Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Investigation into minimum energy efficiency rental standards

Consultation Paper

April 2026

NSW GOVERNMENT

Acknowledgement of Country

> The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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Overview

The NSW Government is investigating minimum energy efficiency performance standards for rental housing. Renters make up about one-third of households in New South Wales. Rental homes are less energy-efficient than owner-occupied homes by a significant margin. Only 22% of NSW rental homes have insulation, compared with 54% of owner-occupier homes. On renewables, only 10% of NSW renters had rooftop solar in 2024 compared to 38% of home owners (Baker et al. 2025).

Renters spend about 8% more on energy than non-renters of otherwise identical homes and in 2022, this resulted in about $150 per year of additional energy costs for a typical rental home (Best et al. 2022). Renters face significant structural barriers to accessing energy saving technologies and other changes to improve the comfort of their home. They are unable to upgrade or renovate without their landlord's permission, and typically do not have sufficient security of tenure to make such investments worthwhile. Landlords do not directly benefit from the energy bill savings and improved thermal comfort that energy upgrades provide, which can reduce their incentive to make upgrades. This problem exacerbates energy hardship for renters and creates the risk of a 2-speed energy transition, in which home owners can reduce their own bills by investing in energy upgrades, while renters are less able to reduce their energy bills and more vulnerable to energy bill variations.

The poor thermal and energy performance of many rental homes means they are too cold in winter and too hot in summer, having direct consequences for health. Temperature monitoring found that 81% of surveyed homes in temperate Australia were below 18°C, which is the World Health Organization's (WHO) guideline for a safe minimum indoor temperature (WHO 2018), on average across winter (Barlow et al. 2023). 24% of NSW renters are unable to keep comfortably warm in winter, compared with 12% of home owners. In addition, 30% of NSW renters report being unable to keep comfortably cool in summer, compared with 16% of home owners (Baker et al. 2025).

What are minimum energy efficiency rental standards?

Minimum energy efficiency rental standards (MEERS) set out mandatory energy-related requirements that rental homes must meet before they can be leased.

If introduced in New South Wales, MEERS could require energy efficiency features such as a level of insulation or a standard for heating and cooling systems, or set out a minimum energy performance rating that rental homes need to achieve through a combination of features. MEERS would build on the existing minimum rental standards which outline existing requirements for rental homes, including that they must be structurally sound, have adequate ventilation and adequate drainage according to the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* (NSW).

Other jurisdictions have already implemented MEERS to improve the thermal safety and energy efficiency of rental homes, including the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, New Zealand, France and the United Kingdom. Independent evaluations of MEERS in the Australian Capital Territory and the United Kingdom found no observable impact on Australian Capital Territory rental prices (Adams et al. 2024) and no significant effect on rents in the United Kingdom (Fuerst et al. 2025).

How minimum energy efficiency rental standards could help

Introducing MEERS in New South Wales would lift the quality of rental homes and make them safer, more comfortable, healthier and cheaper to run.

Energy saving upgrades are a highly effective way to reduce energy-related cost of living pressures. Upgrades to rental properties, such as ceiling insulation and efficient heating and cooling, could save renters an average of $160 to $750 each year in energy costs (Common Capital unpublished). This will reduce cost of living pressures and improve the health and wellbeing of renters while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving the resilience of rental homes in New South Wales against extreme temperatures.

Investigation into minimum energy efficiency rental standards

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and NSW Fair Trading are investigating adopting MEERS in NSW. The investigation will deliver a report in 2026 to the NSW Government on:

- whether to implement MEERS in NSW
- if so, initial recommendations on preferred standards and implementation models; and
- an analysis of the benefits and costs of implementing MEERS

DCCEEW works to protect the state's environment and heritage. The Energy, Climate Change, and Sustainability Group in the department leads the way on climate change, driving the sustainable transition to a net zero economy powered by affordable, reliable, and clean energy. We collaborate and partner with a range of agencies and stakeholders to deliver outcomes for all of New South Wales. This includes the policies, legislation, and programs that provide incentives and support sustainable choices for our households, businesses, communities, and environment.

NSW Fair Trading are the NSW consumer protection regulator. The NSW Government established the role of the NSW Rental Commissioner within NSW Fair Trading to ensure renters have a strong voice to government and to support work to rebalance and modernise the rental market in New South Wales. A key aspect of this work is strengthening engagement with renters, landlords and the rental sector to better understand systemic issues affecting rental housing quality, affordability and security.

Have your say

How you can provide feedback

You can provide feedback on this consultation paper by either:

- completing a short survey (around 10 to 15 minutes) at www.energy.nsw.gov.au/meers
- emailing your comments to energyefficiency@dcceew.nsw.gov.au

Submissions on this consultation paper close on 31 May 2026.

Publishing submissions

The NSW Government is committed to an open and transparent consultation process. Unless a submission or part of a submission is requested to be confidential, all submissions may be made publicly available on our website. Only your organisation's name will be published. We will remove personal details from submissions made by individuals.

If you would like your written submission, or parts of it, to remain confidential, please clearly state this in your submission. Please be aware that even if you state that you do not wish certain information to be published, there may be legal circumstances that require the NSW Government to release that information, for example under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW).

Why is New South Wales considering minimum energy efficiency rental standards?

