

If there is any issue that requires strong leadership it's green buildings. Everybody supports sustainability in theory, but making green buildings a reality is an altogether different matter. The varying interests of owners, tenants, developers, government departments and a range of interest groups all exert their influence, and sometimes the original vision gets diluted along the way. Adam Carey reports on a new initiative to provide this leadership.

NEW COUNCIL TO SHOW THE WAY TO **GREENER BUILDINGS**

It is for the reasons mentioned above that the recently formed Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) has been so eagerly welcomed into the mix. It stands to provide some sorely needed clarity in the dialogue on sustainability and a forum for all interested parties to come together.

ASBEC's brief is to promote a single, unified agenda on a greener built environment.

**It is an ambitious endeavour,
and also a timely one.**

There are several ratings tools for green buildings either on the market now or in development. ASBEC chairman John McCarthy says one of the council's most important jobs will be to articulate the role of these different ratings tools back into an at times confused market place.

McCarthy is careful to point out that ASBEC does not seek to replace or undermine any existing rating tools or the bodies already working towards achieving sustainability. Rather, it will seek to incorporate the views of these organisations as much as possible. He hopes ASBEC will soon become "the peak consultative body on sustainability for the built environment in Australia".

Accommodating so many perspectives on green buildings has meant that the program established for ASBEC has had to be quite broad.

"It is really a gesture to try and get all these diverse interests under a single agenda", McCarthy says.

The group's formation could be interpreted as an effort to end an impasse on the issue, and indications are that the gesture has been a very welcome one.

"To date, there has only been goodwill. I think everyone thinks it was a good idea," McCarthy says.

ASBEC was formed when the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction and Innovation, a seven-year research program into construction innovation for which McCarthy is also chairman, was approached by the CSIRO and asked to contribute to a project on sustainability.

According to McCarthy, the research centre thus became "a vehicle for getting everyone with an interest in the topic into one room, and by some miracle to try and get a single agenda".

The goal was to persuade industry and stakeholders in the built environment to adopt environmentally sustainable practices in relation to nine categories: land development, building finance,



John McCarthy

building designs, building materials, construction, fit-out and retro fitting, building management and its operation, tenancy management and demolition.

The inaugural meeting of the ASBEC steering committee was held in October 2003. There have been four subsequent meetings.



Already the council's lifespan has extended well beyond McCarthy's initially pessimistic expectations.

"My anticipation was that we'd meet a couple of times and everyone would shrug their shoulders and say, 'This is too hard'", he admits.

The collective will exists to create a "single unified agenda" on sustainability.

He is happy to report that this hasn't happened. The rollcall of organisations that have placed their support behind ASBEC proves just how many people would like to see this new council prosper.

To date the Australian Building Energy Council, the Property Council of Australia, Australian Consulting Engineers Association, the Royal Institute of Architects, the Green Building Council, the Timber Development Association, the CSIRO, and the Australian Conservation Foundation have lent their support to ASBEC, to name just a few.

"This is the first time anyone's talked to each other", McCarthy says. "If you look

at who is saying they'll at least consider it, every major player in Australia has at least acknowledged the worth of trying to get an ASBEC off the ground", McCarthy says.

He admits that the issue has not always inspired consensus about the best way forward in the past, but if the debate is to evolve and the search for genuine progress is to be made then a forum such as ASBEC is necessary, because "no one has got a single solution for everything".

As it currently stands, anyone can attend ASBEC's twice-yearly meetings, and for a nominal fee of five hundred dollars, partake in the council's decision-making process.

So the collective will exists to create a "single unified agenda" on sustainability. The much greater task of actually implementing this agenda, and so effecting real change in the built environment, must come next.

McCarthy sees a window of opportunity for ASBEC to make real change, but it is one that will close soon enough if progress towards a single vision on sustainability is not forthcoming.

"I think that it has to happen within the next six to twelve months," he says. "Otherwise it will falter. People will give it support if they think that there are real outcomes. If they think it's a talk-fest then it won't get the level of support that is needed to make a difference."

McCarthy hopes that ASBEC will set an example that will inspire government to "see the worth of having a strong single agenda on sustainability". An important step in this process will be identifying green projects deserving of funding.

"The profile for this thing, if it starts to get some legs, will be huge,"

ASBEC has been given widespread approval thus far by stakeholders in the built environment. Getting everybody under the one roof to discuss the issue has been a great start. It is likely that plenty of goodwill and a willingness to compromise will be needed to juggle the interests of all those involved, but for now the feeling about the council is overwhelmingly positive. If all of this enthusiasm can be channelled into real change then the birth of ASBEC will have been a watershed day for green buildings. ■

AIRAH JOINS PEAK ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

A unified approach is key to AIRAH's goal of improving sustainability in our industry and the formation of the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC) is welcomed as part of this.

AIRAH convened a working group in November 2002 to look at the major issues holding back the adoption of energy efficient HVAC designs in the Australian building industry. The working group comprised representatives from all facets of the HVAC industry, including installers, designers and academics.

A major survey of members was undertaken by the working group and the biggest barriers to the adoption of energy efficient design and operation in commercial building projects were identified as:

- Developers and financial backers looking for the lowest capital cost design solutions to maximise their returns.
- Designers of buildings and their services being left out of the early decision making stages.
- The lack of time allotted by developers to examine energy efficient options.
- Poor maintenance standards of existing equipment.
- Poor commissioning of well designed systems.
- A general lack of formal industry training and education

"Working in concert with the other industry associations involved in the sustainability environment is eminently sensible and can only help improve performance" says AIRAH's chief executive, Jennifer Pelvin.

"As an industry association, we have a commitment to raise awareness and improve standards as evidenced by the numerous programs available through AIRAH," continues Ms Pelvin. "This year we have continued our involvement with the Australian Building Codes Board on the development of new energy efficiency provisions for the Building Code (outlined on page 30)."

"Our training programs on energy maintenance, design and audit are being delivered throughout Australia and our environmentally sustainable design conference (being held in Sydney on September 2 - see page 36 for more information) will tackle issues of innovation, design and application of sustainable solutions in commercial buildings."

"Being involved with an organisation such as ASBEC that brings together a multitude of associations will provide a vehicle to advance a strong single agenda on sustainability."