

Down to earth tests

Natalie Birch

THE Diamond Valley's mudbrick industry has been delivered a last-minute reprieve that will delay it from having to meet the five-star energy rating required for all new buildings.

Following pressure from builders and Nillumbik Council, Planning Minister Rob Hulls has agreed that mudbrick houses will not have to comply with the new system until May next year.

The delay, which also applies to timber floor and relocatable buildings, will allow more time for tests to be carried out on

mudbricks. The age-old popular building material, which is used in many of the shire's most desirable houses, has so far failed to meet the Victorian Building Commission's five-star rating and struggles to comply even with the present four-star requirement.

Cr Michael Young, who is also president of the Nillumbik Mudbrick Association, said the time extension would make it easier for people to obtain a permit to build a mudbrick house.



Michael Young

"Over the last 10 months, with the introduction of the four-star energy rating, and talk of the five-star rating, we have seen the mudbrick building industry slow down," Cr Young said. "This is disappointing for both the industry and Nillumbik - mudbrick buildings are a part of Nillumbik's identity."

A two-part study into the thermal capacity of mudbrick is due to begin later this month.

The first stage involves carrying out tests on an existing mudbrick house, and at least 12 Nillumbik residents have offered their homes for the research.

Nillumbik Mayor Greg Johnson said the council had been advocating for a better

understanding of energy rating requirements. "I am pleased that this extension will give us the opportunity to demonstrate the thermal virtue of mudbrick construction, and better educate all parties on the value of mudbrick," Cr Johnson said.

The local earth-building industry is also celebrating another victory, after the Building Commission granted a permit for a mudbrick building despite it not complying with the energy rating needed.

Cr Young said the approval set a precedent for the industry.

"We've seen our first test case win at the Building Commission," he said.

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