Rental homes in New South Wales are less energy efficient than owner-occupied homes (Best et al. 2012). The gap is largest in lower-income and regional areas. Rental homes are also more prone to mould, which can worsen health outcomes. The proportion of households that are renting is increasing (ABS 2025a). Many renters live in apartments and in townhouse complexes (DCJ 2025), which can add strata-related challenges.

Improving energy efficiency is key to addressing rental homes that are too hot in summer and too cold in winter

Inefficient and poorly maintained rental homes lead to worse health outcomes, resulting in higher energy bills and reduced safety and comfort for renters (Daniel et al. 2020). In addition to renters being more likely to live in homes without adequate insulation, 70% of Australian renters have avoided using heating or cooling to save money, compared with 52% of owners (ECA 2025b) – a behavioural adaptation to structural housing deficits that compounds health risks.

Thirty per cent of renters are unable to keep comfortably cool in summer, compared with 16% of home owners (Baker et al. 2025). Heatwaves and hot indoor temperatures are associated with a range of medical conditions, including heart attack, stroke, and arrhythmia. Being exposed to high indoor temperatures has also been linked to increased levels of violence, and exacerbations of mental health conditions (Wylie et al. 2025). Extreme heat is estimated to have been responsible for around 55% of all recorded deaths from natural hazards in Australia since 1900. This is more than the total number of deaths from all other natural hazards combined, including floods, bushfires and cyclones (Coates et al. 2014). Recent research suggests official records may under-report heat-related deaths significantly (Longden 2019).

Higher temperatures also mean higher night-time temperatures, which will likely contribute to heat stress while sleeping and decreased productivity during the day. This is particularly true for built environments that are impacted by the urban heat island effect, such as Western Sydney and many regional cities and towns in New South Wales.

Twenty-four per cent of renters are unable to keep comfortably warm in winter, compared with 12% of home owners (Baker et al. 2025). Cold indoor temperatures have been associated with increased blood pressure, asthma symptoms and poor mental health (WHO 21018). Six per cent of excess deaths in Australia are attributable to cold, double Sweden's rate (Gasparrini et al. 2015).

Making buildings more thermally efficient by improving insulation and draught sealing reduces the impact of increased temperatures and heatwaves. A World Health Organisation (WHO) review also found that taking measures to warm cold houses will have significant health benefits, and a minimum indoor temperature of 18°C is widely accepted (WHO 2018). Seven of 11 studies reviewed by the WHO found living in an insulated home to be associated with improved health (Barnard et al. 2018). Retrofitting insulation reduced new chronic respiratory disease medication starts by 10% and exacerbation treatments by 4% in a New Zealand study (Fyfe et al. 2022). Energy saving upgrades and technologies have significant health benefits (AHIW 2024), especially for children's respiratory health and adults with asthma (Miller and Wilkinson 2016).

Poor building maintenance can also lead to mould, leaks, rising damp (Mészáros et al. 2014), asthma and fungal respiratory infections (Barlow et al. 2023). Of all tenancy complaints received by NSW Fair Trading in 2024–25, 37.5% were for repairs and maintenance, with 19.6% of all repairs and maintenance complaints relating to mould.

Energy efficiency upgrades to rental homes lead to energy bill savings for renters and benefits to the energy system

Renters spend about 8% more on energy than non-renters of otherwise identical homes (Best and Burke 2022). They also have an increased likelihood of energy hardship than owner occupiers across all income groups. Forty-six per cent of NSW households that are renters with an income under $50,000 are vulnerable to, or experience, energy hardship compared to 26% of NSW owner-occupier households with an income under $50,000 (ECA 2025a). Households experiencing energy hardship were defined by Energy Consumers Australia as those that reported spending more than 6% of income on energy bills, very difficult to pay energy bills and financial stress and turning off heating and cooling to save money.

Energy prices in New South Wales have roughly doubled over the past 10 years, exacerbating energy hardship and rental hardship (IPART 2024).

Low vacancy rates and rental affordability limit renters' ability to choose homes that are cheaper to run and more comfortable. In January 2026, Sydney's rental vacancy rate was 1.5% and some regions, for example, the Hunter, had even lower vacancy rates (SQM Research 2026). Consistently low vacancy rates limit renter choice and often force renters to prioritise basic features over potential energy efficiency (Leishman et al. 2025). In addition, median rental prices in New South Wales increased by 35% from $480 per week in 2019, to $650 per week in 2025, a 35% increase (ABS 2025b).

Inaction on housing efficiency could increase grid pressure and push electricity prices higher. Inefficient rental housing lifts overall residential energy use and risks higher costs if consumer energy resources are deployed without coordination (ANU 2022). The Australian Energy Market Commission has noted that an uncoordinated use of consumer energy resources could add up to 11% to electricity prices as demand rises (AEMC 2025).

This is compounded by climate change impacts. Many NSW homes and buildings, including rental homes, were not designed to withstand extreme heat. As a result, air-conditioning systems are used in many homes to control temperature. This puts a large demand on electricity grids to supply enough power and can even lead to power failures, such as the 2017 heatwave power failures across New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Increased energy use results in higher costs and contributes to climate change as greenhouse gases are released when non-renewable energy sources are used.

Introducing minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes in New South Wales would lift the quality of rental homes and make them safer, more comfortable, healthier and cheaper to run.

