

# 'Greenwashing' fears in property developments

**Kirsten Robb**

Buyers are being warned to be on red alert for fake-green homes as sustainability gains more traction in real estate.

Developers are increasingly marketing "green design", but experts say consumers need to look under the hood for "greenwashing", as some developers exaggerate the environmental benefits of new housing stock.

On the back of sell-out success of major projects The Commons, Nightingale and Mullum Creek, more Melburnians are looking to invest in eco housing.

But environmentalists say projects softly marketed as "sustainable" are often not always as green as they seem and fail to reach government standards on energy efficiency.

A CSIRO study on 129 new homes last year showed almost half leaked more than they should for their mandated six-star energy rating.

Although projects may achieve high ratings in design stages, a lack of follow-through during construction meant many fell short. The Alternative Technology Association is calling for random audits, compliance programs and penalties for those who fail to fulfil efficiency requirements.

Dave Martin from Small Giants, the developer behind popular "deep green" apartment block The Commons, said generally, green-seeking consumers were educated and asked the right questions to make sure a developer's ethos was solid.



"Anyone can say, 'yeah, I'm green', to get a sale, but [consumers] can ask, 'do you live that way?'" Mr Martin said.

Which may be why genuinely green developments are in demand. Steve Mathews and his siblings Sue and Danny Mathews, developers behind Donvale's Mullum Creek, met with success when they launched their 20-hectare development in 2014. All bar a small handful of the 56 lots have sold out.

The family grew up on the land and wanted to create a truly sustainable

**Steve Mathews and his family developed a sustainable project in Donvale.**

Photo: Eddie Jim



**Domain  
Eco housing**

project, requiring purchasers to adhere to environmental and sustainability guidelines that far exceed local and state government requirements.

"We invest a huge amount of time, effort and money in providing oversight and education for purchasers," Mr Mathews said.

"[Greenwashing] does happen a lot in real estate marketing ... marketers promote any benefit. That's their job," he said. "The unfortunate thing for purchasers is that they believe they are buying energy efficient homes ... but

they're not getting what they think they're paying for."

Brendan Condon, developer of one of Victoria's most sustainable communities, The Cape, said there were three key benchmarks that housing projects needed to hit to be called sustainable.

These were good building performance and design that gives a build at least a 7.5-star energy efficiency rating, energy efficient electric appliances and fittings such as heat pump hot water systems and LED lighting; and solar power, he said.