star – Performance use a simplified weighting system, where a point in one category is equivalent to a point in any other. In these rating tools we have also introduced partial points (where practical), to ensure projects are rewarded for incremental improvement. The issue of waste is one which is now addressed as suggested in Green Star – Interiors. All of these improvements are likely to be part of the updated Green Star –Design & As Built rating tool.

Technical manuals should be updated and more accessible online

While you appreciated the technical manuals being made available online for members, you said you would like to be able to paste them into other programs, particularly Microsoft Word. You also said the many rulings and credit revisions have made the technical manuals difficult to use. Some people also took the time to provide formatting suggestions for the technical manuals, particularly in relation to the clarity of the credit criteria.

We are revising the technical manuals by incorporating the rulings and revisions to reduce confusion and increase clarity. We appreciate your offers of assistance with this process. A new edition of each of the existing manuals will be published online. We expect these to be available before the end of 2013. While the focus of this work will be on the existing rating tools it will inform the process for updating the new Green Star – Design & As Built rating tool.



Newer rating tools

You told us the newer Green Star rating tools: Retail, Multi Unit Residential, and Healthcare, can be particularly expensive.

You said the main reasons for this are the expense of achieving the credits (above the 5% additional cost often associated with Green Star Office ratings) and the increased requirement for technical clarifications (TCs) and Credit Interpretation Requests (CIRs).

We are conducting research during 2013 to explore the cost of achieving credits. The results will inform the development of rating tools, including the new Green Star - Design & As Built.

Approved suppliers and products

You suggested that we maintain a list of suppliers, as this could reduce the documentation requirements. An alternate suggestion was to list some products as “deemed to satisfy” particular credits.

We are looking at this as part of the exploration of alternate assessment models. Specifically, we are exploring sign off by pre-approved consultants as the basis for deemed to satisfy credits. We are also investigating how compliance in one project can be transferred to other similar projects. We are also looking at pre-assessing documents for compliance, which can then be used in multiple projects.

Improving the Green Star certification process

You gave us positive feedback on the changes we’ve made to the certification process over the past two years.

In particular, you commented on an improvement in communication with the GBCA and praised the improved formulation of Round One queries. The main concerns you outlined were inconsistencies in assessment results, the cost and complexity of TCs and CIRs and the time taken for certification.

Increasing the consistency of assessments

From your feedback we know inconsistency in assessments remains the greatest concern with the certification process.

You reported receiving different results for similar projects when using the same or similar submissions. Inconsistency adds time and risk to the project, increasing the need for “buffer credits” and increasing the overall cost of Green Star certification. One reason suggested for inconsistent assessments was the amount of time allocated to Assessors. There was a perception that Assessors need more time to understand projects.

Thanks to your feedback, we are addressing this inconsistency. We are scoping ISO 9001 certification for Green Star, which will improve our quality of service. Improved quality management in the certification process will lead to improved certainty during assessment and reduced risk.