Renters' experiences with energy efficiency

In 2024, NSW Fair Trading funded the Tenants Union of New South Wales and the Sydney Alliance to host renters' forums to hear renters' experiences and solutions. The forums aimed to amplify renters' voices with decision-makers and build understanding of systemic issues in the NSW rental market. The NSW Rental Commissioner attended all sessions and sought direct feedback on the energy efficiency of rental homes. *Listening to Renters' Voices* is a report from these renters' forums (TUNSW 2025). Some of the key issues raised by renters about the energy efficiency of rental homes in these forums were:

Unaffordable energy bills

Rental homes are generally of poorer quality, meaning they often have lower energy efficiency, which means higher heating and cooling costs.

Homes are too hot in summer and too cold in winter

Many rental properties are old and lack insulation and energy efficient cooling and heating systems.

Persistent mould

Rental properties are often in poor state of repair. Unresolved structural issues or neglected maintenance lead to leaks and mould infestations.

Causing negative health impacts

Living in a poor quality rental property can lead to adverse health impacts on renters and result in long-term illness.

Impacting wellbeing

Living in an unaffordable home with little chance of finding a suitable alternative, combined with fear of eviction and negative health impacts, often leads to the deteriorating wellbeing of renters.

Question 1: What are the biggest issues that renters and landlords face in New South Wales regarding energy efficiency of rental homes? Are there any important issues not listed here that should be included?

Question 2: What information do renters currently have access to about the energy efficiency of a rental home before signing a lease, and how could this be improved?

Energy efficiency experiences shared at renters' forums

Daniel experiences ever-hotter summers with 80 to 100% humidity in a rental home with no air conditioning or fans. To stay cool, he sometimes takes 3 cold showers a night because his type 2 diabetes makes it hard to sleep in such heat.

Daniel said: 'If I had the money, I would move from Sydney.' He believes the government should intervene to get rid of mould as it is so dangerous. In winter, Daniel layers clothes to save money on heating.

– *Daniel, private rental tenant*

Sarah's* family of 4 lives in an affordable terrace house in Newtown. They struggle with mould and the generally poor condition of the property, but they do not request repairs from the landlord. Sarah knows of friends who had been kicked out when they complained about their issues, so she's afraid her family will be kicked out too, if they ask for repairs.

– *Sarah* (name changed)*

Sala* shared that the aircon in her home is not working, but she is scared to ask for repairs because of a possible rental increase or eviction. Instead, she just uses the fan.

– *Sala* (name changed)*

Shyji pays $280 rent a week for a small room in a home she shares with 9 other people. Rent keeps increasing, but as an international student, she is bound by limits on how many hours a week she can work. This housing arrangement has no formal lease, and Shyji feels limited in exercising her rights. The payment for energy usage in the house is also informal, and the landlord charges $100 extra for energy use if the renters use a heater.

– *Shyji, private rental tenant*

Alex's home is in a relatively newly built property. Despite that, it is really cold inside, so you can't have people over. The bathroom is very mouldy due to poor ventilation (there is no window). Inspections feel to him like a judgement of his housekeeping rather than the condition of the property. In his experience, agents don't respond to repair requests as if it is too much of a hassle to do anything.

– *Alex, private rental tenant*

Cathy* has never had a rental with air conditioning. In previous homes, it was too hard to regulate the temperature in winter due to the draft. She wasn't using the blower heater because it was too expensive and didn't heat enough. She bought pedestal fans to help with the summer heat.

– *Cathy* (name changed)*

Question 3: Are some groups of renters disproportionately affected by poor energy efficiency (for example, low-income households, older people, people with disabilities, families with young children, or renters in regional and remote areas)? Please explain.

Question 4: Would you like to share any experiences related to energy efficiency in rental homes with the team conducting this investigation? Please feel free to share any experiences you've had as a renter, landlord, real estate agent, tradesperson or in any other relevant capacity.

Minimum energy efficiency rental standards are already in effect in other jurisdictions

Jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand that have introduced MEERS have implemented feature-based requirements, rather than whole-of-dwelling energy performance standards.

Australian jurisdictions and New Zealand

Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory requires ceiling insulation for rental properties, including social and community housing. Rental homes with no insulation or existing ceiling insulation below an insulation rating (R-value) of R2, the landlord must upgrade it to at least R5.

For safety, a certified installer must install the insulation, and a licensed electrician must complete electrical safety checks first. Exemptions apply where insulation cannot be installed or would not provide a meaningful thermal benefit (for example, some lower-level apartments). If the cost exceeds $10,000, the landlord must complete upgrades up to $10,000, prioritising living areas and bedrooms (ACT Government 2025).

Impact on rents

An independent evaluation of the Australian Capital Territory's MEERS found that they have 'not had any observable impacts on ACT rental prices' (Adams et al. 2024).

Victoria

Minimum standards for rental properties were introduced in 2021 covering basic features such as gas and electrical safety, ventilation, locks, window coverings, toilets, lighting, hot water and fixed heating. From 2023, fixed heaters have been required to meet a 2-star efficiency standard.

From 1 March 2027, new minimum energy efficiency standards will be phased in covering ceiling insulation (in ceiling spaces where no insulation is present), draught proofing, low-flow shower-heads and cooling, as well as end-of-life electrification requirements for heating and hot water (Victorian Government 2025).

