We represent the clay brick and paver manufacturers of Australia. Our purpose is to ensure clay brick is recognised as the pre-eminence building material by leading architects, developers, builders and property owners. We’re here to promote great home and commercial design using clay brick and pavers.
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1.0 Introduction

One objective of the National Construction Code (NCC) is to ensure that the occupants of multi-dwelling residential buildings, such as villas, townhouses, units and apartments, are not subjected to excessive noise transmitted from adjoining dwellings.

The weighted sound reduction index, when measured, includes two correction factors, $C$ for high frequency noise and $C_{tr}$ for low frequency noise emitted from items such as home theatre systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correction Factor</th>
<th>Type of Noise Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| $C$               | Living activities (talking, music, radio, TV)  
|                   | Railway traffic at high speeds  
|                   | Highway road traffic (>80km/h)  
|                   | Jet aircraft at short distance  
|                   | High and medium frequency factory noise |
| $C_{tr}$          | Urban road traffic  
|                   | Railway traffic at low speeds  
|                   | Propeller driven aircraft  
|                   | Jet aircraft at large distance  
|                   | Low and medium frequency factory noise |

The growth in multi-dwelling residential housing in Australia brought with it an increased demand for more effective acoustic insulation between adjoining dwellings. The weighted sound reduction index, a more sophisticated acoustic measurement, was included in the National Construction Code (NCC) 2016 version. More recently this has been supplemented by correction factors for high and low frequency sounds, the latter acknowledging a major cause of complaints in multi-dwelling buildings and the potential intrusion from sound systems such as home theatres.

The heavy mass of clay brick masonry is ideal for acoustic insulation, particularly for low frequency noise, and cavity masonry walls have the added benefit of isolating impact sounds. It possesses an inherent resistance to the passage of airborne sound, which makes it a superior performer in attenuating low-frequency, airborne noise caused by building mechanical systems, elevators, amplified music, traffic and aircraft. Although some alternative systems may perform as well as masonry for frequencies in the speech range, these lower mass systems have difficulty insulating against low-frequency noise. This document defines the National Construction Code (NCC) and sets out methods for compliance using popular and economic forms of clay masonry construction.
2.0 Sound Insulation Definitions

2.1 Weighted sound reduction index ($R_w$)

Weighted sound reduction index ($R_w$) is a single figure used to indicate the sound insulation performance of a building element. The higher the number, the better the performance.

$R_w$ ratings are determined by laboratory tests of a specimen of the construction system which is fixed within a frame to form the wall between two test chambers. A high noise level is generated in one room and the difference in sound level between the source room and the receiver room represents the transmission loss through the test specimen. Measurements are conducted in one-third octave bands over all frequencies from 100 Hz to 3.15 kHz (inclusive). To determine the $R_w$ rating of a system, the measurement results are compared with reference curves. The total of the deficiencies of the measured values below the reference curve cannot exceed 32dB when they are added together.

2.2 Weighted sound reduction index plus spectrum adaptation term ($R_w + C$ and $R_w + C_{tr}$)

$C$ and $C_{tr}$ are correction factors used to modify the measured sound insulation ($R_w$). They are referred to as a spectrum adaption value and a negative number which is added to the $R_w$ value to take into account mid- to high-frequency and low-frequency noise respectfully.

As most noise related issues involve the transmission of low frequency sound from audio equipment, the NCC’s requirements for sound insulation generally include the $C_{tr}$ term by setting a minimum $R_w$ (airborne)$+ C_{tr}$ (impact) value – typically 50 dB.

2.3 Discontinuous construction ($D_{nT,w}$)

Discontinuous construction ($D_{nT,w}$) is a walling system having a minimum 20 mm cavity between two separate leaves:

- For masonry, where wall ties are required to connect leaves, the ties are to be of resilient type.
- For other than masonry, there is no mechanical linkage between leaves except at the periphery.
3.0 Types of Noise

3.1 Airborne noise

Airborne noise comes from common sound sources such as voices, TVs and radios. The noise performance of a building system is called the Weighted Sound Reduction Index ($R_w$). The higher the $R_w$, the better the system is at isolating airborne noise.

