

Clearing a muddy issue

By Naomi Kollmorgen

TESTING is expected to begin this month on a mud-brick house to determine whether the material complies with new energy rating requirements.

For years, mud brick has been an environmental leader in house design and thermal energy, but the requirements cast a shadow over the industry after claims mud-brick buildings were not compliant.

It is hoped the tests, to be carried out on a house in Deans Road, Christmas Hills, will prove mud bricks are adequately energy efficient.

The tests will be conducted in two stages — the first will set parameters for the second, more intensive examination of mud brick's thermal qualities.

Nillumbik Mudbrick Association president, Nillumbik councillor Michael Young, said the thermal mass testing was a first for mud bricks.

"We have provided the information to show there is a sufficient case to instigate testing that has never been done before.

"From the stage one tests, I would like to see that our anecdotal evidence is validated that our mud-brick houses are efficient in summer and winter."

The testing follows the approval of the first mud-brick building permit case at the Building Commission, and an announcement that mud-brick constructions would not need to comply to the full five-star system until May next year.

Instead, to gain approval,



Compliance fight: Michael Young at his mud-brick home.

Picture: Robert Carew

mud-brick applications will need a four-star rating plus a solar hot water system or rain-water tank.

"This will make it easier for those looking to get mud-brick building permits," Cr Young said.

"It affects literally hundreds of tradespeople, from carpenters, to builders, to designers.

"The industry is still going ahead. We are moving forward."

Mud brick has a rich history in

Australia and is a popular mode of building in Eltham.

Eltham MP Steve Herbert said the area was home to Australia's largest mud-brick industry.

"Given the significance of mud-brick buildings to Eltham's past, and the great desire of

many local residents to own a mud-brick house, it is important that issues with energy rating are ironed out."

For more details on five-star energy ratings, contact the Building Commission on 9285 6400.