



## Building better homes through environmentally sustainable design



### **Our ask:**

Engage with Victorian Councils to introduce stronger climate resilient design standards for all buildings to create homes that are healthy and affordable to live in, now and in the future.

In the face of rising energy costs and a warming climate, the need for thermally comfortable, energy efficient and well-designed homes is more pressing than ever. Designing and building homes with Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) principles, particularly simple measures that reduce community vulnerability to heat waves, will remove the need for costly future retrofits and create homes that are healthy and affordable to live in.

Many existing apartment buildings are not ready to withstand current and growing climate-related pressures. Australian building standards lag behind international best practice for sustainability and climate resilience. According to an Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute report, less than 5 per cent of newer apartment buildings meet minimum sustainability standards, with many older apartment buildings falling well short.<sup>33</sup>

University of Melbourne research released in 2017 showed that if a heatwave hit and the power blacked out, most apartment buildings would bake, with indoor temperatures quickly exceeding international health standards.<sup>34</sup>

Recent Victorian Government planning reforms have greatly reduced the impacts of local ESD planning policies. Even simple requirements for shade, ventilation and insulation have been removed with the intent of streamlining planning processes and addressing housing affordability. However, analysis by Merri-bek Council suggests that homes being designed now are likely to get warmer during hot weather, be more vulnerable during heat waves, will cost more to cool and will require future generations to make costly modifications or rebuilds to withstand climate change.

In 2025, over 30 Council's across Victoria had a local policy for sustainability requirements in their planning scheme, improving building quality and reducing energy bills for residents and businesses.

In Merri-bek, positive outcomes included, more energy efficient homes and buildings via improved glazing, insulation and ventilation, improved natural daylight access and additional greening. Merri-bek Council also demonstrated that the ESD policy did not hinder or detract from the planning application process; rather it helped improve development quality demonstrating there is a way to deliver healthy, well-designed homes quickly for the community.

Merri-bek together with Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) seek opportunities to engage with the Victorian government to embed simple, statewide rules that ensure every new building is future-proofed against climate extremes with design standards that cut energy bills, protect households from heatwaves and flooding, and give industry the certainty it needs. This means every new home and building is affordable, healthy and climate-ready from day one.