The greater the mass of the wall or floor, the more difficult it is to set up vibrations in it, and hence more difficult to transfer sound from one side to the other. Brick walls perform well in reducing the transmission of airborne sounds due to their mass.

A change of 3 $R_w$ (or dB) in the sound level means a doubling or halving of the sound energy. As the human ear does not perceive sound in a linear way, a 3dB change is barely perceptible. The table below shows the subjective perception of sound energy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reduction in dB</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Reduction in Sound Energy Subjective Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Barely perceptible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Sound appears to be reduced by about $\frac{1}{4}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Major reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Sound appears to be less than half original</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below outlines what this means in practice for building elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$R_w$</th>
<th>Effect on Speech Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Normal speech can be heard easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Loud speech can be heard easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Loud speech can be heard but not understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Loud speech heard as murmur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Must strain to hear loud speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Loud speech can be barely heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Loud speech can be barely heard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Structure-borne noise

Structure-borne noise, also called impact noise, is produced when part of the building fabric is directly or indirectly impacted. Energy passes through the building structure and creates noise in nearby rooms. Examples include heavy footsteps (particularly on bare timber or tile floors), banging doors, scraping furniture, vibrations from loud music, and plumbing noise. The Impact Insulation Class (IIC) is used to rate the impact noise insulation of floors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IIC</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>People walking around are clearly audible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>People walking around are audible and noticeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>People walking around audible but acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Walking heard as low frequency thump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Heavy walking heard as low frequency thump</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.0 NCC requirements

Where walls and separate sole-occupancy units, their acoustic performance should ensure that sound from one dwelling does not result in ambient sound levels in the adjoining dwelling that exceed the values regarded as providing a satisfactory working, living or sleeping environment.

NCC determines the classification of a building or part of a building by the purpose for which it is designed, constructed or adapted to be used. The following classes are applied to sound insulation provisions.

Class 1 – one or more buildings which in association constitute –

Class 1a – a single dwelling being either a detached house or one of a group of two or more attached dwellings separated by a fire-resisting wall.

Class 1b – a boarding house, guest house, hostel or the like for no more than 12 persons, with a total area of all floors not exceeding 300 m² measured over the enclosing walls of the Class 1b; or no less than 4 single dwellings located on one allotment and used for short-term holiday accommodation which are not located above or below another dwelling or another Class of building other than a private garage.

Class 2 – a building containing two or more sole-occupancy units each being a separate dwelling (e.g. apartments).

Class 3 – a residential building, other than a building of Classes 1 or 2, which is a common place of long term or transient living for a number of unrelated persons (e.g. hostel, hotel, boarding house).

Class 9c – an aged care building.

For Class 1, the intent of the NCC sound provisions is to safeguard occupants from illness or loss of amenity as a result of undue sound being transmitted between adjoining dwellings.

(National Construction Code Series Volume Two Part 3.8.6)

For Class 2, 3 and 9c, the intent of the NCC sound provisions is to minimise noise transmitted:

- between adjoining sole-occupancy units; and
- from common spaces to sole-occupancy units; and
- from parts of different classification to sole-occupancy units.

(National Construction Code Series Volume One Part F5)
5.0 Methods of Compliance

The following are methods available for complying with the provisions of the NCC. Compliance with the NCC’s performance requirements can only be achieved by:

a) complying with the Deemed-to-Satisfy Provisions

b) formulating an alternative solution to the Deemed-to-Satisfy Provisions

Any alternative solutions must be assessed to demonstrate that the performance requirements have been met. The assessment methods include:

i) Documentary evidence – Testing by a registered testing authority - for example the National Building Technology Centre (NBTC), CSIRO or an authority registered by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) - or by using information obtained from manufacturers’ documentation (e.g. product technical statements).

ii) Verification – Field measurement to demonstrate that the weighted standardised level difference with spectrum adaptation term, $D_{ntw} + C_{tr}$ is not less than 45 when determined by AS/NZS 1276.1. (This does not apply in Qld, NT and WA.)

iii) Comparison with deemed-to-satisfy provisions (i.e. with a reference building).

iv) Expert judgement.
5.1 NCC requirements for Class 1 buildings (NSW, Qld, SA, Tas, Vic, WA & ACT)

In Class 1 buildings common walls are required to have a $R_w + C_tr$ of not less than 50, and where the wall separates a habitable room (bedroom, living, dining) in one unit from a wet area (bathroom, kitchen, toilet, laundry) in another unit, the wall must be of discontinuous construction as well.

