

What consumers want

In mid 2005, ecoSAVVY undertook sustainable housing market research of random consumers attending the Townsville Home and Garden Show.

The results provide some insight into the understanding, wants and preferences of housing consumers in the North.

Key findings of the research follow.

Consumers rank a healthy home, climate responsive design, quality and price as being of higher importance than the environmental friendliness or size of their home.

When asked about a selection of environmental issues which ranged from littering to global warming the majority of consumers said that they were 'very concerned'.

Around two thirds of consumers are 'very interested' and approximately one third are 'somewhat interested' in finding out more about the majority of areas of sustainable housing identified in the survey. Those questioned were most interested in finding out more about homes that is, from highest priority: 'healthy to live in', 'energy efficient', 'water efficient' 'designed for lifestyle', 'improved in resale value', 'prevent risk of accidents and injuries', 'secure', 'designed for tropical environment', 'cost effectiveness over time' and 'low maintenance'.

Around 75% of consumers intend including in their new home or renovation energy efficient appliances, water efficient fixtures and native plants.

Less than 20% are 'not interested at all' in buying/building a more environmentally friendly or sustainable home.

In a surprising result, that is contrary to popular belief, more than 50% of consumers believe that it is possible to have a house in Townsville that is cool enough to live in without air-conditioning. Further, more than three quarters would prefer to have a home that was cool without air-conditioning.

More than half of those randomly questioned stated they thought that builders or developers did not offer or support home owners in building environmentally friendly or more sustainable houses.

When asked what would help them to buy a more eco-friendly or sustainable home, consumers identified: more information as to why; practical solutions, cost comparisons on the benefits, incentives, and reasonable price or cost comparable.

Key barriers to purchasing were (perception or reality of) higher cost, lack of information about / knowledge, lack of availability, options not well advertised.

Conclusions that might be drawn include:

The majority of consumers are concerned about the environment and so could be expected to respond favourably to builders and homes that could demonstrate reduced environmental impact.

There is a low risk opportunity for the industry to offer a more sustainable housing product by initially offering enhanced climate responsiveness, especially houses that are comfortable in general without air-conditioning and healthy house principles.

There is an untapped market opportunity for builders in the North who can both provide more sustainable homes at a reasonable price and market the benefits well to consumers.