

Evaluation of the Sustainable Homes Program

Prepared for the Office of Energy & Climate Change, NSW Treasury

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Citing this Report

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List of Acronyms

ARENA	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
ASBEC	Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council
BASIX	Building Sustainability Index (a scheme introduced by the NSW Government in 2014 to regulate the energy efficiency of residential buildings)
BPIC	Building Products Industry Council
CCF	Climate Change Fund
CSHI	Collaborative Sustainable Housing Initiative
CRC LCL	Cooperative Research Centre Low Carbon Living
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industry Research Organisation
DPIE	NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
GBCA	Green Building Council of Australia
HIA	Housing Industry Association
ITP	Independent Training Providers
MBA	Master Builders Australia
MECLA	Materials & Embodied Carbon Leaders Alliance
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NEPP	National Energy Productivity Plan
NSW	New South Wales
OECC	NSW Office of Environment & Climate Change
OEH	NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
RACE	Renewables & Clean Energy Cooperative Research Centre
SH	Sustainable Homes
Taskforce Zero	Taskforce Net Zero Energy Steering Committee
TVC	Television Communication
UoM	University of Melbourne

Unless otherwise referenced quotations included in this Report have been gathered through interviews conducted with Program Partners and Stakeholders as part of this Evaluation.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Sustainable Homes (SH) Program has operated as a relatively small market and behaviour change program within the NSW Government's suite of energy efficiency and sustainability programs. Initiated in 2014, the Program has been delivered in two phases, Phase 1 July 2014 – June 2017 and Phase 2 July 2017 – June 2022.

The Program has sought to help better position the Residential Housing Market in NSW to support the adoption of more sustainable housing, with the goal of contributing to an increase in the adoption of more sustainable - comfortable, affordable, and healthy - homes over the longer term, supporting NSW's transition to net zero emissions by 2050. The SH Program has worked across three core areas:

1. Building **consumer awareness** of the benefits of, **and demand** for, more sustainable homes
2. Building the **awareness and capability of suppliers**, particularly volume builders, to market and build more sustainable homes, and
3. Informing **policy and regulation** to support adoption, with a particular focus on helping to make sure that Government policy and program levers are designed in a way that both takes into account, and helps to incentivise and build, market readiness to respond to voluntary and / or mandated changes.

The focus of the Program has been on working iteratively with a range of Sustainability, Research, Industry, Commercial and Government Partners to (co)design and implement a series of discrete initiatives that work to mobilise consumer and supplier action to increase the demand for and the supply of more sustainable homes. The activity that has been undertaken through the Program has been guided by an overarching market-oriented, behaviour change-based theory of change.

Evaluation focus & methodology

This Evaluation has been prepared by Regina Hill Effective Consulting Pty Ltd on behalf of the Office of Energy & Climate Change, NSW Treasury (OECC). The purpose of the Evaluation is to assess the outcomes that have been delivered through the Program, identify key factors that have contributed to its effectiveness and provide evidence for decisions about the future need for, and design of, ongoing activity. The Evaluation has focused on Phase 2 of the SH Program, recognising that the activity undertaken in Phase 2 has been informed by, and built on, Phase 1.

The focus of the Evaluation has been on the aggregated impact of the activities delivered through the Program, assessing whether they have aligned with the theory of change on which the aggregated SH Program is based, and whether those activities have together contributed to the overarching objectives of the SH Program.

The Evaluation is structured in three substantive parts:

- Part 1 Reviews how well the Program has been designed and delivered. It discusses the collaborative, market- or systems-based approach that has been applied and explores how the Program has evolved in response to policy and market changes over time.
- Part 2 Discusses the work that has been undertaken through the Program, providing a detailed overview of each of the three areas of activity focused on through the Program (as outlined above). It reviews whether the Program has achieved its planned outcomes and whether there is a role for further activity.
- Part 3 Reflects on what can be learnt and applied by Government when designing and delivering market-based programs of this type.

This Evaluation has drawn on existing evaluations that have been undertaken of individual programmatic components of the SH Program as well material generated through the use of developmental evaluation tools and approaches developed as part of the Mid-term Evaluation conducted 2019 (Hill, DOC21/164762).

The Evaluation has applied a non-experimental design. Given the long term, market-based focus of the SH Program, the evaluation has applied a systems lens and used systems mapping and evaluative approaches based on techniques

including the *Significant Instances of Policy and Systems Improvement* approach. The data collection process used in the Evaluation included:

- Step 1 - A detailed review of Program documentation including project specific impact and evaluation reports.