Note: Discontinuous construction means a wall system having a minimum 20 mm cavity between two separate leaves. For masonry, where wall ties are required to connect leaves, the ties are of the appropriate durability class.
5.2 NCC requirements for Class 1 buildings (NT)

A wall separating two habitable rooms in adjoining units in Class 1 building must have an $R_w$ of not less than 45, whereas a wall separating a habitable room from a wet area requires an $R_w$ of not less than 50 with satisfactory impact resistance.

There must also not be any chases or perforations in the brickwork to accommodate for services.

Figure 3 Habitable–habitable areas in buildings require $R_w \geq 45$

Figure 4 Habitable-wet areas in buildings require $R_w \geq 50 +$ impact
5.3 NCC requirements for Class 2 and 3 buildings (All States and Territories)

Class 2 or 3 buildings are required to have walls separating sole occupancy units of \( R_w + C_{tr} \) of not less than 50 and where the wall separates a habitable room in one unit from a wet area in another unit it must be of discontinuous construction. Also where a wall in a Class 2 or 3 building separates a unit from a plant room, lift shaft, stairwell or public area it must have an \( R_w \) of not less than 50 and be of discontinuous construction when that wall separates a habitable room in one unit from a plant room or lift shaft.

Figure 5 Habitable–habitable areas in buildings require \( R_w + C_{tr} \geq 50 \)

Figure 6 Habitable-wet areas in buildings require \( R_w \geq 50 \) and discontinuous construction
5.4 NCC requirements for Class 9c buildings (All States and Territories)

For Class 9c buildings walls separating sole occupancy units or a sole occupancy unit from a kitchen, bathroom, laundry, plant or utilities room must have an $R_w$ of not less than 45, and also be of discontinuous construction. Also walls separating a sole occupancy unit from a kitchen or laundry must have satisfactory impact sound resistance.

Special attention must be given to the junction of sound insulated walls with perimeter walls, floors and roofs. These extra requirements are listed in parts (e) and (f) of F5.5 in the NCC.

Figure 7 Habitable-wet areas in Class 9c buildings require $R_w \geq 45$ and discontinuous construction
6.0 NCC Deemed-to-Satisfy Wall Systems for ACT, NSW, Qld, SA, Tas, Vic, WA

6.1 Clay brick wall systems that achieve $R_w + C_r \geq 50$

6.1.1 Single leaf of 110 mm clay brick masonry with:

a) a row of 70 mm×35 mm timber studs or 64 mm steel studs at 600 mm centres, spaced 20 mm from the masonry wall; and

b) 50 mm thick mineral insulation or glass wool insulation with density of 11 kg/m$^3$ positioned between studs; and

c) one layer of 13 mm plasterboard fixed to outside face of studs and outside face of masonry.

Figure 8. Single leaf brickwork, 110 mm clay bricks

6.1.2 Single leaf 90mm clay brick masonry with:

a) a row of 70 mm × 35 mm timber studs or 64 mm steel studs at 600 mm centres, spaced 20 mm from each face of the masonry wall; and

b) 50 mm thick mineral insulation or glass wool insulation with density of 11 kg/m$^3$ positioned between studs in each row; and

c) one layer of 13 mm plasterboard fixed to studs on each outside face.

Figure 9. Single leaf brickwork, 90 mm clay bricks
6.1.3 Two leaves of 110 mm clay brick masonry with:

a) cavity not less than 50 mm between leaves; and
b) 13 mm cement render on each outside face.

Figure 10. Rendered cavity brickwork, 110 mm clay bricks

6.1.4 Two leaves of 110 mm clay brick masonry with:

a) cavity not less than 50 mm between leaves; and
b) 50 mm thick glass wool insulation with a density of 11 kg/m$^3$ or
50 mm thick polyester insulation with a density of 20 kg/m$^3$ in
the cavity.

Figure 11. Insulated cavity brickwork, 110 mm clay bricks

6.1.5 Single leaf of clay masonry with:

a) thickness of 220 mm; and
b) 13 mm render on each face.

