

18 January 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: SENATE INQUIRY INTO RECENT TRENDS AND PREPAREDNESS FOR
EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Australian Government's approach to managing the increasing incidence and impact of extreme weather events. The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) believes that is critical for a coordinated and considered strategy to be developed through collaboration between government and industry if the built environment is to become more resilient to the challenges of climate change and extreme weather events.

Buildings that are designed and built to reduce their environmental impact and to be more resilient will be less severely impacted by extreme climate events such as drought, heavy rainfall, severe storms and extreme temperatures etc. Building better, more resilient buildings and communities will minimise the impacts of climate change on Australia's productivity and stability and deliver long-term economic, environmental and social sustainability.

About the GBCA

Established in 2002, the GBCA is dedicated to developing a sustainable property industry in Australia through the adoption of green building practices and sustainable community principles. The GBCA promotes green building programs, technologies, design practices and processes, and operates Australia's only national voluntary comprehensive environmental rating system for buildings - Green Star.

Since its establishment, the GBCA has been at the forefront of climate change mitigation through the Green Star rating system which sets benchmarks for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in buildings. Over the past several years, the GBCA has recognised that looking beyond mitigation and increasing the focus on resilience is vital if Australia is to remain a productive and safe place in which to live and work and invest.

Green Star

Green Star is a national, voluntary rating system that encourages, recognises and rewards best practice and innovation in the property industry. There are currently nine Green Star rating tools which address a range of building types and 540 projects have now achieved Green Star certification across Australia, with a further 480 projects registered.

The Green Star rating system is designed to take an holistic approach within each class and building sector, addressing nine categories in total; Management, Indoor Environment Quality (IEQ), Energy, Water, Materials, Land Use and Ecology, Emissions, Innovation and Transport; and defining 'best practice' in each.

Green Star - Communities

In 2009, the GBCA began to look beyond buildings to ways to precincts and communities. Green Star – Communities is a rating tool for sustainable developments on a community scale. In developing the rating tool the GBCA conducted extensive consultation with all levels of government and industry stakeholders to establish a framework for helping Australian communities to be more productive, liveable and sustainable. The national framework, consists of five principles:

1. Enhance liveability
2. Create opportunities for economic prosperity
3. Foster environmental responsibility
4. Embrace design excellence
5. Demonstrate visionary leadership and strong governance.

In the second stage of the rating tool development 38 credits were developed to support the five principles, including a number of credits that provide guidance and set benchmarks for making communities more resilient to the effects of climate change.

The Green Star – Communities rating tool provides guidance and best practice benchmarks which will assist stakeholders when making decisions about how to make their communities more resilient. For example, the objective of the *Gov-6 Adaptation and Resilience* credit is 'to encourage and recognise projects that can adapt and are resilient to the impacts of a changing climate and natural disasters.' To meet the requirements of this credit, projects must develop a Climate Adaptation Plan and/or a Community Resilience Report in accordance with relevant industry standards and best practice guidelines developed based on research from a range of sources including CSIRO and state governments.

There are a number of other credits within the Green Star – Communities rating tool which also contribute towards developing more resilient communities including *Env-3 Heat Island Effect*, *Env-8 Stormwater*, *Liv-4 Access to Fresh Food* and, *Gov-3 Sustainability Awareness*. In addition credits such as *Econ-8 Peak Electricity Demand* encourage resilience through rewarding communities for producing their own energy and reducing reliance on existing infrastructure. A copy of the Green Star – Communities National Framework is enclosed for your information along with a guide to the credits. More information is available at www.greenstarcommunities.org.au.

The roles of government and industry

The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework, agreed by COAG in 2007, recognises that infrastructure and buildings are vulnerable to the effects of climate change and the impacts of extreme weather. The GBCA supports actions as identified in the framework and encourages COAG to consider updating the framework with clear pathways, benchmarking and metrics to ensure that Australia's built environment becomes more resilient.

The GBCA believes that industry and government will need to continue to work together to raise awareness of the need for climate change adaptation practices as well as increasing awareness of the benefits of creating a built environment that is more resilient to changes in temperatures and extreme weather events arising from climate change. As well as having a significant role to play in developing policies and incentives that encourage climate change adaptation, government also has a responsibility to lead by example.

The GBCA advocates for, supports and encourages all levels of government to commit to achieving environmental ratings for all buildings that they own, occupy or develop, as well as planned neighbourhoods and communities, and there are also significant opportunities for government to integrate sustainability measures with resilience and adaptation in their own buildings and across portfolios.

In 2012, the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC), of which the GBCA is a member, released the Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Framework which sets out 10 priorities for governments and industry to work together to ensure a more resilient built environment. Please find a copy of the framework enclosed. More information about the framework, including a supporting report, *Preparing for Climate Change: A Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Built Environment*, can be found at www.asbec.asn.au.

It is vital that a whole-of-government approach is taken to meet the challenge of climate change and the issues of adaptation and resilience which Australia must face at building and community scale. All levels of government must be working together and with industry to get the best outcomes. The GBCA welcomes the opportunity to work with government to develop policies, incentives and tools that will encourage green building and climate change adaptation. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information about resilient buildings and communities.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Mellon

Executive Director – Advocacy and Business Operations