The standards apply to private and public housing providers with a range of exemptions provided for situations where compliance is impractical or unreasonably costly, for example in apartment buildings where heating or hot water are supplied by a centralised system. Community housing providers are currently exempt from compliance with the standards pending a review currently underway.

From 25 November 2025, rental providers must ensure their property meets the minimum standards at the time the property is advertised, not just before a renter moves in. It will be an offence for a rental provider or their agent to advertise a property that does not meet the minimum standards (CAV 2026). A number of complementary reforms governing permissible rent increases and no-fault evictions were also introduced in Victoria to minimise the risks of adverse outcomes (Victorian Government 2025).

The new efficiency standards are estimated to deliver benefits to renters of up to $454 per year from the installation of ceiling insulation, $220 per year from installing an efficient electric hot water system, and $215 per year from installing energy efficient electric heating and cooling (DEECA 2024).

Impact on rents

Analysis on the market impacts of these minimum standards is relatively limited and the new minimum energy efficiency standards have not yet come into force. The research that has been conducted so far indicates that the minimum standards that were introduced in 2021 did not increase rents or sales by rental providers in the year after they came into effect (DEECA 2024).

New Zealand

The Healthy Homes Standards were introduced in 2019 to address cold, dampness, drainage, ventilation and draughts in rental properties. The standards have applied to social housing and registered Community Housing Provider properties since July 2024. In a 2025 survey on the standards, 87% of landlords reported their properties fully met the standards. (NZ Government 2025)

Overseas jurisdictions

Several European jurisdictions, along with the United Kingdom, have implemented performance-based rental standards using Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), similar to how the federal Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) star rating system works in Australia with energy performance scored out of 100. EPCs in Europe and the UK are used to rate new and existing dwellings from A (most efficient) to G (least efficient). These include:

United Kingdom

Since April 2020, landlords cannot lease properties with an EPC rating below E unless a valid exemption applies (UK Government 2026a).

Impact on rents and rental supply

Academic research found that the United Kingdon's MEERS have successfully driven improvements in building energy efficiency without inducing rent inflation and have had only a minimal effect on the supply of homes within the private rental sector (Fuerst et al. 2026).

France

Energy Performance Certificates have been mandatory for rented and sold dwellings for many years in France and became legally binding in 2021. From 2025, residential homes with the lowest rating cannot be rented.

Impact on rents and rental supply

In France, rent impacts from energy upgrades are moderated, which allows landlords to recover part of upgrade costs only with tenant agreement and where energy savings exceed the additional charge. This framework supports investment while limiting adverse rent and market impacts (UIPI 2025).

Flanders region of Belgium

Minimum energy performance standards have been in force since January 2023 for all residential buildings. For rental properties, staged targets apply by dwelling type with semi-detached and detached houses having separate targets from apartments and townhouses. Non-compliant rental properties may be deemed unsuitable for occupation and removed from the market. Grants and low-interest loans are available to support compliance and enforcement, including inspections and financial penalties, to ensure the standards are met.

Impact on rents and rental supply

In Belgium, special rules for rent modification in case of renovation are foreseen at regional level. If the work takes longer than 60 days, the tenant is entitled to a rent reduction. The parties may agree that the work will result in an increase in rent if they reach an agreement on this matter at least one month before the work is carried out (UIPI 2025).

Boulder, Colorado

The City of Boulder's SmartRegs program required rental properties to meet minimum energy performance standards by January 2019. The city paired the mandate with EnergySmart, a one-stop shop that supported compliance through rebates, low-cost energy assessments and technical advice. Within a year, Boulder exceeded its targets (1,000 units inspected; 500 compliant), and some owners voluntarily upgraded beyond the minimum requirements (Zimring 2012).

Impacts on rents and rental supply

There were no findings about whether these results had led to higher rental costs for renters.

Across Europe, performance-based rental standards are used to progressively lift minimum rental energy performance, with exemptions typically linked to cost or technical feasibility challenges.

We welcome knowledge sharing on the implementation of MEERS in other jurisdictions.

Question 5: Would you like to share any experiences you've had with minimum energy efficiency rental standards (MEERS) in another jurisdiction where MEERS are already in place? Please feel free to share any experiences you've had as a renter, landlord, real estate agent, tradesperson or in any other relevant capacity.

Question 6: What lessons from other jurisdictions would be most relevant to New South Wales if MEERS were introduced, particularly in relation to exemptions, lead-in times, or support measures?

Question 7: Are there any unintended consequences observed in other jurisdictions with MEERS (for example, impacts on rental supply or rents) that New South Wales should consider?

How minimum energy efficiency rental standards could be applied in New South Wales

Potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards

Below are some possible objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards (MEERS) in New South Wales.

- **Improve the thermal safety** of rental homes to protect renters' health
- **Improve energy affordability** and reduce energy hardship for renters
- **Maintain and improve the quality of rental homes** by upgrading energy efficiency features
- **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions** from rental homes
- **Improve renters' access to energy saving technologies**

Question 8: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what objectives should they have? Please list the objectives in order of priority. You can include the objectives listed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales, or something else.

