



Stakeholder Consultation Policy



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1 Introduction

1.1 About NABERS

The National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS) is a suite of building rating tools that measure the environmental performance of commercial buildings and tenancies. NABERS can be used to measure energy efficiency, emissions intensity, water usage, waste management and indoor environment quality. It can measure and rate the environmental performance of commercial offices, shopping centres, hotels, data centres and homes.

The NABERS program is delivered nationally by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (the NABERS National Administrator) under the guidance of the Commonwealth, State and Territory government membership of the NABERS National Steering Committee. The key industry advisory body is the NABERS Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The full NABERS team is an extensive group of government and industry professionals working together to develop, direct and deliver NABERS ratings to market.

1.2 NABERS values

NABERS is committed to the values of integrity, quality, public service, leadership and collaboration.

NABERS places high importance on working closely with stakeholders to ensure that the tools and their associated processes keep up with market trends and meet the program objectives of technical accuracy and robustness and the needs of the commercial operating environment.

1.3 Purpose of the NABERS Consultation Policy

With such a large and diverse network of individuals and organisations invested in the success of NABERS, effective stakeholder consultation is central to NABERS operations.

NABERS regularly consults with members of the NABERS Stakeholder Advisory Committee, NABERS Auditors and Assessors and other targeted industry representatives, as well as conducting full public consultations. Expert industry representatives also volunteer to participate in NABERS Technical Working Groups to provide feedback and input into new NABERS tool development and tool reviews.

This type of formal industry consultation helps NABERS to access industry knowledge and views on proposals for new tools, enhancements to existing tools and specific technical issues or new strategic directions. This knowledge is used to make program improvements and increase stakeholder satisfaction. Formal consultation also provides stakeholders with a pathway to contribute as experts in their field and participate in the decision-making process.

This Consultation Policy sets out the core principles that underpin NABERS consultations. It has been developed to inform stakeholders about the NABERS approach to obtaining stakeholder feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions and increase understanding of the NABERS consultation process.

2 Consultation principles

The NABERS stakeholder consultation policy is underpinned by the following consultation principles:

1. Clarity of communication

The purpose, process and scope of consultations are clearly communicated to participants.

2. Timeliness

Consultation activities have clear timeframes that allow participants reasonable time to prepare and provide input.

3. Informing and listening to NABERS program delivery partners

NABERS Assessors and Auditors are direct partners in the delivery of NABERS ratings to market and consultation processes are structured to prioritise their early input.

4. Informing and listening to NABERS advisory groups

The views of NABERS Stakeholder Advisory Committee and Technical Working Groups are highly valued and consultation processes are structured to ensure their early input.

5. Relevance of consultation issue to stakeholder groups

Targeted consultations are conducted with NABERS stakeholders that are either impacted by the issue or have appropriate technical or industry expertise. Full public consultation occurs when the issue is strategically significant or impacts on wider stakeholder groups.

6. Relevance of consultation method to stakeholder groups

Consultation methods used are those that best support the consultation purpose, scope and types of participating stakeholder groups.

7. Transparent decision-making

Stakeholder input is incorporated into final decisions in consideration of the extent to which it aligns with core NABERS program principles of:

- Equity - does not unfairly advantage or disadvantage particular NABERS customers.
- Environmental benefit - maintains or improves the environmental benefit delivered by NABERS tools.
- Technical accuracy - maintains or improves the robustness and reliability of NABERS tools.
- Market acceptance - reflects the needs of the broader representative industry and customer base.
- Program purpose - maintains NABERS as a benchmark of building environmental performance.

8. Procedural certainty

All consultations are guided by a Consultation Plan that identifies the target participants, timeframes, submission requirements, who is responsible for the management of the process, and where responsibility for the final decision will lie.

9. Accountability

NABERS releases final decisions and clearly communicates how stakeholder input was considered in the decision making process.

3 Consultation framework

3.1 NABERS stakeholder groups

Key stakeholders of the NABERS program and rating tools include:

- The NABERS Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- NABERS Assessors, Auditors, Supervisors and Trainers
- NABERS Technical Working Groups
- Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government agencies
- Industry associations and representative groups
- NABERS office, hotels, shopping centres and data centres customers, including property owners, investment groups and tenants
- The Commercial Building Disclosure Program
- Other partner programs
- Educational institutions
- The general public.

These stakeholders have varying levels of engagement and interest in the technical and strategic aspects of the NABERS program, so are consulted in different ways at different times depending on the nature of the issue. This approach aims to ensure that consultations are relevant to the participating stakeholders and appropriate to the issue at hand. It allows NABERS to develop program changes with early input from those who are most engaged in the delivery and overall direction of the program, so that the technical robustness of proposals and their alignment with program principles have been properly considered before progressing to wider consultation.

