

Environment Centre NT and COOLmob Submission: Building energy efficiency in new commercial buildings in the Northern Territory

The Environment Centre NT (ECNT) is the peak community sector environment organisation in the Northern Territory, Australia raising awareness amongst community, government, business and industry about environmental issues.

COOLmob began in 2002 as part of the national Cool Communities project, which was a partnership between community groups, environmental organisations and the Australian Government. COOLmob is the sustainable living initiative of the Environment Centre NT (ECNT) with a mission “to help and inspire our community to live sustainable and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.”

Australia and the Northern Territory need to rapidly decarbonise to ensure we meet the 2015 Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to less than 2°C. The construction, operation and maintenance of buildings accounts for almost a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia. 51% of Australia’s buildings in 2050 will be built after 2019, therefore an obvious method to control the quality of performance of yet to be constructed buildings lies within our National Construction Code (NCC), raising the minimum standards for energy efficiency within the NCC is a major focus of the strategy. The NCC is a familiar regulatory system in the building construction industry, code upgrades can be applied incrementally over time to all commercial & residential building types and will capture the efficiency of both the building envelope and fixed equipment that consumes energy within the building.

The gap between the NT and the rest of Australia has grown wider in 2019 for commercial buildings and energy efficiency. Historically, the NT has never adopted any minimum standards for energy efficiency for Class 3-9 buildings which seems unbelievable in a tropical climatic environment where most commercial buildings are air-conditioned for 100 percent of their occupancy hours. Hence, the adoption of minimum energy efficiency provisions presents enhanced possibilities to reduce the energy consumption in the NT’s built environment over and above other jurisdictions where these building types are less reliant on air-conditioning for human comfort¹.

Section J of the NCC was updated in 2019, increasing the energy efficiency standards of commercial buildings for the rest of Australia. The Achieving Low Energy Commercial Buildings in Australia Report (Energy Action, 2018) assesses the extent to which it would be feasible for the non-residential building sector as a whole, and for individual building forms, to achieve net zero energy and/or greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This report found that the combination of higher, cost-effective energy performance requirements in the Code, including solar within new building solutions and lifting non-Code energy efficiency policies and targets would put the non-residential building sector onto a trajectory to achieve zero net energy consumption, and zero net emissions, by 2050. At the same time, this result would not be achieved if any one of these three elements were removed. If the Northern Territory do not adopt Section J, we will not be about to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and will continue to fall behind the rest of Australia.

¹ NT Property Council Sustainability Committee, 2019

Both the Environment Centre NT and COOLmob strongly recommend that the NT Government adopt Section J of the National Construction Code, which will provide basic minimum energy efficiency regulations for new commercial, Class 3-9 buildings in the NT.

This will ensure the NT can:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduce energy demand from future new buildings
- Increase on site renewable energy generation
- Future proof buildings for a future climate of increased temperatures and increased humidity
- Reduce cost of power and water for owners and occupiers of buildings