Benefits and challenges of introducing minimum energy efficiency rental standards

Benefits of introducing MEERS

MEERS are well-suited to address some of the key issues that make rental homes less energy efficient, safe and healthy and could:

- **Maintain and improve the quality of rental homes:** upgrading energy efficiency features, potentially reducing the damaging impacts of damp and mould, decreasing maintenance costs for home owners and potentially increasing their value.
- **Improve the thermal safety and comfort of rental homes:** positive health and wellbeing outcomes are closely linked to the ability to maintain temperatures within the World Health Organisation's safe indoor temperature guideline of 18 to 24°C (WHO 2018).
- **Improve energy affordability and reduce energy hardship for renters:** renters face heightened bill pressures but have limited ability to advocate for energy efficiency upgrades due to market dynamics, making MEERS an appealing option if it does not significantly increase rents or constrict housing supply (DCCEEW n.d.). Rental homes that are more affordable to run will also be more attractive to renters.
- **Level the playing field:** vulnerable cohorts are more likely to rent. MEERS that reduce energy bills without significantly increasing rental costs will result in improved conditions for low-income and other vulnerable groups who are more likely to rent or experience energy poverty.
- **Provide clear direction:** what level of energy efficiency is acceptable. This may mean that renters need to spend less time and money searching for a rental, would not need to accept a rental home with poor thermal performance, and have a mechanism for requesting energy efficiency upgrades to their home from their landlord.
- **MEERS could reduce mould:** insulating homes leads to safer indoor temperatures and drier indoor air, with treated homes seeing reduced relative humidity (Howden-Chapman et al 2007).
- **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions**: rental homes which have an energy-efficient thermal shell and efficient heating, cooling and hot water systems use less energy and produce less greenhouse gas emissions than rental homes with inefficient thermal shells and appliances such as electric resistive heating and hot water systems, or gas hot water systems.
- **Increasing renters' access to the benefits of the energy transition by improving their access to energy saving technologies:** technologies could include insulation and energy efficient heating, cooling and hot water systems which have significant health and energy saving benefits. This would be significant as renters constitute a third of all households in New South Wales and the proportion of households that are renting is growing.

Question 9: What are likely to be the main benefits and impacts of introducing MEERS?

Challenges of introducing MEERS

While MEERS may address some structural issues, there are potential challenges that government needs to consider. These challenges are especially acute for vulnerable groups such as renters with disabilities or mental illness, on low incomes, and those experiencing domestic and family violence.

Table 1: Potential challenges, mitigations and considerations for introducing MEERS

Potential challenges	Potential mitigations and considerations
• **Tailoring solutions to context and climate:** Minimum standards set a 'floor' for thermal performance or comfort, but this will have varying levels of impact depending on factors such as the building type or climate zone. Setting a standard that works for all climate zones will require careful consideration of context. Homes in hot climate zones will generally benefit more from energy-efficient cooling systems compared to homes in colder climate zones which will generally benefit more from insulation and efficient heating systems. Poorly specified insulation and draught sealing requirements could worsen mould in many regions if they fail to ensure adequate ventilation.	• Consider whether any variations or exemptions to certain standards may be appropriate, based on factors such as building type, climate zone etc. • Consider what ventilation and other requirements are needed to minimise and reduce mould so that MEERS does not worsen the impacts of mould in rental homes.
• **Increased rental costs:** Renters are sensitive to the potential trade-offs they may face if MEERS are introduced, such as rent increases or reduced availability of rental homes.	• Consider financial impacts of potential implementation models for MEERS to ensure renters are better off overall – including both rental and energy costs - if MEERS were introduced. • Consider financial and other support mechanisms to landlords to reduce the chance of their passing on costs of upgrades to renters. • Consider whether there should be a cap on the costs of energy upgrades to rental homes as there is in the ACT and the UK.
• **Renters are reluctant to ask landlords for upgrades:** Studies have found that many renters in poor housing conditions are reluctant to ask their landlords for energy efficiency upgrades because they fear this might lead to a rent increase or eviction (Chandrashekeran et al. 2023). While MEERS would take the pressure off renters to ask for upgrades, or may provide a basis for	• If MEERS were to be introduced, consider what types of compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms should be introduced to ensure they are effective and workable, especially for renters living in poor housing conditions.

some renters to ask, this is contingent on effective compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.	
• **Ensuring appropriate education, support, compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms** are available, effective and workable without being overly bureaucratic or burdensome.	• If MEERS were to be introduced, consider what types of education and support processes should be provided before, during and after the introduction of MEERS to key stakeholders including renters, landlords, real estate agents and installers • Consider what types of compliance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms should be introduced to ensure they are effective and workable. • Consider whether any existing standards and processes could be utilised or updated to minimise compliance monitoring and enforcement burdens.
• **Reduced supply of rental homes:** landlords may take their properties off the long-term rental market if they cannot afford to implement or finance the required energy upgrades, and this is potentially more likely for lower-cost rental homes, in areas with high vacancy rates, in regional areas and for sub-market housing that can face marginal financial viability (e.g., social and affordable housing, supported accommodation, crisis accommodation).	• Consider whether there should be a cap on the costs of energy upgrades to rental homes as there is in the ACT and the UK. • Consider whether governments (NSW and Australian) or the private sector could provide or subsidise financing schemes that minimise the upfront costs of MEERS to landlords. • Ensure a phased introduction to MEERS to give landlords plenty of time to get properties up to standard. • Consider what types of rental properties are covered by MEERS. • Consider whether MEERS should apply to short-term rentals, e.g., rooms and houses rented out on Airbnb, Stayz etc. • Consider whether there should be variations in how MEERS applies to sub-market housing
• **Energy upgrade technologies need to be readily available:** The ability for landlords to make energy upgrades requires that the necessary technologies are commercially available at a range of prices and that there are enough suitable installers and builders available to install these technologies across NSW.	• Work closely with industry to ensure that enough suitable installers could be trained and ready to install these technologies across NSW if MEERS were to come into effect.

