

Media enquiry: Sustainable buildings and the building code

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“The creation of innovative and sustainable buildings relies on the technical design expertise of the engineering profession. The Building Code of Australia (BCA) is the key regulatory document guiding the design of buildings in Australia. With a focus on safety and sustainability, the BCA sets the minimum standards which must be adhered to, but also provides for designers to create innovative solutions that meet or exceed the Code. This is achieved by adopting a flexible performance standard. By allowing designers to achieve the performance standard needed, rather than stipulating what the solution must be, the Code allows innovation.

“While the Code in itself is not stopping anyone creating better buildings, it can inadvertently encourage people to accept the minimum standard, rather than what might be optimal. We would hope people adopt a greater standard for their own benefit, but this is not always the case. At the end of the day, innovation must be desired by the building owner and the benefits understood.

“An innovative design may cost more to build, but it can reduce total cost over the life of the property. As an example, there are many things a designer can do to decrease the amount of energy a building will use in heating and cooling. Long term, these reductions will more than offset the initial capital cost increase. It’s a win for the owner and a win for the environment. In the future, we would like to see the Code take greater consideration of whole of life costs like these so owners and occupiers can benefit from overall reductions in costs.

“Governments have a leading role to play in getting sustainable designs built. Innovative designs by their nature do not fit the mould. This means they can be hard to judge by the people who provide the regulatory ‘tick of approval’. With the overall loss of engineering expertise from governments across Australia – something Engineers Australia has publicly voiced concerns about - getting sign-off for buildings which push design boundaries will be increasingly difficult.

“Furthermore, governments can provide policy settings which increase awareness of the value of energy efficient buildings, and encourage adoption. This could include ‘green door’ development processes where developers can get fast-tracked approvals for adopting sustainable designs, facilitating performance based standards as much as possible to foster innovation and new approaches, and creating tax incentives for energy efficient buildings.

“Engineers Australia has over 100,000 members and is the peak body for the engineering profession in Australia. Engineers Australia is a member of the Australian Sustainability Built Environment Council. Roughly 60,000 engineering professionals are directly involved in the building and construction industry. Specifically, non-residential building construction is the 16th largest employer of engineers.”