

NABERS glossary guide - Northmore Gordon

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NABERS

NABERS is an authoritative rating system that provides operational and design ratings for buildings. It serves as a starting point for building assessments and enables comparison of building performance. An achieved operational rating reflects actual building operation, while design ambition represents the intended performance target during the design phase. These are distinct pieces of information. NABERS ratings help establish performance baselines and identify improvement opportunities in commercial buildings.

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What is NABERS and what role does it play in building performance assessment?

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How should NABERS ratings be used when investigating commercial building improvements?

Before using an existing NABERS rating as a comparison baseline, confirm both its scope and date. Commercial building assessments must define whether the investigation covers a tenancy, base-building services, or the whole building. Identify the meters, services, operating period and occupancy conditions included. An achieved operational rating, a design ambition, and a planned improvement represent different pieces of information and should not be treated interchangeably in feasibility or investment decisions.

Does a NABERS rating automatically indicate eligibility for energy efficiency certificates?

No. The existence of a NABERS rating alone does not confirm certificate eligibility under energy efficiency schemes. A rating improvement or HVAC project may warrant scheme investigation, but eligibility depends on the specific activity, premises, equipment and scheme conditions. Accredited

providers must assess the relevant state, activity, project dates and applicable method separately from the building's NABERS performance. A technically sensible upgrade is not automatically eligible for certificates.

How is NABERS used within the Victorian Energy Upgrades scheme?

NABERS ratings are used in the benchmark rating method, which is one of two project-based methods available under Victorian Energy Upgrades for assessing eligible activities. The benchmark rating method uses NABERS ratings to establish a comparison baseline. The other method is measurement and verification, which uses pre- and post-upgrade energy information. Choosing the method early helps identify what evidence must exist before equipment changes are made.

What information should be established before using a NABERS rating for an investment decision?

Record the specific NABERS rating date and scope, including which building parts it covers. Distinguish between an achieved operational rating (actual measured performance), a design ambition (intended performance target), and a planned improvement (proposed future state). Confirm the rating product type and whether it addresses the same boundary as your proposed assessment. This clarity prevents assuming that a historical rating automatically establishes today's baseline or improvement eligibility under certificate schemes.

What is the relationship between NABERS ratings and commercial building control arrangements?

NABERS ratings assess building performance within defined operational and control conditions. However, energy improvements depend on who controls building services, who pays energy bills, and who can approve capital works. A building owner, tenant and facilities manager may each control different parts of the building systems. Before committing to improvements based on a NABERS comparison, establish these control and decision-making arrangements between stakeholders, as they affect both technical feasibility and investment viability.

Why should NABERS ratings be kept separate from operational improvement investigations?

A NABERS rating measures performance under existing conditions at a point in time. Operational improvements such as controls adjustments, maintenance optimisation and the interaction between system components can significantly affect energy performance before equipment replacement is considered. Government guidance recommends an integrated sequence of demand reduction, optimisation and equipment upgrade. Investigating operational performance first, separately from the rating assessment, prevents unnecessary capital expenditure and identifies what controls or maintenance changes might improve the baseline against which improvements are measured.

How can Northmore Gordon assist with NABERS-based building assessments?

We offer energy audits, utility benchmarking, forecasting and energy management services for commercial buildings. These services help define the assessment boundary, investigate operating constraints, identify opportunities, and prepare evidence for feasibility or investment decisions. The company can assess whether operational adjustments or capital improvements warrant certificate pathway investigation under schemes like Victorian Energy Upgrades. Contact the company through its website to describe your building type, decision need and current project stage for a scoped assessment.