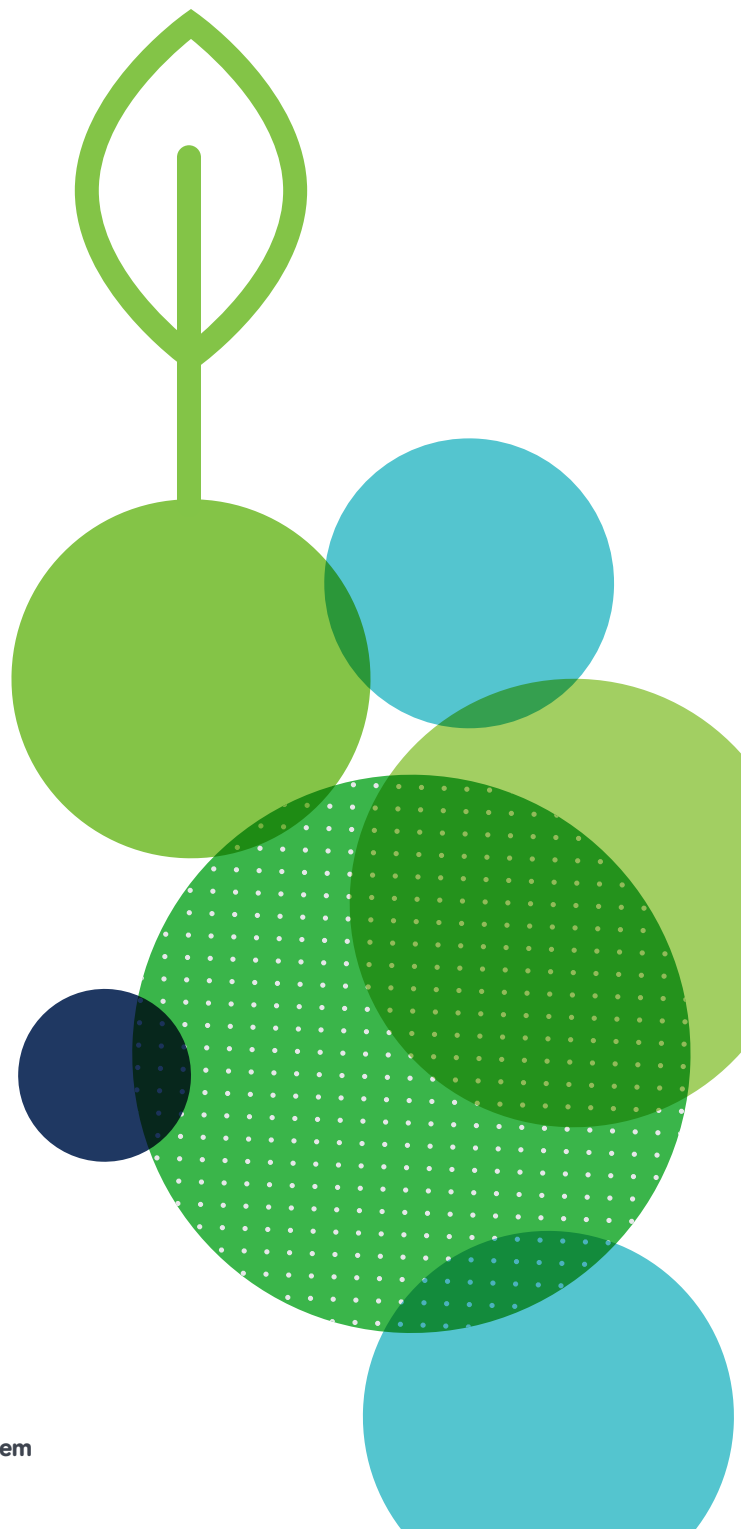
We are also expanding our submission templates and examples to cover all credits. This should help to standardise the presentation of information, which will in turn save time and lead to greater consistency between assessments. This should be completed by November 2013.

Another suggested source of inconsistency was the varying expertise of Green Star Certified Assessors. A suggested solution was to have specialised Assessors for different credits, such as energy or water. We will look at this as part of our investigation of alternate assessment models.

Access to the Assessors

Project teams have continued to express a desire to meet with the assessment panel to provide context to their submission and field any general questions about the project and documentation prior to the assessment.

This will be considered as part of the exploration of alternate assessment models during 2014.





Keeping track of TCs and CIRs

You have told us TCs and CIRs are a concern, due to the time taken to use them, the cost (in consultants' time as well as GBCA fees) and their complexity.

Thirteen per cent of our active project contacts were dissatisfied with the fairness of their TCs and CIRs. Currently, 86% of TCs and CIRs are approved. You've said you would like TCs and CIRs to be transparent (so it is clear why decisions were made), provided in less time and referred quickly to technical specialists where relevant.

We are currently exploring alternative methods of providing technical support, including giving access to Green Star staff members, having regular meetings with project teams who have multi-building projects, and creating project specific guides that address significant issues raised by project teams.

