Response to the SMH re BASIX

Response given to the Sydney Morning Herald on 2 September 2011 in response to questions about the BASIX building sustainability index in New South Wales and its online tool allowing homeowners to complete their own BASIX certificate.

Department of Planning and Infrastructure response:

Thermal performance/energy efficiency

COAG agreed in 2009 that the energy efficiency of new residential buildings should be set at six stars or equivalent and BASIX provides all-of-house sustainability results equivalent to the six-star standard.

In fact, BASIX goes further than the systems in other States by examining not only the thermal performance of the shell of a new building (which the six-star standard is based on), but also of other key energy efficiency components such as the hot water system and lighting.

BASIX is a comprehensive and proven sustainability tool which has improved the construction of some 150,000 homes.

By requiring newly-built homes to achieve water and energy savings of up to 40 per cent compared to homes built before 2004, BASIX has saved NSW households more than 24,000 million litres of water and avoided around 700,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. It also saves NSW families up to $600 per year on household energy and water bills.

DIY tool

There is a DIY tool within BASIX which applicants may use for the thermal performance component of BASIX. This DIY tool is currently being upgraded to bring it into line with the software used to calculate star ratings and this work is expected to be completed around the end of this year.

The DIY tool provides an affordable online choice for homeowners to satisfy the energy efficiency requirements for a typical suburban home. While professional assessors are chosen by the majority of BASIX users, the DIY tool can assist with the affordability of new housing by offering homeowners the alternative of producing the BASIX certificate themselves.

To make sure the commitments are really met, compliance with any BASIX certificate still needs to be signed off by an accredited building certifier as part of the certification process for a new development.

Approximately 20 per cent of BASIX certificates in New South Wales are produced using the DIY tool and the software itself is designed to ensure the user properly addresses each step.

The BASIX system in New South Wales also boasts a rigorous and ongoing monitoring and reporting process, the outcomes of which are available on the BASIX website.
BASIX is being continually reviewed and updated in line with the outcomes of this monitoring and community feedback.

The accuracy of DIY reports

Investigations by the Department in the first few years after BASIX was introduced showed that there was no discernable difference in the quality of the information being input by homeowners using the DIY tool compared to certificates being produced by accredited sustainability assessors.

The Department has continued to meet regularly with the Association of Building Sustainability Assessors to discuss how BASIX can continue to improve and develop in line with community and industry expectations.

The Department would welcome any clear information the association has regarding the performance or effectiveness of the DIY tool and has, in fact, regularly offered the association the opportunity to provide such information.