3.2 Program issues for consultation

NABERS consults on a range of issues relating to keeping the suite of NABERS environmental performance rating tools updated and relevant, from minor technical amendments that affect a small number of buildings through to full tool reviews with wide-ranging strategic implications for many stakeholders. The types of amendments to the program that are consulted on include:

- Minor updates to rules in response to improved methods or new technologies and building occupancy practices that are technical or operational in nature.
- Moderate-level updates to rules and tools that have a wider impact on building ratings and may affect a wider range of customers or industry sectors. These can have both technical and strategic implications.
- Major updates to rules and tools that have a significant impact on building ratings, customers and industry.
- Proposals to develop new tools.
- Reviews of existing tools.
- Continuous improvements to NABERS services, products, processes and the strategic direction of the program.

3.3 Consultation types

The types of consultation that are undertaken on these issues fall into four broad categories:

1. Information gathering

NABERS routinely seeks advice or data from its stakeholders to ascertain the extent and significance of program issues.

2. Technical review

Consultation for the purposes of technical review seeks advice from technical experts and affected stakeholders to ensure the technical robustness of proposed tool developments and enhancements.

3. Strategic review

Consultation is undertaken to assess the strategic implications of technical enhancements or changes to program operations, as well as providing an avenue to collaborate with industry on the strategic direction of the program.

4. Public Consultation

Public consultation is triggered when a technical or other program issue is strategically significant and impacts on wider stakeholder groups or sectors.

3.4 Consultation triggers

Consultations may be triggered when the NABERS National Administrator becomes aware of a potential area for improvement to the program. Consultations can be triggered by:

- National Administrator proactive improvements in response to:
 - new methods, technologies and building occupancy practices
 - internal analysis of the results of Level 1 and Level 2 Audits
 - low market uptake of a tool
 - development of other new tools that have implications for existing tools.
- Industry feedback about areas of the program that may need improvement provided through:
 - Ruling Requests,
 - New Tool Requests,
 - Assessor technical enquiries,
 - industry reviews,
 - the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and other forums.

The National Administrator assesses any proposals to develop new NABERS tools or make enhancements to existing tools against key criteria in the New Tools Assessment Framework and the Tool Review Assessment Framework to ensure the proposals meet program objectives before progressing to consultation.

TABLE 1 – Consultation types

Purpose of consultation	Typical trigger for consultation	Stakeholder groups consulted	Example scenario
1. Information Gathering			
To inform a full understanding of the extent of an issue in the marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessor enquiry • Formal Ruling request • Other direct stakeholder enquiry • New methods, technologies and building occupancy practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NABERS Assessors • NABERS Auditors • NABERS Customers • Technical Working Group • Stakeholder Advisory Committee 	<i>An Assessor wants to use the thermal exclusion methodology to exclude server room heating from an office building rating. Consulted groups are asked to provide information on how often centralised chilled water is provided to tenant server rooms. This information determines how NABERS proceeds with the Ruling process, which may also include further consultation.</i>
2. Technical Review			
To ensure the technical robustness of NABERS tool enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessor enquiry • Formal Ruling request • Other direct stakeholder enquiry • Internal analysis and review • New methods, technologies and building occupancy practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NABERS Auditors • NABERS Assessors • Technical Working Groups • NABERS Customers • Targeted NABERS stakeholders • Subject matter experts • National Steering Committee 	<i>A minor technical issue with a NABERS tool is identified as impacting the process of rating particular building configurations. The National Administrator seeks expert advice on the technical options and develops a discussion paper that is circulated to NABERS Auditors for early feedback. A second iteration of the paper is then circulated to Assessors. Once Assessor feedback is incorporated, a draft Ruling is created.</i>
To develop and enhance tools to meet the needs of industry and the market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An internal or external proposal for a new tool or tool enhancement has been assessed positively against the New Tool or Tool Enhancement Assessment Framework and has been added to the NABERS Tool Review and Development Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Working Group • Tool proponents • Targeted NABERS stakeholders • National Steering Committee • Stakeholder Advisory Committee 	<i>The National Administrator gathers information and identifies barriers to the widespread uptake of an existing tool that are significant enough to warrant a review of the tool. Advice is sought from the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and a call for expressions of interest is released to form a technical working group. The group provides in-depth analysis of the market and the building characteristics and advice on how the tool can be enhanced.</i>

