



COOLMOB SUBMISSION ON MANDATORY DISCLOSURE

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COOLMOB BACKGROUND

COOLmob is a community based sustainable living program that grew out of the national Cool Communities Program that commenced in 2002. COOLmob Top End, (there is also COOLmob Alice Springs), is a program of the NT Environment Centre. The COOLMob team of sustainable living experts and energy auditors work to promote and educate individuals and households to reduce their carbon footprint by reviewing their use of power, water, transport and recycling and to consider topics such as energy efficient tropical building design, food miles and unnecessary consumption. COOLmob continually evaluates its program, updating its knowledge of sustainable living products and behaviours, researching barriers to change and promoting energy savings appliances and actions. COOLmob serves the role of being a one-stop shop for trusted information on sustainable tropical living.

MANDATORY DISCLOSURE

COOLmob supports measures to raise people's awareness of the running costs of the utilities in a home and believes that it is important to educate people so that they think of these expenses over a number of years. However, COOLmob has serious reservations on imposing a system that rates energy and water efficiency of a building according to predetermined factors that do not take into account how people use the building and effects of the surrounding space.

The Top End of the Northern Territory experiences extreme weather during some months of the year. Some people find the months that have high humidity very uncomfortable, requiring modification of their micro climate, while considering the climate at other times of the year particularly comfortable and not needing any modification.

The way people choose to live in this wet/dry tropical climate varies considerably, with some homes designed to cope with no climate modification, while others are designed to have their internal climate modified for some part of the year. Thus, it is particularly difficult to rate these homes with any one system, as was experienced when the Government tried to produce results using its green loan home assessors program. Similarly, building energy efficiency rating tools do not necessarily reflect the living costs (power and water bills) of a particular north Australian home because it depends on how you choose to live in a tropical home and the micro climate around that home. Outdoor living areas are often the most used part of a tropical home. A home under a very shady garden may be an energy efficient and comfortable passively cooled house, regardless of the building's energy efficiency rating.

COOLmob recommends that the best way to drive energy and water efficiency is to make people aware of the real living costs of a home. Mandatory disclosure could mean the revealing of household power and water bills for the 3 year period prior to the sale of the property. This would encourage households;

1. To build or buy energy and water efficient homes
2. To improve their house structurally such as installing LED light fittings, pool covers, energy efficient pool pumps, solar air conditioners and PV panels, ?
3. To improve water management and promote low water use gardens
4. To become conscious of their utilities running costs and have an incentive to modify their behaviour



The annual power and water consumption results could be presented as a comparison to the local and national average and as running costs over a 10 year period. This is important as it will give people an understanding of life cycle costings and savings. The number of people living on the property, the number of days the house was unoccupied per year and any specific circumstances (such as work from home, pottery kiln, shift worker who used air conditioner to block noise during the day) could be listed. Power and water information would have to be supported by evidence of utility bills.

FOR RENTAL PROPERTIES

Water bills for rental properties are usually held by the owner or the body corporate so will be accessible for inclusion on a mandatory disclosure report. Power bills would require a tenant releasing such bills or the owner requesting access permission to the utility provider when signing the lease contract. COOLmob presently seeks access to utility bills when we do household sustainability assessments and it is very rare for someone not to sign the information release form that we present to the utility provider to gain access to their bills.

For rental properties that do not provide power bills, an energy sustainability assessment could be arranged. This would incur some cost so it would be an incentive for landlords and real estate officers to include a disclosure clause relating to power bills in the rental lease agreement.

The results could be presented to prospective tenants and purchasers showing comparisons to the national and local energy and water figures as for houses. Leases usually state the number of residents and land lords would become aware of the power consumption of their property, which may serve as an incentive to improve the efficiency, or lack off, of the building or appliances.

OTHER RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

Many people live in homes that have a variety of ownership arrangements (including lease, rental and private or part ownership) that need to be covered by some form of mandatory disclosure. These include aged care facilities, retirement villages, student and on location worker accommodation. As Australia's population increases the number of people living in such villages will increase. They should not be exempt from mandatory disclosure and examination of past utility bills would give a good indication of the efficiency and running costs.

Please go to www.coolmob.org for additional information on COOLmob.

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