



Timber, the sustainable option for housing

6 April 2011

The Master Builders Association of Victoria and the Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) have called for an overhaul of housing energy rating software to recognise the environmental benefits and energy saving attributes of timber.

Both organisations have requested a review of the Energy Rating System, which needs to more accurately assess the energy efficiency of timber in construction. VAFI has also announced a more active policy for plantation development is needed to increase the availability of timber products.

VAFI CEO Lisa Marty said significantly more locally grown and produced timber products would need to be used to build the two million new homes needed within the next decade.

“If the next generation of young Australians are to be able to afford to buy a home, Australian builders will need access to a sustainable supply of timber,” she said.

“Yet despite being the seventh most forested country in the world, we already have a \$2 billion trade deficit in wood and paper products.

“The Federal Government must develop a new national timber strategy to replace the current one — which is now 19 years old — and more must be done to develop a policy framework encouraging new plantation development.

Ms Marty pointed to the 10 storey cross-laminated timber (CLT) apartment building recently announced by Grocon as an example of how timber could be used to ease Australia’s housing shortage and achieve a positive environmental outcome.

The apartments will be built out of solid softwood CLT panels imported from Europe; the panels providing a significant store of CO₂ over the life of the building. They will be fitted together in a matter of weeks to make 50 dwellings; a major saving in construction time due to the lightweight nature of the material.

Master Builders Association of Victoria’s Executive Director Brian Welch said while his industry supported the use of locally grown timber, the Star Energy Rating system did not.

“There needs to be an overhaul of the software used to calculate the energy rating of new housing so that it more adequately evaluates timber’s contribution to CO₂ emission reduction,” he said.



“The current regulations only assess the energy used in part of the operational phase of the home, but do not include any measure of the embodied impact of the materials the home is constructed from.

“A more ‘whole-of-home, whole-of life’ focus should be the approach to future regulations.”

Mr Welch also pointed out that besides being environmentally beneficial, in many instances timber could also be a much more cost effective material for building.

“The cost of work increases dramatically when building on sloping terrain,” he said.

“In these circumstances pad footings with stumps are the cheapest and most efficient construction solution and a more environmentally friendly option than alternative approaches.

The environmental benefits of timber are outlined in Australia’s State of the Forests Report 2008, which found that an average sized timber house stored over 7.5 tonnes of carbon while a steel framed house emitted 2.9 tonnes.

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