

A BETTER NATIONAL AUSTRALIAN BUILT ENVIRONMENT RATING SYSTEM

Policy Position Paper

September 2013



Introduction

The Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) strongly supports the National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS). This support dates back to the involvement of individual ASBEC members in developing and launching the initial NABERS program.

It is because of this support that ASBEC is committed to the continual improvement of NABERS and its underlying tools.

This Position Paper is the consolidation of our members’ ideas for a better NABERS. They range from technical recommendations for tool improvement, to more fundamental questions about how NABERS is governed and the role of industry representatives.

ASBEC believes a rigorous and nationally consistent rating tool is pivotal to fostering a more sustainable built environment.

ASBEC will continue to partner with Government to recommend practical and technical improvements to NABERS, and provide a conduit for key stakeholders.



Recommendations

Governance and oversight

NABERS should be overseen by a modern governance structure. This would include:

- A governing committee with an independent chair, diverse stakeholder representation and access to technical experts;
- stating a clear philosophy on the purpose of NABERS, and specifically, the purpose of NABERS Energy and each of the other NABERS rating tools;
- consultation with stakeholders on a strategic plan which is adopted by the governing committee, and includes:
 - clear outcomes and objectives;
 - measurable targets; and,
 - specified timeframes;
- an adequate budget which provides reliable funding for the strategic plan.

Engagement with industry

Despite the importance of industry adoption, the engagement process to date has fallen short of best practice. NABERS administrators should agree to:

- set and comply with a fixed engagement timetable (rather than ad-hoc forums);
- act on issues which arise during consultation, or explain in detail why recommendations are not adopted;
- provide adequate resourcing for an ongoing and structured engagement program.

Tool development

A NABERS work plan should be developed immediately and regularly reviewed to help industry understand the lead times on proposals.

The initial work plan should address the following priorities:

- updating the NABERS Office Energy and NABERS Retail Energy tools;
- audit all other tools to determine their policy purpose, effectiveness and relevance to the market and develop a program for implementing audit recommendations; and,
- adequately resource and prioritise a methodology for dealing with embedded generation systems.

Technical improvements

NABERS continues to be a black box to industry and end users. Additionally, feedback from industry is not being considered and implemented in a transparent manner.

A new culture of transparency is required, starting with:

- immediate disclosure of all technical algorithms by 1 October 2013, followed by a peer review process; and,
- technical amendments to NABERS tools should be progressed according to a clear and public project plan:
 - finalised within defined timeframes;
 - subject to independent cost benefit analysis; and,
 - transparent – with feedback from Technical Working Groups.

Training and accreditation

The NABERS training program has failed to educate large segments of the market about the NABERS program, or offer pathways for specialisation.

A new model for training should be established to improve industry knowledge of the assessment process.

NABERS should aim to facilitate the training of all participants in the NABERS process, not just assessors, by:

- mobilising industry and professional associations to gain access to a broad cross section of stakeholders;
- developing materials tailored to users with varying expertise; and,
- developing accreditation pathways which allow assessors to specialise in particular fields.

Metrics and data

NABERS Energy is critical for building owners and tenants. Building owners and tenants often have significant difficulties in securing energy use data from utilities in a timely, accurate and standard format.

NABERS administrators should partner with industry to tackle this problem by working with relevant agencies to encourage energy retailers to provide timely and accurate billing data.

Customer service

The NABERS team should commit to developing a more positive customer service ethic.

NABERS should:

- establish a range of clear customer service benchmarks in consultation with stakeholders; and,
- publicly report on performance against such benchmarks.

About ASBEC

ASBEC is the peak body of key organisations committed to a sustainable built environment in Australia.

ASBEC's membership consists of industry and professional associations, non-government organisations and government observers who are involved in the planning, design, delivery and operation of our built environment, and are concerned with the social and environmental impacts of this sector.

ASBEC provides a forum for diverse groups involved in the built environment to gather, find common ground and intelligently discuss contentious issues as well as advocate their own sustainability products, policies and initiatives.

ASBEC is a non-profit volunteer organisation. Members commit their time, resources and energy to developing practical opportunities for a more sustainable built environment.