

# Mudbrick muddle over

**Fiona Willan**

DIAMOND Valley's iconic mudbrick industry is set to rise from the dead.

Sustainability Victoria has released long-awaited software that proves mudbrick homes meet the State Government's five-star energy rating.

Local builders, homeowners and mudbrick enthusiasts who fought long and hard for the new software said it would bring the broken industry back to life.

The industry was dealt a crushing blow three years ago, when mudbrick homes failed to rate above an average two stars.

Nillumbik Mudbrick Association president, builder and shire councillor Michael Young said the improved software proved what campaigners had argued all along.

"Mudbrick homes are thermally superior to other building modes and with good design techniques will rate five stars and more," Mr Young said.

"We are now ready to rebuild a vibrant local mudbrick industry in Nillumbik."

Mr Young and 300 supporters formed the Nillumbik Mudbrick Association three years ago, to lobby to revise the software.

Local MPs Steve Herbert and Danielle Green also joined the fight.

Mr Young said the original software did not offer a fair assessment of mudbrick homes.

The Australian Greenhouse Office contracted CSIRO to make changes to the software.

Sustainable building specialist Tony Isaacs said the new software gave a more accurate energy rating of mudbrick homes.

The former Sustainability Victoria employee developed the original software 11 years ago and was involved in its overhaul.

"The new software is far more detailed and allows every room in the house to be regarded as a separate thermal zone," Mr Isaacs said.

Mr Young said uncertainty over energy

ratings had had a noticeable impact on the mudbrick industry.

"I was previously doing two mudbrick houses a year," he said.

"Now I've done two mudbricks in four years. People have been wanting timber and corrugated iron instead."

Eltham landowners Tony and Stephanie Jenkins said they now felt confident to proceed with plans to build a mudbrick home.

"As far as the resale value of the home was concerned, we were hesitant to go ahead until we got a five-star energy rating," Mrs Jenkins said.