The above documentation was provided by the SH Team to the Evaluator in response to requests identifying the categories of material required. It included the provision of access to all programmatic evaluation reports relevant to the work undertaken through the Program over the period relevant to the Evaluation.

- Step 2 - A series of workshops with the SH Program Team and collaborative review and preparation of journey maps and narrative assessments of identified markers / signposts of change using structured systems change assessment tools developed as part of the Mid-term Evaluation, and
- Step 3 - 22 semi-structured telephone interviews with 25 Industry, Commercial, Sustainability, Research and Government Partners and Stakeholders involved in different aspects of the Program. (A list of the organisations represented in the above interviews is provided in Appendix 1.)

Steps 1 and 2 above were used to gather information about the work undertaken through the SH Program and to identify potential markers of progress and change aligned to the objectives of the Program. Systems-based analysis tools and frameworks were used to categorise and assess the nature and significance of the changes identified as having been delivered or influenced by the Program, and the role and significance of the contribution made by the Program to those outcomes.

The interviews in Step 3 were used to validate the nature and quality of the work that had been undertaken through the Program and to test whether the outcomes identified in Step 2 had been realised, as well as the significance and the nature of the contribution (if any) that the SH Program had made to them. Additional areas of impact identified through the interviews were validated and tested with stakeholders on an iterative basis.

Systems maps were prepared to map how activity undertaken through the program had evolved over time. Those maps were also tested with relevant stakeholders as part of the interview process. Copies of the validated system maps have been included in this Report. Detailed systems change narratives prepared and validated through the Evaluation have been provided to the Department in support of this Evaluation. The content of them has been used to prepare Section 2.1 of this Report. Copies of the tools and methodology applied in this Evaluation are available through the SH Team.

Limitations

As noted above, this Evaluation has relied on discrete research and evaluation work undertaken through the SH Program to assess the impact on individual programmatic components of the Program. As such, this evaluation will be subject to any biases or limitations associated with those contributing evaluations.

The funding and scope of this evaluation has not allowed for an independent analysis of market-based changes in consumer or supply side awareness, knowledge, confidence or behaviour, or shifts in market trend in relation to the marketing, sale or uptake of more sustainable homes outside of the above research and evaluation activity.

All of the stakeholders interviewed as part of the Evaluation have played a role in some aspect of the Program. While an effort has been made to test and validate information provided by individuals by seeking to confirm and triangulate data and explain differences in position through interview-based inquiry and testing against available program based research and evaluation data, there is a potential for implicit and explicit bias in the information that has been collected. Where differences in view were identified they have been referenced in this Report.

Key Evaluation findings

This Evaluation builds on and affirms key findings in the Mid-term Evaluation of the Program that was completed in 2020 (Hill, DOC21/164762). The Evaluation concludes that the market-based work that has been undertaken through Phase 2 of the SH Program has complemented other Government initiatives to help mobilise action and build the capacity of the Residential Housing Market in NSW to transition to net zero.

Specifically, the Evaluation finds that the SH Program has:

- **Helped to progress the mainstreaming of Net Zero Energy Homes:**
 - Supported engagement and collaboration between key Industry, Commercial, Sustainability, Research and Government stakeholders through Taskforce Zero and more broadly through the work that the SH Team has done across the different initiatives it has supported.
 - Built awareness of, and interest in, sustainable housing features through television edutainment initiatives enabled through the Mass Media Communication Strategy, helping to mobilise demand for net zero homes and supporting the Housing Industry to identify a new potential market.
 - Catalysed ongoing edutainment activity that can continue to mobilise demand.
 - Supported the development of resources and training to build understanding of the potential market for sustainable homes and the ability to use sustainability as a differentiating factor when marketing and selling housing packages / options.
 - Supported early supply-side adopters and followers to build their understanding of how to market and sell more sustainable homes and, through that, encouraged the early-stage development and testing by volume builders of more sustainable housing packages / options.
- **Supported Policy and Regulatory Framework Development to reinforce the mainstreaming Net Zero Homes:**
 - Collaborated with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to explore the way that ratings and disclosure frameworks can be used to mobilise desired market behaviour and how policy frameworks can be designed to both build market readiness and drive change.
 - Built relationships with other areas within Government in NSW, including the BASIX and Housing Strategy Team, to share market-based knowledge to inform ongoing policy, regulation, and program design.

A summary of the key findings of the Evaluation is provided Table 1 below.

Recommendations

The need to address residential energy efficiency has been identified as being critical to the ability of NSW to meet its net zero objective by 2050. Feedback gathered through this Evaluation indicates that there is a clear view that there is an ongoing need for Government to support the NSW Residential Housing Market to transition to net zero. The work that has and is being done through the SH Program has been identified as providing a market-based platform for Government to drive emission reductions in this area alongside other initiatives.

