

21 September 05

«Title» «FirstName» «LastName»
«Company»
«Address1»
«Address2»
«City» «State» «PostalCode»

Dear «Title» «LastName»,

Re: Maria Atkinson - Green Building Council Executive Director

I am once again forced to write to the Board to complain about the behaviour of Maria Atkinson and management of the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA).

The matter I raise is extremely serious and the Board must now act to rectify the situation.

Maria Atkinson used the CSIRO Balancing Act Report in her most recent letter to me dated 2nd September 2005 to justify the exclusion of rapidly renewable resources ie Australian grown wool from the Materials category criteria in the Green Stars – Office Interiors (GS-OI) rating tool.

As you are aware the GBCA GS–OI rating tool was released at the beginning of May 2005. The CSIRO Balancing Act report was released 24th May 2005 (the CSIRO on Friday 9th September confirmed to INSTYLE the GBCA did not have access to a draft or advance copy of the report before its release date).

Therefore, Maria Atkinson has quoted from the CSIRO report released 24 days after the launch of the GBCA GS–OI rating tool. Maria Atkinson has referred to the report and used direct quotations from this report to justify decisions made at least 24 days before the report was published.

In summary, Maria has incorrectly and deliberately used this report to defend the GBCA's decision and undermine Australian grown wool's environmental credentials. It is obvious that Maria Atkinson "discovered" this document during her research to respond to my recent letters and the use of the document clearly exposes the fact that the GBCA has all along had no substantive scientific evidence to justify the exclusion of sustainable rapidly renewable resources such as Australian grown eco wool from the Materials category criteria.

Even if the report had been available before the GBCA had released the GS–OI rating tool the CSIRO report states in its Executive Summary and Introduction -

“Care needs to be taken in drawing conclusions from the results. A ‘below average’ indicator (eg high water use, low employment, low surplus) does not necessarily indicate a problem or inefficiency. Different sectors perform different functions in the economy and all sectors have a mix of above and below average results. The report provides a static description of these results for a point in time. Dynamic modelling would need to be used to quantify changes in TBL factors that would occur if conditions changed (eg shifts in demand or supply, or in corporate or government policies). Thus the results cannot by themselves identify problems or appropriate policy and management responses, nor tell us whether Australia’s environmental, economic and social performance is sustainable or not.” (Foran, Lenzen & Dey 2005)

Additionally, anomalies have been found with the analytical procedures used in the report:

“This anomaly is primarily due to the analytical procedure used in the Balancing Act report. This nation-wide study uses the established conventions of National Accounts that are set by UN Standards, and applied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These international conventions treat physical flows as gross and not net, and are designed to facilitate comparison between nations. The resulting anomaly for the forestry sector, and other sectors with similar accounting issues, is noted in the report.

In attempting to provide the first comprehensive account of Australia's triple bottom line the authors have uncovered many accounting discrepancies, some of which are quite challenging. Not to follow established international conventions would decrease the rigour of the report and compromise the aim of Balancing Act to provide the bigger, economy-wide picture.

A confounding issue is that Balancing Act provides a report on each sector in its own right and single issue or sector reporting by some journalists has compromised the integrated nature of the report.” (Clarification on green house gas accounting for the forestry sector in the Balancing Act report 2005)

I note that Maria Atkinson did not disclose or acknowledge the above information in her letter.

This is unfortunately not the first time Maria Atkinson has misused information by quoting facts out of context (ie. Maria previously quoted soil erosion from overgrazing was the number one environmental issue in Australia according to a CIA report) or made false and misleading statements about these issues to suit her argument and deflect criticism. For example, Maria Atkinson has told other interested parties including a journalist that the information INSTYLE provided “lacked comprehensiveness” as well as indicating to Government Ministers that the issues INSTYLE has raised have been resolved when they clearly have not. Ironically at the same time I have been requesting answers and information from Maria Atkinson since April this year and she has failed or deliberately avoided providing this information.

As you are well aware the serious conflict of interest problem is still outstanding. Maria Atkinson’s failure to recognise the problem shows either poor judgement or exposes a more serious probity issue at the GBCA. Her failure to understand the gravity of this issue and the harm this is doing to the GBCA must be of concern to the Board, as it is for every other party who has since become aware of the situation.

The fact that Interface, the sole representative of the textile industry had company representatives on the Board, Technical Working Committee and Marketing Committee at the time when the GS–OI rating tool was developed is disturbing. It should be noted that INSTYLE made numerous attempts to contribute to the process from July 2004 onwards however apart from one initial meeting (where we presented the case for sustainable rapidly renewable materials ie Australian grown eco wool and Australian manufactured products) all attempts to become involved or contribute to the process were ignored or rejected.