You were divided over the best approach for the publishing of TCs and CIRs. Project contacts with less Green Star experience tended to prefer a re-writing of the credits, while those with more experience preferred the current system, seeing the re-writing of credits as creating "a constantly moving feast". Overall, the most support was for the current system, although you would like to see TCs and CIRs published regularly (such as every 2-3 months) or as they are ruled.

Some would also like to see an increase in the number of TCs deemed applicable to multiple projects, as there is a perception that the GBCA is unnecessarily limiting some general CIRs to specific projects. An additional suggestion for improving TCs and CIRs was to have a master sheet showing all the TCs and CIRs, with a tick box for the rating tools to which they apply, rather than having them stored by rating tool.

To simplify the TCs and CIRs we are publishing new versions of the technical manuals that incorporate the many rulings and credit revisions that have been issued. We will work with GSAPs to achieve this. These should be available before the end of 2013. We are also working to align credits across the rating tools.



Saving time

You said timeliness is a key concern, with Green Star queries and the submission process sometimes failing to keep pace with your projects' design and construction programs.

You expressed frustration at delays, which adds to the expense of projects. You also said that when the GBCA provides a window within which assessment results will be delivered it seems as though it always takes the maximum amount of time and in some cases the deadline is missed.

As outlined above, we are scoping ISO 9001 certification during 2014 in order to improve our quality of service. We are also developing a simple and secure online submission system, which will reduce the time taken for assessments.

Green Star Accredited Professional (GSAP) qualifications and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program

You were pleased with what you see as a “tightening” of the Green Star Accredited Professional (GSAP) qualification, as this is helping to differentiate “true” accredited professionals from “those along for the ride”.

Some project contacts lamented the expense and difficulty in maintaining CPD points. The high cost of courses and the desire for free courses was raised several times. Alternate options for earning points were suggested, including collaborating to provide feedback on how the rating tools could be improved and participating in Green Star related working groups.

Several of you suggested that if the GSAP qualification was made more rigorous, GSAPs could then be used to sign off on Green Star documentation. There was also a suggestion that GSAPs could undertake Green Star assessments for Design ratings, with a full external assessment required for the As Built rating. Building on this idea, one stakeholder suggested that in the long term, GSAP should be made a profession. Professional GSAPs could then be assessors, with this being their main role. Another suggestion was to adopt the BREEAM model of self assessment, where a GSAP's first four Green Star submissions are completely audited, followed by audits of between five and ten percent of subsequent submissions. These options will be explored during the investigation of alternate assessment models in 2014.

Additional research

You suggested some areas of additional research for the GBCA to focus on in the year ahead.

These included:

- Gaining feedback from a wide range of people, including the “people on the ground making it happen”, such as service contractors.
- Publishing a report listing the credits achieved by 4 Star, 5 Star and 6 Star Green Star certified buildings. This would save project teams time at the initial stages, as project teams could easily see the ‘typical’ credits others have achieved in similar buildings.
- Publishing a report on successful ‘Innovation’ claims.

During 2013 we plan to speak to a range of people as part of our research program, including those “on the ground”. We are also expanding our reach to include those who are not currently using Green Star. Research is underway to identify the credits achieved by 4 Star, 5 Star and 6 Star Green Star certified buildings, with the results to be published on our website during the second half of the year. We are also exploring how to best address the issue of innovation. This includes giving project teams guidance on what is innovative (and what is not) and using industry expertise to provide direction as to where the industry should direct its innovation efforts.

Expanding our reach with new business

You asked the GBCA to consider developing a set of rating tools for homes. Another suggestion was for the GBCA to provide guidance on converting businesses and homes to renewable energy.

While we continue to welcome your suggestions, on the direction of our Board, for now we are focused on improving our current offering and developing our target markets for Green Star, with the existing building sector a particular focus.





General comments

You said that we have been “much more engaged over the last couple of years”. Your response to the Green Star Review research was generally strong. The GBCA would like to thank those who took the time to contribute to the Green Star Review. We look forward to sharing our progress with you.





We're here to help.

If you'd like to get more involved with the Green Building Council of Australia, need some advice on Green Star or have an idea you'd like to share, please contact us!

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