

# GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA (GBCA) - Green Star Rating Includes Indoor Plants

The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) has adopted a "Green Star" rating system for "green" buildings. The inclusion of indoor plants is one way of gaining points towards the Green Star – Office Interiors IEQ 15.

GBCA State Manager (Qld and NT) Andrew Aitken recently discussed the inclusion of indoor plants as one of the eight categories that GBCA has developed to rate Green Buildings. According to Andrew, you can build a building that is energy efficient; however, it is really important to achieve indoor environmental air quality as well. Andrew acknowledges that the emphasis used to be on energy and water saving, however, now it is also about people and increasing productivity. It is being realised that more dollars can be saved increasing productivity than any amount you can save on energy and water efficiencies. Staff retention is one area in focus - it follows that there is a lot of interest in bettering internal environments to retain good staff.

Today's key issues are about air quality through access to good daylight as well as the provision of indoor plants. The uncomfortable one size fits all indoor environments are out and the opposite is in.

GBCA develops green star compliance criteria with professional organisations such as NIPA.

Andrew Aitken has been with GBCA for six months and in that time there has been enormous growth with the number of certified Green Star buildings in Queensland increasing from seven to 27. GBC has released tools for other than office buildings, these include retail and education buildings.

Regardless of business ethics in creating quality internal environments for employees, both the overwhelming global research into the benefits of indoor plants on human health and well being; and the cost savings in increased productivity, are important factors driving employers to install and maintain live internal landscapes. In last month's edition of Architecture & Design, the lead story confirms "Firms will need to consider their clients' employees as businesses attempt to save costs by shoring up staff retention". It seems the clients of architects are seeking help to solve the matter of staff retention because "good design improves morale, which leads to staff retention."

## Benefits of Green Star Buildings

The Green Building Council's mission is to develop a sustainable property industry for Australia and drive the adoption of green building practices through market-based solutions.

Launched in 2002, the GBCA is a national, not-for-profit organisation.

Commercial buildings have the highest growth rate in energy consumption of any sector, and they are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions.

### Green Star

In order to achieve these objectives, the GBCA launched the Green Star environmental rating system for buildings. Green Star rating tools help the property industry to:

- reduce the environmental impact of buildings
- improve occupant health and productivity
- achieve real cost savings
- showcase innovation in sustainable building practices.

There are a variety of sectors in which Green Star ratings can be achieved, currently including:

- commercial offices
- shopping centres
- healthcare facilities
- schools and universities.

Just like ratings for Hotels GBCA has used "stars":

- 4 Stars 'Best Practice'
- 5 Stars 'Australian Excellence'
- 6 Stars 'World Leadership'.

There are currently 109 projects (covering all states) that have achieved a Green Star Certified Rating and over 250 registered projects throughout Australia. Among the certified projects are the biggest and most prestigious buildings in the country.

As early as 2005, the Victorian and South Australian State Governments mandated a minimum Green Star rating for its own office accommodation that it owns or occupies. This trend is now being followed in other states.

### Benefits of Green Buildings

The benefits of a green building are shared by the developers, the building owners and the occupants and include:

- lower development control costs
- improved risk mitigation and management
- **higher tenant retention**
- lower renovation costs
- faster lease-up periods
- **lower overheads**
- **higher returns**
- **more flexible space planning**
- **more productive and healthier environments**
- access to financial incentives and tax credits
- a baseline measure to earn carbon credits
- lower insurance costs
- increased interest by Ethical Investment Funds and a better industry image.

### Office Interiors Rating

This is the Green Star sector commercial offices and the points that can be achieved for Version 1.1 are:

Category	Points
Management (MAN)	15
Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ)	34
Energy (ENE)	16
Transport (TRA)	10
Water (WAT)	14
Materials (MAT)	30
Land Use and Ecology (ECO)	19
Emissions	3
Innovation	5

Note the high number of points for Indoor Environment. This is the category that directly affects every worker in an office.

### MAN-6 Waste Management During Tenancy Fitout

3 points can be achieved if 80% of all waste by weight is reused or recycled.

### IEQ-1 Ventilation Rates

Up to 3 points can be gained by the use of natural (fresh air) ventilation.

### IEQ-3 Daylight.

Up to 3 points can be gained by providing good levels of natural light at the work settings.

### IEQ-7 External Views

2 points can be gained by giving tenants long distance views and visual connection to the outdoors.

### IEQ-11 Volatile organic Compounds

8 points can be achieved by reducing the detrimental impact on occupant health from products that emit pollutants. Such products include: paints, adhesives.

### IEQ-15 Indoor Plants

2 points can be awarded by the installation of indoor plants that improve indoor environment quality.

### ENE-4 Office Lighting Zoning

2 points can be awarded where all individuals or enclosed spaces have separate switches.

### TRA-1 Public Transport

2 points can be achieved by the building being in close proximity to public transport.

### TRA-2 Car Parking

2 points can be awarded by providing less car parking than allowed by the local planning allowance.

### MAT Materials

This category is all about sustainability and the environmental impact of products from "birth to death". ie "Green Products".

### ECO-6 Building Conservation

2 points can be awarded for tenancy fitouts that are undertaken in existing buildings in preference to new buildings.

### EMI-2 Insulation Ozone Depleting Potential

1 point can be gained by using thermal insulation that avoids the use of ozone-depleting substances.

### INN Innovation

As always innovation is rewarded.

The Green Star has been created by people who care about the world and its future and is continually being updated and improved from industry and customer feedback.

