

Green debate more than just hot air

Agenda

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Stung by recent criticism that the federal government is dragging the chain on green development reforms, Environment Minister Ian Campbell wants to put some good news on the table about the government's role in reducing greenhouse gases.

The criticism came from prominent US-based green development campaigner David Gottfried, founder of the Green Building Council worldwide.

Gottfried said in these pages last month that despite brilliant advances by the property industry itself, the government was simply not at the table in terms of fostering the multiplying business opportunities in sustainability.

He's not alone. The green lobby group is also unhappy with much of the government's attitude. It says the government is wrong not to sign the Kyoto Protocol, that it is in thrall to the powerful coal lobby, preferring to spend millions of dollars to make coal energy cleaner instead of developing alternative energy, and that it flatly refuses to use tax

incentives that have proved highly successful overseas.

None of this deters Campbell, who is clearly personally committed to his portfolio. In a recent interview with *The Australian Financial Review* at the Lend Lease headquarters, The Bond, where he was about to get his first tour of a five-star-rated office building, the minister made it clear his government was committed to carrots rather than sticks.

Incentives such as educational tools, guide books and manuals such as the green leases guide for government tenants will help people

to make their own rational decisions, he says.

Campbell quickly listed the solar cities program, a photovoltaic rebate program, the Greenhouse Challenge Plus for the building industry, *Your Home Guide* for sustainable housing and *Your Building Technical Guide* for commercial buildings, a \$750,000 project with the CRC for construction innovation and the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council.

Certainly there is also room for some mandatory measures, he says. These include disclosure of water

use in household equipment and that big energy users assess options to lift their game. "Our experience shows that companies that do such analysis identify and seize opportunities," Campbell says.

Another measure is a proposal for commercial building owners to disclose energy performance in all buildings before sale or lease. This one, says Campbell, "has been supported by all jurisdictions through the Ministerial Council on Energy". It is opposed by the Property Council of Australia. Watch out for who wins. As for the bigger battle, let's hope we all win.