Question 10: Do you support the introduction of MEERS for rental homes in New South Wales? Why or why not?

Question 11: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges of introducing MEERS in houses?

Question 12: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges of introducing MEERS in apartments and other types of strata developments?

Question 13: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges and opportunities of introducing MEERS in social and community rental housing, affordable housing, boarding houses, build-to-rent housing, student accommodation, retirement villages and other rental accommodation?

Question 14: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, do you think they should be applied consistently across New South Wales, or should they vary, for example by building type, climate zone or in some other way? For example, if MEERS requires ceiling insulation: should the insulation requirements in hot, humid climate zones such as the far North Coast be the same as in cooler climate zones such as the Monaro or the Southern Highlands?

Question 15: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, how could potential impacts on rents be minimised to ensure renters are better off overall, including both rental and energy costs?

Question 16: Please indicate if you think there should be variations in how MEERS applies to certain home types, and if so, how and why. For guidance, please think about the following home types:

- Apartments
- Houses and 'granny flats'
- Townhouses and villas
- Affordable housing
- Boarding houses
- Build-to-rent housing
- Key worker accommodation
- Seniors rental accommodation (e.g., retirement villages)
- Short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb, Stayz)
- Social and community housing
- Student accommodation
- Sub-market housing (e.g., crisis accommodation)

Question 17: If MEERS were introduced, what are likely to be the major challenges for landlords to implement and comply with MEERS, and how could these challenges be minimised?

Question 18: If MEERS were introduced, what are likely to be the major challenges for real estate agents to implement and comply with MEERS, and how could these challenges be minimised?

Question 19: If MEERS were introduced, how might they change behaviour in the rental market – for example, in property maintenance, upgrades or lease negotiations?

Question 20: If MEERS were introduced:

- How should they interact with existing rental minimum standards in New South Wales?
- In your view, should energy efficiency requirements be considered as part of broader rental minimum standards over time, or remain a distinct set of requirements? Please explain why.

Question 21: What would be a fair and effective approach to compliance monitoring for MEERS, if they were introduced?

Question 22: What role should education and support play compared with enforcement, particularly during any transition period?

Potential implementation models for minimum energy efficiency rental standards

The scope of the NSW Government's investigation into MEERS includes exploring potential implementation models. This consultation is seeking feedback on 3 potential models for MEERS. Table 2 and Table 3 describe the expected advantages and disadvantages of each model.

Option 1: Features approach

This type of approach has been adopted in the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and New Zealand and would introduce standards for specific energy efficiency features. It could require rental homes to have installed:

- one or more energy efficiency features, either by a certain year or before a new lease is signed
- a new efficient system (for example, heat pump hot water system) only when an old, inefficient system (for example, electric storage hot water system) reaches the end of its life and needs replacing.

This option would deliver consistency across rental homes. Examples of features that other jurisdictions have required, or are requiring soon, include insulation, draught proofing, reverse cycle air conditioning systems, and heat pump hot water systems.

Option 2: Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach

The Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) rates Australian homes' energy performance on a 0–100 scale, reflecting thermal performance, major household energy use and on-site generation/storage (solar and batteries). Higher scores mean lower running costs and emissions. This model would require rental homes to achieve a minimum NatHERS for Existing Homes rating (NatHERS 2026) by a set year or from a specified point in the lease process (e.g., advertising or signing a new tenancy). It offers flexibility in how owners meet the rating and aligns with the planned implementation of home energy disclosure at the point of sale or lease, another key action under the NSW Consumer Energy Strategy. Similar performance-based standards using Energy Performance Certificates operate in the United Kingdom and much of Europe.

Option 3: Multiple pathways

This type of approach could provide multiple compliance pathways as options for landlords to meet minimum energy standards, including faster pathways for homes which are already certified to have higher levels of energy efficiency under BASIX or Passive House standards. Under an approach like this, homes would only need to meet one of the following requirements to be compliant:

- BASIX (Building Sustainability Index) standards cover water, thermal performance and energy use. All new homes built in New South Wales since 1 July 2004 are required to comply with BASIX and issued with BASIX certificates.
- Passive House is a more stringent energy performance standard developed in Europe which some NSW home owners and builders have voluntarily chosen to comply with (Australian Government 2026).
- Features approach
- Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach

