

ELTHAM environmental builder the late Alistair Knox is synonymous with Australia's mud-brick resurgence. His distinctive houses are still highly sought after and attract top prices when they come on to the market.

**Builder Michael Young, below, working on a mud-brick house, and, above, Steve Herbert, Michael Young, Danielle Green and Alan Grimes discuss the merits of mud-brick technology outside Mr Young's house.**

*Pictures: LAWRENCE PINDER. N39DV106*



# Mud-brick energy efficiency study

By Dave Crossthwaite

THE State Government has offered Nillumbik's mud-brick industry an olive branch in the debate over the energy efficiency of earth building materials and the Government's mandatory energy requirements.

Last week, following lobbying by State Labor MPs Steve Herbert (Eltham) and Danielle Green (Yan Yean), Planning Minister Mary Delahunty agreed to mount a research project into the energy performance of mud bricks.

Since July, all new buildings have been required to achieve a four-star energy rating under the Sustainable Energy Authority's FirstRate computer modelling program.

From July next year, the Government will raise the requirement to five stars.

In September, more than 130 mud-brick manufacturers, architects, tradesmen and mud-brick house owners formed the Nillumbik Mudbrick Association to fight energy-efficiency laws they believed unfairly targeted the age-old building material.

They feared the requirements signalled the death knell for their industry and called on the Government to re-think the way it assessed mud bricks.

Association president Michael Young, a candidate in the

coming Nillumbik Council election, said the research project was the first step in securing the industry's future.

"This research will validate what we in Nillumbik have always believed – that eco-friendly mud-brick houses have outstanding thermal qualities," Mr Young said.

Mr Herbert said the Building Commission, the Energy Authority Victoria, the Australian Greenhouse office and Deakin University were collaborating on the project.

"A scientific trial into the performance of mud bricks is long overdue and has been high on the mud-brick industry's agenda for some time," Mr Herbert said.

"Nillumbik is widely recognised as the most significant mud-brick region in Australia and local mud-brick builders are involved in the planning and design of this substantial trial."

Ms Green said the study would be carried out over the 2005 winter period because it was the heating performance of mud-brick buildings that was of primary interest.

Nillumbik Mayor Tony Raunic said the council welcomed the decision, but it wanted guarantees it would be able to issue permits after July, 2005, when the five-star rating requirement took affect.

Mr Herbert said the Government could not commit to a moratorium for mud bricks. "There is plenty of time to have that discussion," he said.