To enable the SH Program to reach its full potential, Government Stakeholders have recommended that:

1. The structure of the SH Team be revised to build out the strategic and management capability of the Team and incorporate construction-based skills (either directly or through consultancy or project-based work) to support its supply-side activity.
2. Work be undertaken to leverage relationships within Treasury to *'change the lens'* on the potential contribution and importance of residential energy efficiency to achieving NSW's net zero policy outcomes and to secure the inclusion of key SH Program initiatives in the 2023 - 2027 Housing Strategy Action Plan and Net Zero Implementation Plan Updates.
3. Steps continue to be taken to document and share the approach that is being undertaken by the SH Program to build awareness and understanding of the Program, inform the design of other market-based initiatives and reduce key person risks.

Table 1 – Key Evaluation findings (responses to Key Evaluation Questions)

1. How well was the Program designed? (appropriateness)
<i>1.1 How appropriate was the design of the Program to meet the policy objectives and targets?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design of the SH Program has been appropriate. It has responded to key market needs in a way that is appropriate to meet the targeted program outcomes. • The design of the Program has been influenced by several factors including the complex nature of the Residential Housing Market, the impact that has had on how residential housing has been positioned within Government policy and regulatory frameworks and the range of factors impacting the take up of sustainable housing from a demand and supply perspective. • The SH Team has designed and structured its work to try to best leverage its limited resources. It has worked with Sector Stakeholders and sought to take advantage of national platforms relating to the NEPP and the Trajectory and State-based initiatives, such as the NSW Housing Strategy and Net Zero Implementation Update, to broaden its impact.
<i>1.2 To what extent did the Program incorporate learnings from the Mid-term Evaluation?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SH Team has acted on most of the recommendations made in the Mid-term Evaluation (Recommendations 3-7 and 9 have been actioned, Recommendation 2 ceased to be relevant because of how the Program evolved). A recommendation that Program staffing be reviewed to better respond to and balance resourcing and workload considerations was not effectively actioned (Recommendation 8). Although provision was made to increase staffing following the Mid-term Evaluation, challenges in being able to recruit appropriately qualified staff, particularly over the COVID-19 period, meant that the overall staffing level was not increased. Staff turnover, secondment transfers and extended leave provisions have meant that resourcing pressures have continued. Those pressures have resulted in some Program activity being reduced, put on hold or deferred because of resourcing constraints. One of the areas impacted was the documenting and sharing what was being learnt through the SH Program which had been identified in the Mid-term Evaluation (Recommendation 1).
2. How well was the Program delivered and managed? (effectiveness, efficiency)
<i>2.1 Which components of the Program have been most successful?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mass Media Communications Strategy that formed the core of the demand-side activity undertaken through the Program was more structured and had a higher level of resourcing and focus. It is seen as being particularly innovative and valuable because of the importance of mobilising consumer demand. The work that was undertaken on supply-side activity was less resourced and has been more fragmented and is less developed than the Mass Media Communications Strategy work. As a result, it is at an earlier stage in terms of being able to demonstrate impact. The focus of this work is seen as being less innovative than the Mass Media Communications Strategy work, having focused on supporting demonstration projects and on identifying key capability gaps and developing more traditional training-based responses to address them. Because of that, the impact of this work is seen by Program Partners and Stakeholders as being likely to be more incremental. • The Program’s policy and regulation activity has played a significant role in helping to inform the development of Draft National Framework for Disclosure of Residential Energy Efficiency Information (the Draft National Disclosure Framework, DOC 22/618756)¹ that has recently been submitted for and obtained Ministerial approval for public consultation.
<i>2.2 What factors supported this?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As noted above, the level of resourcing and focus able to be placed on different aspects of the Program and the nature of the work involved has had an impact on the impact and effectiveness of specific programmatic elements of the Program. • A number of factors were identified through the Evaluation as contributing to the success of the Program overall including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The approach that has been taken, specifically the Program’s systems and behaviour change focus, its application of human-centred design and its collaborative co-design approach – Its preparedness to learn by doing and innovate – Its agility and ability to respond to its changing context and market dynamics, enabled through its agile and adaptive project management approach, and

- The credentials of the SH Team and the trusting and engaged relationships they have been able to build with stakeholders across the Residential Housing market.

