

# Green star puts out more heat than light

## Property agenda

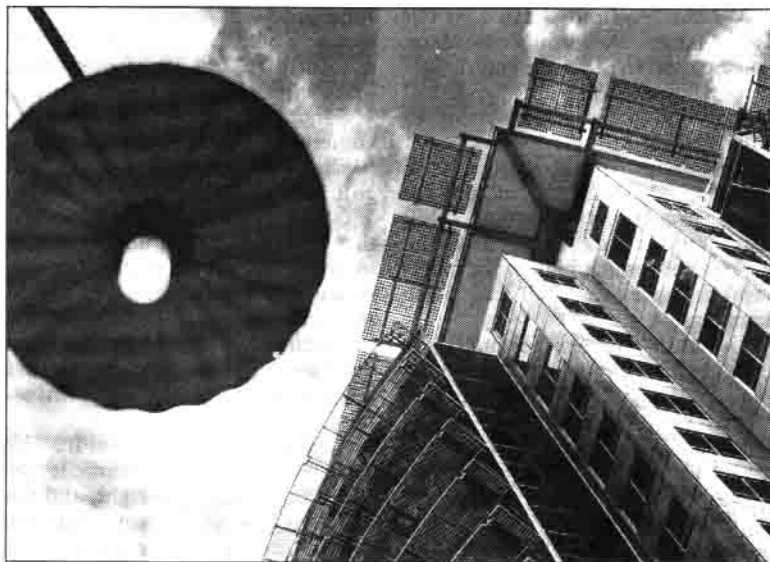
Tina Perinotto

**T**he launch of the green star rating tool should have been a cause for celebration. The initiative of the Green Building Council of Australia was certainly long awaited.

Here was a change to simplify the long list of rating tools and building codes erupting around the country. Many developers have been working steadily and sometimes spectacularly towards better environmentally sustainable development principles.

Instead the stoush over the launch of the tool had all the makings of a Greek tragedy. What should have been an opportunity for closer co-operation between the green groups and the people who can either create or minimise the problem degenerated under a cloud of suspicion and accusations.

The Total Environment Centre's Jeff Angel could not have been more blunt. The Green Building Council, funded and supported by property-industry stalwarts, used "taxpayer dollars to develop their own tool and has ignored the



This building wins points for its solar panels.

Photo: ROBERT ROUGH

community", he says. "The lack of negotiation with the community [social and environmental stakeholders] means the GBC does not have a social licence to operate."

What really riles Angel is the potential for trade-offs between energy, waste and water.

Peter Szental, director of the Business Council for Sustainable Energy, an energy efficiency consultant and member of other ESD-related groups, says the GBC asked for submissions and then ignored them.

He says the initial assessment was that the tool allowed trade-offs

between key ESD areas such as energy, water and waste.

"If you were being cynical," Szental says, "you could say it's a lot easier to get ratings by having policies in place and recycled materials and a good indoor air quality than energy."

But Maria Atkinson, who runs the GBC, says the tool — still in pilot phase and open to input — needed better understanding.

For example, it is not true that energy conservation could be ditched in favour of better waste management, she says.

The weighting system means that energy takes 30 per cent of the total, with the balance of categories more or less evenly distributed.

Just try the tool out yourself online, says Atkinson; in her view it is impossible to score the minimum four stars while ignoring energy.

And more energy points are embedded within several other categories — in transport, for example, and in the commissioning of a building, where opportunities for good energy savings are often squandered.

Atkinson also says it is wrong to call recycling steel and concrete old technology.

"To say to the industry that to have steel recycled is old hat shows how out of touch that is because it [recycling] is not common practice," Atkinson says.

A deeper suspicion is that the property industry is "greenwashing" that is, trying to cheat its way into the marketing kudos available for all things green.

Craig Heaton, a project management director for ING Real Estate, says the green star rating tool was a way to overcome this because it would set a benchmark.

And Peter Verwer of the Property Council of Australia says: "The industry finally has a tool that will help them price eco-efficiency and that tool is as good as exists anywhere in the world."

"It's unfortunate that green groups don't want to work constructively during the prototype consultation phase and wish to run a campaign based on paranoia and prejudice."

But Australian Conservation Foundation executive director Debra Henry rejects such thoughts.

He says the ACF is still examining the pilot, which should involve consultation with stakeholders that is "full and transparent and fair dinkum".