Figure 12. Rendered single leaf brickwork, 220 mm clay bricks
6.2 Clay brick wall system that achieves $R_w \geq 50$
(only for class 2, 3, and 9c buildings)

Single leaf of 150 mm clay brick masonry with each face rendered 13 mm thick.

Figure 13. Rendered single leaf brickwork, 150 mm clay bricks

6.3 Clay brick wall systems that achieve $R_w + C_{tr} \geq 50$ (only for class 2, 3, and 9c buildings)

Single leaf of 220 mm clay brick masonry with each face rendered 13 mm thick.

Figure 14. Rendered single leaf brickwork, 220 mm clay bricks

6.4 Clay brick wall system that achieves $R_w \geq 45$
(only for class 2, 3, and 9c buildings)

110 mm thick brick masonry with 13 mm cement render on each face.

Figure 15. Rendered single leaf brickwork, 110 mm clay bricks
7.0 NCC deemed-to-satisfy wall systems for NT

7.1 Clay brick wall system that achieves $R_w \geq 50$ and impact

7.1.1 Two leaves of 90 mm clay brick masonry with:

a) all joint solid filled with mortar
b) minimum cavity of 40 mm
c) Leaves connected with ties in accordance with AS 3700 and AS 4773.1

Figure 16. Cavity brickwork, 90 mm clay bricks

7.1.2 Single leaf of 80 mm thick brick masonry with:

a) Both faces rendered 13 mm thick
b) 50 x 12 mm thick timber battens at less than 610mm centres fixed to each face but not recessed into the render
c) 12 mm thick softboard nailed to the battens
d) 6 mm thick medium density hardboard fixed to the softboard using adhesive.

Figure 17. Single leaf brickwork, 80 mm clay bricks

7.2 Clay brick wall system that achieves $R_w \geq 45$

7.2.1 Single leaf of 110 mm clay brick masonry with:

mass per unit area $\geq 290 \text{ kg/m}^3$.

Figure 18. Single leaf brickwork, 110 mm clay bricks
7.2.2 Single leaf of 80 mm thick pressed brick with:

- 13 mm thick render on one side
- Mass per unit area of unrendered wall ≥215 kg/m³.

Figure 19. Rendered single leaf brickwork, 80mm clay bricks

8.0 Good practice for compliance

- All clay brick wall systems should be constructed in accordance with the design drawings and the manufacturers’ specification.

- All joints must be filled solid with mortar.

- Where a wall separates a habitable room in one unit from a wet area in another unit the wall must be of discontinuous construction (except for NT).

- Where for structural integrity two leaves of clay bricks are connected and used where discontinuous construction is required they must be connected using resilient ties.

- Clay brick walls must not be chased to install any services.

- Adequate impact sound insulation can be achieved via testing - the test specimen is compliant if its performance is equivalent to, or better than, the performance of a cavity brick construction of two 90 mm leaves under the same test conditions.
9.0 Exclusions from NCC requirements

For information on other clay brick walling solutions for sound insulation contact the manufacturers in your state.

The provisions in the code apply to sound insulation between dwellings as described in this document and do not address:

- noise entering the unit from an outside source (traffic),
- air-conditioning or other plant from within a unit,
- domestic appliance noise within a unit,
- room acoustic design for home entertainment systems and
- noise transfer within a unit.
10.0 References


2. AS 3700 - 2018 Masonry structures Section Section 5 Design for durability, Standards Australia, Sydney, 2018.


With four equal walls and a tall triangular-shaped roof, the entire room is constructed from Austral Bricks Elements bricks in Zinc. This is an uncommon and tricky application, but striking in its execution. Sharp lines and rough textures externally are transformed into opulent finishes and soft curves on the interior, with gentle curving to the ceiling points and warm timber parquetry. A slick, lined window seat pushes through the wall to overlook the pool and draw in natural light. At the front is a full-width sliding entrance door, hidden by the feature patterned brick screening. This brick house glows from within and the light plays through the front brick screen, which also provides privacy to the room inside.

Architect & Builder: Weststyle Design & Development

Manufacturer: Austral Bricks
Bricks used: Elements – Zinc
Contractor: Daniels Brickwork + Walls n All Brickwork
Photographer: D-Max Photography

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