2.3 What, if anything, could have been done differently to achieve more impact in the targeted areas?

- The SH Program has been recognised as ‘batting above its weight’ in terms of the activity and impact it has been able to have. It has evolved as a small, entrepreneurial program within NSW’s suite of sustainability programs, operating as an ‘intrapreneur’ within Government. The work that has been done to date has allowed the Program to get traction and provided a platform for growth. Like a successful start-up enterprise, as it has matured, the SH Program has started to face the real challenge of how to best focus and leverage the opportunities that are now available to it. That challenge is impacted both by the fact that the Team:
 - Does not currently have strong policy or executive level awareness of, or strong policy authorisation for, its work, and
 - Is not currently funded, resourced or structured to be able to take advantage of the opportunities for impact available to it.
- Interviews undertaken as part of this Evaluation have raised the need to strategically (re)position the Program within Government to allow it to secure the authorisation and funding required to consolidate, resource, and scale its activity. Program Partners and Stakeholders have observed that in the absence of scaling up, the SH Program will remain a niche activity and will not be able to realise its potential.
- To enable the SH Program to reach its full potential, Government Stakeholders have recommended that:
 - The structure of the SH Team be revised to build out the strategic and management capability of the Team and incorporate construction-based skills (either directly or through consultancy or project-based work) to support its supply-side activity
 - Work be undertaken to leverage relationships within Treasury to ‘change the lens’ on the potential contribution and importance of residential energy efficiency to achieving NSW’s net zero policy outcomes and to secure the inclusion of key SH Program initiatives in the 2023 - 2027 Housing Strategy Action Plan and Net Zero Implementation Plan Updates, and
 - Steps continue to be taken to document and share the approach that is being undertaken by the SH Program to build awareness and understanding of the Program, inform the design of other market-based initiatives and reduce key person risks.

2.4 How well was delivery modified, through the agile delivery approach, to address emerging risks, opportunities, and changing situations and to incorporate lessons learned? Particularly in response to stakeholder engagement?

- The SH Program has consistently adopted an adaptive, agile project design and iteration approach. The effect of that has been that work being undertaken through the Program has consistently been adapted and evolved in response to stakeholder feedback and to respond to opportunities and challenges as they have emerged. This has been a strength of the Program and is reflected in the way in which its three core areas of activity have evolved. Learnings, insights and relationships gained through earlier stages of the Program have clearly informed, enabled and incubated later ones, which is reflected in the activity mapping outlined in this Report.

3. To what extent did the Program achieve the planned outcomes? (legacy, equity)

3.1 What role did the collaborative approach have in supporting that and ensuring initiatives are sustained beyond the Program’s involvement? and

3.2 Is there evidence that Program Partners / Beneficiaries will continue their activities beyond Program support?

- The collaborative approach applied by the SH Team in the (co)design and implementation of the Program has been critical in allowing the Program to achieve what it has.
- That approach, and the role that the Program Team has played in helping to build and broker relationships and enable and incubate activity with and through others – rather than through the direct delivery of activity themselves - has positioned stakeholders outside of Government to take a lead on activity. It has also helped a number of activities to build sufficient momentum to be continued independent of the Program. Examples of that include:
 - The commencement of work on a second series of the *Renovate or Rebuild* program and the development of other TV concepts targeting other consumer segments,
 - The licensing of the Simply Selling training package to four independent training providers (ITPs) with consideration being given to the development of further micro-credentials, and
 - The work that has been done on the Draft National Framework for Disclosure of Residential Energy Efficiency Information.

3.3 How effectively has the Program encouraged partnerships and linkages between Program Partners and what outcomes did this lead to? and

3.4 Are appropriate structures being set up to enable the benefits to continue?

- The SH Team are recognised for the work that has been done to engage, mobilise and align stakeholder activity. The Team has been successful in brokering a number of relationships and collaborative initiatives, relating to their demand and supply side, and regulatory work.
- Taskforce Zero, a cross-disciplinary group established to support the above Mass Media Communications Strategy and related Education Working Group supporting the development of the above supply-side training, are examples of how the SH Program has supported Industry, Sustainability, Research and Government Stakeholders who would not ordinarily work together to do so. Participating stakeholders have acknowledged that through that, they have been able to build a better understanding of what one another are doing and build relationships and trust. While the structure of the Taskforce itself is not continuing, the impact of that has – and is expected to continue – beyond the life of the Taskforce. The experience of having worked together on Taskforce Zero is also expected to make it easier to establish like cross-Sector working groups to align around and coordinate activity in the future.

3.4 Is information managed in such a way as to be accessible after the Program?

- While the SH Team has documented the work that it has been doing and taken steps to share its approaches, resourcing constraints have limited its ability to do that.
- The structure of this Evaluation has intentionally been designed to document key aspects of the work as a means of trying to ensure that the work that has been undertaken, and the learnings from the approach that has been applied, are accessible.

