

# BRINGING EXISTING BUILDINGS INTO THE SUSTAINABILITY EQUATION

Miss Ceri Warnock

LLB (hons) LLM

Lecturer in Law

University of Otago, PO Box 56, Dunedin, New Zealand

Telephone 64 3 479 8857

[ceri.warnock@stonebow.otago.ac.nz](mailto:ceri.warnock@stonebow.otago.ac.nz)

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A cursory look at statistics reveals that the approach taken to existing buildings will be critical in progressing sustainability within the built environment. For example, there are c. 1.6 million dwellings in New Zealand; c. 1.04 million homes were built before 1977 and of these, a third have wholly inadequate insulation (Amitrano, 2006). In contrast, only 20,000 new homes, or thereabouts, are built each year (EECA, 2007). To ignore the role of existing buildings will provide the greatest stumbling block towards fostering a sustainable built environment and will raise doubts concerning the Government's true commitment to the issue. Unfortunately, the Building Act 2004 does not require work to existing buildings to comply with the updated code (save that provisions for disabled access and escape from fire must comply "as nearly as is reasonably practicable"). This is a huge loophole and contrary to the approach taken by a number of European States. Various mechanisms are used in Europe to ensure that existing buildings become part of the sustainability equation and meet regulation standards. Most States require specified alterations to comply with the operative regulations. In Denmark and the Netherlands, buildings have to reach an agreed energy efficiency rating at point of sale and this must be included in the sales information. Germany, Sweden and Norway have various forms of building audits that must be conducted at set intervals (Halliday, 2004). Most pertinently, the German Government has announced a 20-year programme to bring all pre-1978 housing stock up to contemporary energy standards and has provided a significant budget to achieve this end (House of Commons, 2006). Whilst any attempt to improve the existing building stock may seem daunting, a raft of measures are applied in Europe; New Zealand should analyse such to gauge efficacy and follow suit.

## References:

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