

## **Earth Building Association of Australia Conference Eltham Victoria September 2010**

### ***More Politics than Science: The Dirt on Star Ratings***

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Improving energy efficiency in Australian homes aimed in particular at reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been a concern of successive Australian governments over the last 20 years or so.

Providing this “energy-efficiency” has developed into a multi-billion dollar component of the building & construction industry and this price will most likely soar with the 2010 update of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) that increases the energy efficiency stringency to a so called 6 Star energy rating or equivalent for new residential buildings, and a significant increase in the energy efficiency requirements for all new commercial buildings.

Compliance to the amended Code may be demonstrated by two deemed-to-satisfy options, first, software evaluation using NatHERS, or an elemental approach, for example, achieving a specified thermal resistance value for the roof/ceiling, walls and floors, together with satisfying provisions related to windows.

My presentation will begin with a brief historical review of how we got to this position. I will then turn to the subject of evidence-based policy and ask the question “What evidence exists to show that the objective of the Building code provisions is being achieved?” The answer lamentably will be very little.

While sections of the building industry, together with the wider material and component manufactures may live or die depending on the BCA requirements a dearth of research into all aspects of the environmental performance of buildings has meant policies based more on opinions and politics rather than hard science. This malaise however is not limited to Australia. A very recent special issue of the influential journal Building Research & Information examines performance evaluation of houses and highlights “... the need to account for peoples’ lifestyle choices rather than generically take this for granted when evaluating performance...” and concludes that this imperative has “... serious implications for policy-makers and practitioners alike.” The presentation will conclude with some remarks on how such an approach may impact the Earth Building industry.

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