Table 2: Advantages of 3 potential implementation models for MEERS

Option 1: Features approach	Option 2: Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach	Option 3: Multiple pathways
• Similar 'features checklist' approach to the water efficiency measures for rental properties in New South Wales which many landlords, real estate professionals and renters are familiar with. • Aligned with the features approach used for MEERS in the ACT and Victoria. • Likely to be simpler and easier to understand for renters, landlords and real estate agents than other options as it's based on property features. • Would potentially mean easier compliance and enforcement than Options 2 and 3.	• Can enable more tailored and cost-effective energy efficiency solutions specific to the home, that consider context, climate, construction, etc. • Likely to provide flexibility for landlords in the energy upgrades they can choose from. This flexibility may reduce costs by enabling upgrades to be selected that are better suited to the home or that overcome any pressures in particular trades. • The Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach is being used in the voluntary NSW home energy ratings disclosure scheme, which will become mandatory, so leveraging that approach will likely reduce administrative burden over time • As the NatHERS assessment is conducted by an independent accredited assessor, it can support a more efficient compliance process for MEERS.	• Recognising existing energy efficiency standards such as BASIX, Passive House and NatHERS if it was mandated, would reduce red tape by exempting a reasonable percentage of efficient rental homes and help ensure these standards are cheaper to implement and administer. • Giving landlords choice to use either the features approach or the Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach provides greater flexibility and can support greater cost effectiveness of MEERS due to reduced administrative burden. It will be particularly efficient if homes have a mandatory disclosure rating that can be used for the purposes of MEERS. • May provide extra flexibility in the energy upgrades landlords can choose from to improve the energy efficiency of rental homes.

Table 3: Disadvantages of 3 potential implementation models for MEERS

Option 1: Features approach	Option 2: Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach	Option 3: Multiple pathways
• Does not leverage the NatHERS approach used in the NSW Home Energy Ratings disclosure scheme. This may increase administrative burden for landlords and real estate agents. • Some types of energy upgrades, for example, draught proofing, do not currently have a trade/ certification for suitably qualified installers (Wilmot et al 2025). • Workforce: some energy efficiency upgrades may require additional installers to be trained and certified to install them before MEERS could require them. • It would require an exemptions system to be developed for instances where it's not feasible or economic to install certain features in certain homes.	• Worse-performing homes may need to have multiple upgrades to reach a certain rating, which may make this approach more expensive for lower socio-economic landlords. • Cost of obtaining ratings: the rating can only be produced by an accredited NatHERS assessor, so this option will have an initial cost outlay before any upgrades are made. • Workforce: would require a significant number of additional assessors to be trained and accredited to deliver ratings before MEERS based on NatHERS could begin. This could lead to long implementation lead times. • Due to the greater flexibility of this option, the upgrades selected could result in a less-than-ideal outcome. For example, landlords could choose to install a lot of solar and not improve thermal performance (insulation).	• Multiple compliance pathways may increase complexity of the scheme and may make it harder to implement, communicate and understand for key stakeholders including renters, landlords and real estate agents. • If this implementation model is selected, the mitigation is to ensure that any exemptions for rental homes which have already been certified as efficient, for example, under BASIX, are clearly communicated. This is so that key stakeholders, especially landlords, understand the compliance pathways that are available and the requirements for each compliance pathway.

Question 23: Which of the potential implementation models do you think would be most effective, practical and workable? Please also explain why.

- Option 1: Features approach
- Option 2: Home Energy Rating (NatHERS) approach
- Option 3: Multiple pathways

Question 24: Do you have any comments on the advantages and disadvantages for each model? Are there any additional advantages or disadvantages that should be considered?

Question 25: Are there any other alternatives or hybrid implementation models that would help achieve the objectives listed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales?

Question 26: What types of support (financial, technical or regulatory) would most assist landlords, property managers and renters to improve the energy efficiency of their rental properties?

Complementary policies to improve the energy efficiency and thermal safety of NSW homes

The NSW Government is currently undertaking, or has committed to, several initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of housing in the state. Many of these form part of the NSW Consumer Energy Strategy, which was designed as a package of measures that work together to address the reliability, environmental sustainability and affordability of the energy system for consumers. The Strategy includes technical, financial and regulatory measures to tackle household energy efficiency from different angles, and targets different household types that face barriers to accessing energy saving upgrades.

Measures that will work to complement potential MEERS include:

- **Disclosure of home energy ratings** – under the Consumer Energy Strategy, the NSW Government will implement a program introducing simple energy rating information at the point of sale and/or lease of a residential home. This program will inform buyers and renters about the energy performance of a home and its estimated energy usage, and may incentivise landlords to upgrade rental homes with low ratings.
- **Home Energy Saver Program** – the Strategy committed $238.9 million over 4 years to a new program to offer targeted financial incentives to home owners to conduct energy saving upgrades to their homes. The program is still in the design phase, but the size of the program may see large numbers of upgrades to NSW homes.
- **Energy Savings Scheme (ESS) and Peak Demand Reduction Scheme (PDRS)** – the existing ESS and PDRS programs offer discounts on energy saving technologies including air conditioners, heat pump water heaters, batteries and virtual power plants, for eligible households and businesses in New South Wales. All home owners, including landlords, are eligible to apply, reducing cost barriers to landlords to conduct these types of upgrades.
- **Solar for Apartment Residents** –the Australian and NSW governments are currently delivering a $30 million program as part of the Strategy to provide grants to eligible multi-unit buildings to install rooftop solar panels. Involvement in this program will ensure tenants in strata buildings can access the benefits of solar.
- **Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative (SHEPI)** – the NSW and Australian governments are working with the social housing sector to implement a $175 million program to upgrade approximately 24,000 social housing homes by June 2027 to improve liveability and save social housing tenants money.

NSW residents can also access the national **Household Energy Upgrades Fund** which offers discounted loans through financial institutions to conduct energy saving upgrades.