4. What lessons can be learned about program delivery and governance? (effectiveness, appropriateness)

4.1 What lessons have been learned that can inform future delivery or other initiatives targeting similar audiences?

- The SH Program affirms the need to manage market- or systems-based programs like the SH Program in an adaptive way, tailoring standard program planning, management, and resourcing to meet the specific needs and timelines for that type of work. Examples of that include:
 - **Program planning:** Because of the systems-based nature of this work, while it is possible to define high level objectives to guide a program, nearer term objectives and success measures need to be defined and measured on a more iterative cycle. The approach that has been taken by the SH Team to use commissioned research to track long-term trends aligned to overarching program objectives, while using more targeted evaluations of specific project initiatives to track near-term outcomes and provide feedback to inform iterative program development, is an example of how this can be done.
 - **Program management:** The systems-based nature of the work also makes it important to be able to take both a big picture and a more granular view of the work that is being undertaken, and to be agile, and to look for and be able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and manage and leverage interdependencies between different areas of work. This requires a particular type of strategic and adaptive management. The ability to be able to link program activity into policy is also important and often requires not only strategic management skills but a level of experience and authorisation to be able to engage at both a program and a policy level. Practical team and project management is also important, as there are often multiple moving parts in initiatives such as this.
 - **Resourcing:** The above factors have implications for the mix of skills - and roles - that are required in teams like the SH Team and the training and development required to support them. The iterative nature of the work also means that there is need to be able to balance program management, stakeholder engagement, operational delivery, as well as opportunity identification and early-stage exploration. Stakeholder engagement and opportunity identification and scoping are distinct activities that often take significant time in addition to more structured project delivery. Teams working in this way need to be resourced to cover that. It can be useful to make provision for a 'floating resource' that can be allocated flexibly across the program, not to deliver existing program activity, but to identify and assess opportunities as they arise and leverage and share program learnings.
 - **Managing & balancing innovation & risk:** The work that the SH Program has undertaken has demonstrated the value of Government taking on early-stage risk to be able to incubate innovation. The development of *Renovate or Rebuild* is an example of this. The Program demonstrated how risk can be managed and mitigated by:
 - Working to build broad stakeholder engagement and understand the nature of the challenge / opportunity being responded to up front
 - Using research and the iterative testing of ideas to stage investment
 - Engaging Commercial Partners to help drive commercialisation activity, and

- Establishing clear project gates to allow Government to plan for and transition project and financial responsibility.
- **Navigating differing policy & policy horizons:** The long-term nature of the changes that the SH Program has sought to influence and the market-based approach that it has taken have often meant that the SH Team has been working to a longer-term horizon than other parts of Government that it has been working with. The difference between the near-term rating scheme amendments and tool design horizons that the NEPP 5 Working Group was working on compared to the longer term design considerations that the SH Team was focused on are examples of this.
- In addition to the above factors, there are insights from the SH Program about how the role that is taken up by Government in market initiatives of this type can change over time, and the implications for how program-based initiatives can best be leveraged to both inform policy and be a mechanism through which to realise policy objectives. The SH Program demonstrates how Government can:
 - **Work as a market enabler vs a market actor:** The Program demonstrates the different roles that can be played by Government and how working as a market enabler, supporting market-led activity (through demand- and supply-side activity), and taking up a role as a market actor (through policy and regulation activity), can both be used to help mobilise change.
 - **Leverage the interface between program & policy design & implementation:** The Program has highlighted the way that program-based insights can inform how policy can be designed not only to enable effective implementation through program activities, but also how it can be used to build the underlying market readiness needed to achieve Government policy objectives. This has implications for the way that program policy groups within Government work together and what is done to encourage and authorise the collaborative development of policy across policy and program teams.
 - **Applying a systems-based approach within Government:** The SH Program has also highlighted the importance of ensuring that Government-based activity is also coordinated, particularly in areas such as residential housing, where policy and program responsibility is dispersed. This applies both to Government Departments and Agencies within NSW and to the coordination of activity on a cross-jurisdictional basis.

4.2 What were the unintended consequences of the Program?

- The agile and adaptive nature of the SH Program and the way that it has evolved over time it is difficult to distinguish between factors that have been shifts in activity and unintended consequences of the Program.
- It is clear from Stakeholder feedback that the extent of the role being played by the SH Program Team as a market connector and cross-jurisdictional influencer has been unanticipated and has had an influence on both Government and Non-Government parts of the Residential Housing system.
- The extent of the role that the SH Team has played a role in supporting cross-jurisdictional collaboration, helping align and cross-leverage State-based activity and investments is also notable and is an unanticipated outcome of this work.