The fact that Interface’s products receive the greatest credit points (with the exception of reused items and products that are certified with the ‘Environmental Innovative Products’ through the AELA) in the Materials category criteria, providing a significant competitive advantage for this company’s products and excludes their closest (fibre) competitor ie Australian grown eco wool and locally manufactured products is scandalous.

Again I wish to highlight that **all** the other Green Building Council's around the world and other recognised environmental organisations such as the Centre for Design and Australia's Ecospecifier recognise the benefits of rapidly renewable and locally manufactured products (ie. Australian grown wool).

We are at a total loss as to why imported recycled PET textiles (manufactured from consumer waste from the USA or Asia) that contain hazardous chemicals and will end up in landfill after its useful life will contribute credit points for a chair or workstation in the rating tool. However a textile produced locally to strict environmental criteria from Australian grown eco wool that benefits indoor air quality (a fact now acknowledged by ecospecifier) and can be reused, recycled or biodegrade in the right conditions will not contribute any credit points for a chair or workstation in the rating tool.

Below is a table that clearly exhibits the benefits of LIFE Textiles made from 100% Australian eco wool over recycled PET textiles.

Sustainable criteria	LIFE Textiles	Recycled PET
Made with rapidly renewable, sustainable and/or non hazardous recycled resources	YES	NO
Made with minimal input (energy/water) and output (waste)	YES	POSSIBLE
Made without polluting or toxic chemicals	YES	NO
Fabric produced locally	YES	POSSIBLE (<i>however almost all PET textiles are imported</i>)
Benefits indoor air environment/human health	YES	NO
Reusable, recyclable or biodegradable	YES	NO

As you are also aware the GBCA management have been involved in the use of disturbing censorship tactics which saw the GBCA publish Maria Atkinson's response letter dated 19th July on its web site however my two letters, that she was responding to, were not. This behaviour can only be viewed as a deliberate attempt to mislead stakeholders of the issues and harm INSTYLE and Australian grown wool's reputation. This action does not exhibit the "open and transparent" policy the GBCA professes and has failed to fully inform all stakeholders of the situation.

You will recall I had to demand, in my letter dated 15th Aug 05, the GBCA to publish my letters on its website. However before the issues have been properly addressed and any of the requested information made available the GBCA has now removed all correspondence from its website and I can only draw the conclusion that this is an attempt to bury the issue. This exhibits either a siege mentality or behaviour akin to a cover up.

INSTYLE will now publish all correspondence on its web site so stakeholders can be kept informed of the progress of this important issue.

I believe the situation has now reached a point where the Board must act on this behaviour so that its reputation and that of the GS-OI rating tool is not further damaged. We still await answers to our previously posed questions and requested information and have once again listed these below and would respectfully ask that a senior staff member be asked to directly supply the answers and information asap.

For clarity the unanswered questions and information we are seeking are as follows –

1. To make available all the information, including the minutes of the Technical Working Committee, which informed the GBCA's decisions in the Materials Category and details of the organisation/person who submitted these documents.
2. Research to support GBCA's claim that "wool grazing requires substantial amounts of water" made in your letter dated 19th July.
3. Why the GBCA attempted to discredit Australian grown wool by quoting out of context a US Central Intelligence Agency website rather than referencing the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage. In using this quote out of context there was no consideration of other products (ie. lamb, beef, leather hides) that result from the same activity.
4. When will the GBCA rectify the current situation and include sustainable rapidly renewable ie Australian grown eco wool and Australian manufactured products in the GS – OI in the Materials Category criteria.
5. Given the conflict of interest that existed at the GBCA during the development and launch of the GS – OI rating tool, when will the GBCA approach an independent organisation such as the CSIRO to conduct a review of the GS–OI Materials category criteria.

Additionally,

6. For the GBCA to justify the reasons why sustainable rapidly renewable and locally manufactured materials such as Australian grown and produced eco wool have been overlooked in the Materials category criteria in favour of recycled materials such as imported PET textiles.

Our experience dealing with the GBCA has been both frustrating and disappointing. The expectation was that the GBCA would be an organisation exhibiting environmental and social leadership with corporate behaviour and decision-making processes beyond reproach. Sadly this is not the case and I have absolutely no confidence in the performance and integrity of the management of the GBCA and the Board needs to act immediately to remedy the situation.

I have been keeping informed various ministers, politicians and journalists on the outstanding issues with the GBCA. On Thursday 15th September The Hon. Duncan Gay (NSW Deputy Leader of the Opposition) raised the issues and problems INSTYLE has been confronting with the GBCA in the NSW parliament (I have attached a copy of the Hansard). To ensure further public and industry awareness of the issues we are approaching other parliamentarians to follow Duncan Gays lead and highlight the problems with the GBCA GS – OI rating tool in other parliaments around the country.