Purpose of consultation	Typical trigger for consultation	Stakeholder groups consulted	Example scenario
3. Strategic Review			
To identify and address the strategic implications of technical tool enhancements and developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessor enquiry • Ruling request • Stakeholder Advisory Committee advice • Other direct stakeholder enquiry • Internal analysis and review • Issue is raised in the public domain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NABERS Auditors & Assessors • Technical Working Groups • NABERS Customers • Stakeholder Advisory Committee members • Subject matter experts • National Steering Committee • Commercial Building Disclosure Program 	<i>A Ruling request has been received that has may affect a number of ratings for a specific building type. A draft Ruling is created and it is put forward first to NABERS Auditors for technical feedback. Once this feedback is incorporated it is then circulated to Assessors, the relevant TAG, affected customers or other relevant stakeholders, the NSC and the SAC. This feedback is reflected in the final Ruling.</i>
To identify and address the industry implications of strategic program improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Administrator proactive developments • Stakeholder Advisory Committee advice • Industry reviews • Issue is raised in the public domain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NABERS Assessors • Technical Working Groups • Stakeholder Advisory Committee members • National Steering Committee 	<i>NABERS would like to introduce a new pricing discount structure to incentivise uptake of a new rating tool. The draft proposal is circulated to NABERS Assessors for comment, advice is sought from the relevant TAC and the SAC and a proposal is developed for Steering Committee approval.</i>
To involve stakeholders and collaboratively develop the strategic direction of the NABERS program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Administrator proactive developments • Stakeholder Advisory Committee advice • Industry reviews • Issue is raised in the public domain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder Advisory Committee members • Commercial Building Disclosure Program • Targeted NABERS customers and stakeholders • National Steering Committee members 	<i>The NABERS program convenes workshops with industry and government stakeholders to identify the key themes and areas for action in its new Strategic Plan. The draft Plan is circulated to stakeholders for comment and the final plan is reviewed annually in response to any feedback from industry received over the year.</i>
4. Public Consultation			
To identify and address the broader business impacts of NABERS tool amendments and developments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes from previous consultations • Stakeholder Advisory Committee advice • Implementation or completion of a major tool review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders & the public 	<i>A major tool review has been completed by the NABERS National Administrator and the Technical Working Group. The recommended changes to the tool are put to all stakeholders and the public for comment.</i>

3.5 Consultation materials

The National Administrator may employ a range of consultation materials depending on the complexity of the issue and the level of consensus between stakeholder groups. These include:

- *Options papers and Discussion papers*
NABERS has identified a number of suitable solutions and is seeking industry feedback on the preferred option.
- *Fully developed proposals and Draft Rulings*
NABERS has developed a clear position or Ruling and is seeking industry feedback on any potential issues with a proposal.
- *Feedback on existing documents*
Open feedback is sought on Rules or other existing program documents.
- *Questionnaires*
NABERS has identified areas of service delivery or program operation that it is seeking feedback on through customer or industry surveys.

3.6 Consultation methods

NABERS seeks input from stakeholders using a range of consultation methods that can be classified as either *direct feedback* or *facilitated discussion*.

Direct feedback is invited by releasing a paper, proposal or questionnaire through various forums (see 4.5) for direct feedback from participants, typically in the form of written submissions. Feedback may also be provided verbally in person. The NABERS response is provided in writing either directly to the individual, as a public report following analysis of the collective feedback, or verbally at minuted meetings. The NABERS response may be provided at the closure of the consultation period ahead of the final decision or may be released alongside the final decision, depending on the timeframe for the overall consultation and whether further feedback is sought.

Facilitated discussion takes place in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and Technical Working Groups, as well as other specially convened forums. Summary of the input is provided through the meeting minutes, and the NABERS response is typically provided alongside the final decision unless an alternative is agreed within the forum.

Facilitated discussion also takes place through the NABERS on line discussion forum for specific stakeholder groups, where the participants are clearly identified and encouraged to discuss the consultation issue amongst themselves. The NABERS response is posted on the forum during and at the conclusion of the consultation period and provided alongside the final decision.

3.7 Consultation forums and timeframes

NABERS uses a range of forums for stakeholder consultation depending on the engagement needs of participants, the stage of the consultation and the complexity of the consultation issue.

3.7.1 Stakeholder Advisory Committee meetings

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) is comprised of key industry representatives and provides strategic advice and industry feedback on the direction and delivery of the NABERS program.

Agenda papers are provided as per the SAC Terms of Reference and the timeframe for input is typically within the SAC meetings, although longer timeframes on specific issues can be agreed by SAC members and the National Steering Committee.

3.7.2 Technical Working Groups

NABERS routinely convenes independent Technical Working Groups to guide the development of new rating tools, reviews of existing tools or to provide ongoing oversight and advice for existing tools. Members are either directly invited or appointed through an Expression of Interest and the terms of reference outlines the role, purpose and operating procedures. There are typically 15-20 members in each Group.

