

24 October 2011

Community Energy Efficiency Program
Low Carbon Communities Team
Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
GPO Box 854
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir / Madam,

RE: SUBMISSION ON THE COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the proposed Community Energy Efficiency Program, a part of the Low Carbon Communities initiative. The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) supports, in principle, initiatives that encourage greater energy efficiency in the built environment.

About the Green Building Council of Australia

The GBCA is Australia's leading authority on green buildings and communities, established in 2002 to develop a sustainable property industry in Australia and drive the adoption of green building practices. The GBCA promotes green building and community programs, technologies, design practices and processes, and operates Australia's only national voluntary comprehensive environmental rating system for buildings - Green Star.

The GBCA has more than 900 member organisations, including government departments, which work together to support the Council and its activities. The GBCA is also a founding member of the World Green Building Council, which was established to provide a federated 'union' of national green building councils with a common goal to support the sustainable transformation of the global property industry; there are now 89 such councils worldwide.

Reducing carbon emissions through greener buildings

The GBCA agrees that improving the efficiency of our energy use is one of the fastest and most cost effective ways to reduce emissions. While commercial and residential buildings combined are responsible for around a quarter of Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions, the building sector also has the greatest potential to deliver emissions cuts, at the least cost, using technology available now.

The Community Energy Efficiency Program will offer significant opportunities to local councils and community organisations to increase the energy efficiency of council and community-use buildings and facilities. Increasing energy efficiency in such buildings will reduce carbon emissions as well as reducing energy costs and the GBCA has been watching many projects across the world, such as Project Neutral in Toronto, as they aim to achieve similar outcomes (see www.projectneutral.org).

While energy efficiency should remain a key focus, it is important that an holistic approach is taken to projects to improve the overall performance of community buildings and facilities. It is understood that funding through the Community Energy Efficiency Program will only apply to energy efficiency-related upgrades and retrofits. However, the GBCA recommends that the Low Carbon Communities Team consider that this program will offer a significant opportunity to local councils and community groups for upgrading their buildings or facilities and projects that look beyond just energy efficiency measures should be encouraged. Greener buildings do not just use less energy, they use less water, they are healthier places for people to live, work and play, and they have a smaller impact on the environment overall.

The Green Star rating tools

Green Star is a voluntary tool that encourages, recognises and rewards best practice and innovation. The first Green Star rating tool was released in 2003 in response to market demand for a rating tool that would evaluate the environmental design and construction of buildings as well as establishing a common language for green buildings.

There are currently nine Green Star rating tools which address a range of building types and more than 350 buildings have achieved Green Star ratings, with a further 540 projects registered. The Green Star rating system is designed to take an holistic approach within each class and building sector, addressing nine categories in total: Management, Indoor Environment Quality (IEQ), Energy, Transport, Water, Materials, Land Use and Ecology, Emissions and Innovation.

The GBCA has several rating tools that could potentially be applied to projects that will be eligible for the Community Energy Efficiency Program.

Green Star – Public Building

The GBCA launched the Green Star - Public Building PILOT tool in October 2010 to support the sustainable planning, design and construction of high-performance public buildings. The rating tool is designed to assess the environmental attributes of everything from libraries, law courts, museums and art galleries, through to places of worship.

The GBCA is working closely with a limited number of public building projects to further test the pilot version of the rating tool and it is expected the first version of the rating tool will be launched in 2012. We have enclosed a PDF copy of the Green Star – Public Building PILOT factsheet with this submission.

Green Star – Education

The GBCA believes that every child – whether in the city or the country – deserves to attend a school with an environment that encourages learning. Solid international research confirms that green education facilities can enhance student learning, create a better workplace for teachers and boost an education facilities' competitiveness.

The Green Star – Education v1 rating tool provides guidelines and credits for including vital elements in the development of an education facility such as access to fresh air and natural light, and use of low VOC materials. The rating tool, which may be useful in the development of facilities such as playgroup centres, is available on our website to download for free and provides an outline for the best practice benchmarks for projects across Australia. A copy of the GBCA discussion paper which includes case studies, Green Schools, is enclosed, along with a copy of the Green Star – Education v1 factsheet.

Green Star – Healthcare

Significant research has been done regarding the impact of well-designed healthcare facilities on patient healing, recovery and pain management, not to mention the benefits to staff health, staff retention and lower operational costs.

The Green Star – Healthcare v1 rating tool provides guidelines and credits for including these vital elements in the development of a healthcare facility. The rating tool, which may be useful in the development of community healthcare facilities, is available on our website to download for free and provides an outline of the best practice benchmarks for projects across Australia. A copy of the Green Star – Healthcare v1 factsheet is enclosed.

Green Star Communities

In 2009, the GBCA commenced work, in consultation with government and industry, on the development of a rating tool for sustainable development projects on a community scale. The first step in developing the Green Star Communities rating tool was to develop a national framework consisting of five best practice principles. Enclosed is a copy of the Green Star Communities Framework. We are now working on Stage 2 of the project which involves establishing best practice benchmarks for assessing and certifying sustainable communities.

We are continuing to build support and commitment for the project across all levels of government and industry. In 2010, we announced a national sponsorship agreement with every state and territory Government Land Organisation, which we believe will secure the tool's position as a national benchmark for government and industry projects. In addition, we have received sponsorship funding from local, state and federal governments, including the Australian Government's Department of Infrastructure and Transport – Major Cities Unit.

The Green Star – Communities framework and rating tool can help local councils to plan and create more sustainable communities. Making buildings greener, especially community facilities, is a significant part of creating a sustainable community and an important way for local councils to show leadership.

Green Star – Performance

A significant step in the evolution of Green Star is the development of the Green Star – Performance tool. This tool is due to be released in 2012 and will be designed to assess the operational performance of existing buildings, complementing other rating tools already in operation. Green Star – Performance will address the gap between 'Design' and 'As Built' certifications, by assessing the operational impacts in the built environment that follow the design and construction of buildings. We have enclosed a PDF copy of the Green Star – Performance factsheet with this submission.

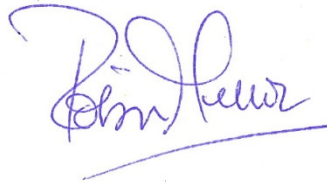
In this light, the Community Energy Efficiency Program will be of particular interest, since Green Star – Performance will be used to assess many different types of buildings, including many of the buildings outlined in the public consultation paper.

The GBCA looks forward to working with the Australian Government to ensure Australia's transition to a low-carbon future through greener, healthier more sustainable buildings and communities. We encourage you to look upon the GBCA as the primary green building resource, and to visit our website at www.gbca.org.au. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is any further information we can provide, or if we can help with case studies of Green Star-certified public building, education, healthcare or commercial projects.

Yours sincerely,



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Enclosed:

Green Star – Public Buildings PILOT rating tool factsheet
GBCA's 'Green Schools' report
Green Star – Education v1 rating tool factsheet
Green Star – Healthcare v1 rating tool factsheet
Green Star – Communities Framework document
Green Star – Performance rating tool factsheet