The Board most importantly needs to address the Materials category criteria and include sustainable rapidly renewable ie Australian grown eco wool and locally manufactured content immediately so that better environmental outcomes can be achieved.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Fitzsimons
Managing Director

References

Clarification on green house gas accounting for the forestry sector in the Balancing Act report 2005, viewed 08-09-05
<<http://www.csiro.au/index.asp?type=mediaRelease&id=GreenhouseBA&stylesheet=mediaReleas>>.
Foran, B, Lenzen, M & Dey, C 2005, *Balancing Act A Triple Bottom Line Analysis of the Australian Economy*, viewed 08-09-05 <<http://www.cse.csiro.au/research/balancingact/balancingactexecsumm.pdf>>.

Attachments

The Hon Duncan Gay Hansard 15th September 05

cc.

GBC Board Members:

	Peter Verwer, Bob Nation, Che Wall, Ken Maher, Chris O'Donnell, Brendan Crotty, Daniel Grollo, Warren Lear, Craig Heaton, Michael Barnes, Daniel Labbad, Dennis O'Regan, Chris Johnson, Tony Arnel, Daren Armstrong, Jamie O'Rourke
Minister for Environment	Senator the Hon Ian Campbell
VIC Premier	The Hon Steve Bracks MP
Shadow Minister for Primary Industries:	The Hon Duncan Gay
VIC Minister for Environment	The Hon John Thwaites MP
NSW Minister for Environment	The Hon Bob Debus MP
SA Minister for Administrative Services	The Hon Michael Wright MP
SA Shadow Minister for Environment	The Hon Iain Evans MP
Parliamentary Secretary	The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP
General Manager Woolmark	Leah Paff
Aust Wool Growers Ltd	Charles Ollsen
ACTU	Steven Mullins
TCFU	Igor Nossar
QLD Department of Public Works	Delwyn Jones
Indesign Magazine	Raj Nandan
Eco Balance Consultancy	Kirsty Mate
Environment Manager	Murray Griffin
Environment Business Magazine	Richard Collins

AUSTRALIAN TEXTILES

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The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.27pm]: Tonight I again highlight concerns from an Australian textiles company about the future of Australian woolgrowers, manufacturers and associated industries. As I have stated before in this House, Instyle Contract Textiles is a leading supplier of contract furnishing textiles. Instyle, in conjunction with the Woolmark Company, has developed an environmentally preferable textile collection called LIFE Textiles. These textiles are produced locally to strict environmental criteria from sustainable rapidly renewable resources, including Australian eco-wool and organically certified wool.

Instyle is continuing its efforts to seek changes to government procurement policies favouring recycled content and has kept me well informed of its plight. Instyle is urging the various levels of government in Australia to expand its procurement policies to include all environmentally preferable products from rapidly renewable and all non-hazardous recycled materials. However, another matter concerning the rating tools of the Green Building Council (GBC) of Australia, has a greater potential to damage the Australian wool growing industry, local textile manufacturers and the environment. The GBC is a non-profit organisation that was funded initially by the Department of Defence, the New South Wales and Victorian Labor Governments and member companies. The GBC office interiors rating tool specifies recycled content and organic content as eco preferable materials, that is, textiles and carpets.

Certified organic content accounts for an extremely small percentage of available products. The only textiles currently available in Australia with recycled content are made from polyester fibres manufactured overseas. These recycled textiles, polyethylene terephthalate (PET), contain harmful and toxic substances that create environmental and human health risks during production, use, disposal and recycling. Instyle is concerned that its LIFE Textiles product and other wool textiles and carpets have been excluded from the Green Building Council (GBC) Green Stars Office Interiors rating tool, yet imported recycled PET product are included.

The decision to exclude sustainable rapidly renewable content and locally produced materials goes against the GBC's predecessors, such as the Centre for Design at RMIT and the United States of America Green Building Councils LEED rating system, which recognise rapidly renewable and locally produced materials. The use of rapidly renewable materials reduces the use and depletion of limited raw materials, and local production supports the use of indigenous resources and reduces the impacts associated with transportation. The GBC's unique stance will eliminate better sustainable options and could have serious consequences for the Australian wool-growing and Australian textile manufacturing industries.

The South Australian Government had adopted the GBC rating tools for all government office accommodation, and the other States, including New South Wales, have indicated that they would follow suit. Instyle would like support in reversing the GBC decision and would ask that the State governments do not adopt a green building standard that is fundamentally flawed. The GBC has been slow to respond and all responses to date have not addressed indeed, all have deliberately avoided the issues raised by Instyle. The GBC has claimed that overgrazing is the number one environmental issue in Australia, cited from a CIA website. Credible reasons for the exclusion have not been provided and this, frankly, is not acceptable. The GBC has not been open and transparent, nor has it been accountable.

I support Instyle in its quest for the Green Building Council to recognise rapidly renewable and locally produced resources, that is, wool textiles, and seek the New South Wales Government's support in doing so.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.32pm until Tuesday 20 September at 2.30pm