



Building for the future

The Building Act 2004 is required to ensure that 'buildings are designed, constructed and able to be used in ways that promote sustainable development'. This has yet to be implemented in the New Zealand Building Code.

The term 'sustainable development' traces back to the 1987 Brundtland Commission's report *Our common future*, which described it as being 'development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The last 22 years have been used to explore, ignore or embrace the concept of sustainable development. Perhaps the most important shift has been the wider recognition of the critical role humankind plays in the natural environment.

Many organisations now appear to be taking a greater interest in environmental and social issues, but we have also seen a large amount of 'greenwash' – where the publicity is not matched by the real behaviour. In the longer term, customers will see through these green-screens and ask serious questions about the purchase of goods, products and services from these businesses.

How is the building industry dealing with environmental and social issues? Whether at the stage of design, construction, use or demolition, our products are essential to society, are resource-hungry, involve large numbers of people and are around for a long time.

When we look at one product – housing – it seems that, since the 1970s, only one of the three following indicators is heading in a sustainable direction:

- Houses are getting bigger and take more resources to create (building consent data from 1976 to 2009 shows average floor area increased from 121 m² to 208 m²).
- Houses now have fewer people living in them (the average number of occupants has fallen from 3.6 in the 1971 Census to 2.7 in the 2006 Census).
- Houses now use less energy (energy use has fallen slightly from 44 GJ/dwelling/year in 1971 to 42 GJ/dwelling/year in 2006).

For many other important measurements of sustainable development, we just don't know. Are our buildings using less water, creating less waste or even lasting longer?

The easy response is that the construction industry is merely reacting to the demands of its customers. The reality is that customers often turn to us for the best way to achieve their desired result.

Over the past decades, we have developed great skills in offering the most economical (or cheapest) solution, which we then give to the client as being what they want. As clients' and society's attitudes change, can these skills be turned to offering the most sustainable answers? Or will the answer be seen in the next edition of the Building Code?

Nigel Isaacs, BRANZ Principal Scientist Energy & Environment

FROM THE EDITOR

Where has 2009 gone? Summer holidays are nearly upon us again, with the chance to reflect on the year past and



consider goals for the year ahead. 2009 will be remembered for the recession and troubled times all round.

This Build is heavily focused on the feature topic – Sustainability. There is also the annual Build Readers Survey which we would appreciate readers taking the time to complete. Build aims to provide the information industry needs, so let us know if you have a burning issue you would like covered. And remember, readers are always welcome to send in a short letter or to contact me with ideas for articles.

Finally, I wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and best wishes for 2010.

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