These actions interrelate and complement each other, addressing cost barriers to upgrades for people in freestanding homes, apartments, and social housing. Most of these programs are not specifically targeted at renters although renters could benefit from any of them.

As part of the consultation for the Consumer Energy Strategy, we heard from many stakeholders that, MEERS would be required in order to adequately target the energy efficiency of rental housing

stock specifically. This is generally supported by evidence about landlord motivation, which suggests the most effective way to improve rental energy efficiency is to combine a suite of enforceable regulatory requirements (to set floors) with financial incentives (to reduce cost barriers) and information provision (UK Government 2026b).

Question 27: Are there any policy alternatives that you believe the NSW Government should consider on top of, or instead of, MEERS that would achieve the same objectives as those proposed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales?

Appendix 1: Summary of questions

Question 1: What are the biggest issues that renters and landlords face in New South Wales regarding energy efficiency of rental homes? Are there any important issues not included in the list in **Error! Reference source not found.** that should be included?

Question 2: What information do renters currently have access to about the energy efficiency of a rental home before signing a lease, and how could this be improved?

Question 3: Are some groups of renters disproportionately affected by poor energy efficiency (for example, low-income households, older people, people with disabilities, families with young children, or renters in regional and remote areas)? Please explain.

Question 4: Would you like to share any experiences related to energy efficiency in rental homes with the team conducting this investigation? Please feel free to share any experiences you've had as a renter, landlord, real estate agent, tradesperson or in any other relevant capacity.

Question 5: Would you like to share any experiences you've had with minimum energy efficiency rental standards (MEERS) in another jurisdiction where MEERS are already in place? Please feel free to share any experiences you've had as a renter, landlord, real estate agent, tradesperson or in any other relevant capacity.

Question 6: What lessons from other jurisdictions would be most relevant to New South Wales if MEERS were introduced, particularly in relation to exemptions, lead-in times, or support measures?

Question 7: Are there any unintended consequences observed in other jurisdictions with MEERS (for example, impacts on rental supply or rents) that New South Wales should consider?

Question 8: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what objectives should they have? Please list the objectives in order of priority. You can include the objectives listed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales, or something else.

Question 9: What are likely to be the main benefits and impacts of introducing MEERS?

Question 10: Do you support the introduction of MEERS for rental homes in New South Wales? Why or why not?

Question11: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges of introducing MEERS in houses?

Question 12: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges of introducing MEERS in apartments and other types of strata developments?

Question 13: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, what are likely to be the main challenges and opportunities of introducing MEERS in social and community rental housing, affordable housing, boarding houses, build-to-rent housing, student accommodation, and other rental accommodation?

Question 14: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, do you think they should be applied consistently across New South Wales or vary, for example by building type or climate zone or in some other way? For example, if MEERS requires ceiling insulation: should the requirements in hot, humid climate zones such as the North Coast be the same as cool climate zones, for example, the Southern Highlands?

Question 15: If MEERS were introduced in New South Wales, how could potential impacts on rents be minimised to ensure renters are better off overall, including both rental and energy costs?

Question 16: Please indicate if you think there should be variations in how MEERS applies to certain home types, and if so, how and why. For guidance, please think about the following home types:

- Apartments
- Houses and 'granny flats'
- Townhouses and villas
- Affordable housing
- Boarding houses
- Build-to-rent housing
- Key worker accommodation
- Seniors rental accommodation (e.g., retirement villages)
- Short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb, Stayz)
- Social and community housing
- Student accommodation
- Sub-market housing (e.g., crisis accommodation)

Question 17: If MEERS were introduced, what are likely to be the major challenges for landlords to implement and comply with MEERS, and how could these challenges be minimised?

Question 18: If MEERS were introduced, what are likely to be the major challenges for real estate agents to implement and comply with MEERS, and how could these challenges be minimised?

Question 19: If MEERS were introduced, how might they change behaviour in the rental market, for example, in property maintenance, upgrades or lease negotiations?

Question 20: If MEERS were introduced, how should they interact with existing rental minimum standards in New South Wales? In your view, should energy efficiency requirements be considered as part of broader rental minimum standards over time, or remain a distinct set of requirements? Please explain why.

Question 21: What would be a fair and effective approach to compliance monitoring for MEERS, if they were introduced?

Question 22: What role should education and support play compared with enforcement, particularly during any transition period?

Question 23: Which of the potential implementation models in the minimum energy efficiency rental standards have already been implemented in a number of other jurisdictions do you think would be most effective, practical and workable? Please also explain why.

- Option 1: Features approach
- Option 2: Home Energy Ratings (NatHERS) approach
- Option 3: Multiple pathways

Question 24: Do you have any comments on the advantages and disadvantages for each model? Are there any additional advantages or disadvantages that should be considered?

Question 25: Are there any other alternatives or hybrid implementation models that would help achieve the objectives listed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales?

Question 26: What types of support (financial, technical or regulatory) would most assist landlords, property managers and renters to improve the energy efficiency of their rental properties?

Question 27: Are there any policy alternatives that you believe the NSW Government should consider on top of, or instead of, MEERS that would achieve the same objectives as those proposed in the potential objectives for minimum energy efficiency rental standards in New South Wales?

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Legislation

Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW), section 52

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