Agenda papers are provided as per the Terms of Reference and the timeframe for input is typically within the meetings, but longer timeframes on specific issues can be agreed by members and the National Administrator.

3.7.3 Email invitation

For targeted stakeholder consultations NABERS will typically use direct contact through email to provide consultation papers and invite stakeholders to participate in the consultation process. This method invites formal written feedback and allows for up to eight weeks for submissions depending on the scope of the consultation.

3.7.4 Website

Full public consultations will be hosted on the NABERS website with consultation papers and clear process for submissions. This method invites formal written feedback and requires a period of dissemination to interested stakeholders and so allows for a standard eight week timeframe for submissions.

3.7.5 Online forums

The NABERS online stakeholder engagement platform www.nabershavemyoursay.com.au allows the National Administrator to consult directly with specific stakeholder groups – Auditors, Assessors, Technical Working Groups and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The platform can also be used to provide additional support for public consultations through the public page.

The platform includes a resource library, a 'key dates' function, 'smart forums' that can be used to discuss specific topics, a newsfeed, an FAQ section and a guest book where participants can propose topics for discussion. Users must register to comment on the forums and anonymous comments will not be permitted.

This method invites informal written feedback in an open discussion-style format and is used to quickly canvass views and identify any major issues with the proposals under consultation. When consulting with program delivery partners, this method allows for a shorter two to four week timeframe for participation. Public consultations are open for the standard eight week period.

3.7.6 Facilitated forums

NABERS also holds facilitated forums for specific groups, such as customers or Assessors, which achieve a number of program goals, from discussing a range of topical issues to providing thought leadership with the introduction of guest speakers to focusing on a specific proposal for consultation. The timeframe for input is typically within the forum, but additional forums or opportunities to provide post forum feedback can be arranged upon request.

3.7.7 Surveys

This method includes standardised surveys that are repeated regularly to track improvements as well as other surveys seeking feedback on specific aspects of NABERS service delivery and tools. Timeframes for surveys will be up to eight weeks to allow for dissemination amongst targeted NABERS industry and customers.

Table 2: Summary of Consultation Methods

Note: Any stakeholder and Industry consultation effort will be open for eight weeks regardless of the type of consultation method used.

Method	Consultation materials	Timeframes	Type
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options papers • Fully developed proposals • Draft Rulings • Technical documents for comment • Links to online surveys 	Open for up to eight weeks.	Direct feedback
Website with email promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options papers • Fully developed proposals • Technical documents for comment • Draft Rulings 	Open for eight weeks.	Direct feedback
Online forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options papers • Fully developed proposals • Draft Rulings • FAQs • Technical documents for comment • User-generated content 	Open for two - four weeks.	Facilitated discussion Direct feedback can also be provided through this forum
Online surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire 	Open for up to eight weeks depending on scope	Direct feedback
Technical Working Group and Stakeholder Advisory Committee meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda papers • Discussion papers • Options papers • Fully developed proposals • Draft Rulings 	Agenda papers are provided as per the Terms of Reference and feedback typically provided at the meeting.	Facilitated discussion
Facilitated forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations • Options papers • Fully developed proposals • Draft Rulings 	Consultation papers are provided at least two weeks before the forum, and feedback typically provided at the forum	Facilitated discussion

3.8 Consultation roles and responsibilities

3.8.1 National Administrator

The National Administrator is responsible for:

- determining the appropriate level and method of consultation
- drafting discussion papers and Rulings in consultation with stakeholder groups
- reviewing input and making decisions on minor operational amendments and tool enhancements
- submitting proposals for consultation on moderate-level and major amendments to the National Steering Committee
- promoting consultations
- responding to queries from participants within forty eight hours
- managing content and moderating online forums
- events management for facilitated forums
- overseeing the selection process and operation of technical working groups.
- reviewing and providing reports on all consultations and subsequent decisions.

3.8.2 National Steering Committee

The National Steering Committee is responsible for:

- advising on proposals and materials for targeted consultations
- approving proposals and materials for public consultation
- making decisions on moderate-level and major amendments, strategic directions and program priorities following consultation.

3.8.3 Stakeholder Advisory Committee

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee is responsible for:

- advising on the effectiveness and suitability of consultation processes
- providing the industry view and advice on key issues ahead of National Steering Committee decisions.

3.9 Consultation plan

Each consultation conducted by NABERS is guided by a Consultation Plan. This Plan identifies:

- the objectives of the consultation
- the project management steps, tasks and responsibilities
- the relevant stakeholder groups and likely number of consultation stages and total consultation period
- the consultation types and methods
- risks and risk mitigation strategies
- feedback mechanisms and post-consultation strategies