rewiringaustralia.org | electrify@rewiringaustralia.org
ABN: 18 664 239 196 | ACN: 664 239 196

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Solar Sharer Offer - Consultation Submission

Rewiring Australia is pleased to make a short submission on the Solar Sharer Offer, an initiative that we strongly applaud and support. The proposal to offer three hours of free, green energy to households during the day is a tremendous, practical example of the abundant energy system we can achieve with Australia's sunny rooftops and landscapes, and enabling everyone to share the benefits of that abundance.

It's also an excellent opportunity to provoke Australians to look for ways to move their energy usage into the sunny middle of the day, reducing peak demand and better utilising our existing generation and grid infrastructure - especially as people begin to adopt electric vehicles in larger numbers and form new regular habits around charging instead of refuelling for the first time.

Our submission seeks to highlight opportunities to ensure that the Solar Sharer Offer can be taken up by the homes that need it most - the renters and apartment dwellers that can't get their own solar panels.

Key recommendations

1. Customers should be able to request a free smart meter installation from their retailer if they want to use the Solar Sharer Offer
2. There should be obligations, and finance support, for owners to make switchboard upgrades to enable smart meters
3. Public education and comparison tools should be updated for the launch
4. Controlled Load tariffs should be aligned to the Solar Sharer Offer
5. Appliance standards and star ratings should consider flexibility capabilities

1. Customers should be able to request a free smart meter installation from their retailer if they want to use the Solar Sharer Offer

The Solar Sharer Offer is supposed to open up access to cheap energy for Australians that can't get solar panels themselves, and would open up the opportunity for renters and apartment dwellers to save on bills by charging their EV, heating hot water or lining up laundry and dishwashing with the cheap, renewable-rich energy available from the grid around midday.

But accessing these tariffs requires a smart meter that can record what time of the day the energy is used. Unfortunately the Australians who don't have solar are also significantly less likely to have a smart meter.

The current approach allows retailers to charge fees to consumers that request a smart meter upgrade, although an installation initiated by the local network under their *Legacy Meter Replacement Plan* is free and due to occur at some point before 2030.

This is a confusing and disempowering situation for consumers without smart meters, leaving them waiting on a mysterious date for access regardless of their interest in the Solar Sharer Offer, and of their ability to move loads into the desired window.

Consumers who request a Solar Sharer Offer should be entitled to have a free meter upgrade arranged by their retailer. The Government may need to consider funding support for the costs incurred by retailers, but if the request is subject to a reasonable waiting period of weeks, the marginal cost of a different location for a planned upgrade should not be material.

Alternatively, if this is not practicable, there should at least be a published schedule indicating when homes in an area are likely to be upgraded between now and 2030 to assist consumers in deciding whether to initiate their own upgrade.

Consumers with switchboards that cannot host a smart meter upgrade have further issues. We believe there should be an obligation to upgrade switchboards supported by a flexible loan - see below.

2. There should be obligations, and finance support, for owners to make switchboard upgrades to enable smart meters

Suzie and Raj* bought an older, semi-detached 3-bedder in Melbourne two years ago - a bit of a fixer-upper, but they feel lucky to be able to buy into a suburb they like. They've been planning to get solar and electric heating to remove the ancient, costly gas heating system and got quotes recently.

They got some bad news. Their installer told them they'll need to upgrade their (old) switchboard - a process that can cost anywhere from $1000 to over $4000.

Although *most* homes don't need this, it's still a pretty common scenario across Australia. In the Electrify 2515 community pilot near Wollongong NSW, where 500 homes are being upgraded to replace gas with all-electric, we've found about 20% of the homes participating have needed a switchboard upgrade to go all-electric. Most switchboards in Australia from before 1990 are made of asbestos, and many don't have the electrical capacity or physical room for an all-electric home with a modern smart meter.

The story gets trickier for Suzie and Raj. They actually share a switchboard with their neighbours in the semi - and those neighbours are renters. They've asked if their landlord might share the cost of a switchboard upgrade - but unsurprisingly they haven't heard anything back from the real estate agent about that, and the renters aren't keen to push hard.

That leaves Suzie and Raj in a crappy position; spend about $4000 to upgrade the large shared switchboard for the benefit of their unhelpful next-door landlord, or give up on going all-electric for now - and spend another summer paying high air-con electricity bills through the sunny hours that could have been covered by solar panels, and another winter paying escalating gas heating bills.

The Solar Sharer Offer for three hours free during the day aims to help apartments and renters who can't get solar themselves. But it only works if the home has a modern smart meter that can tell what time of day someone used electricity.

At the moment, even though there is now a 'plan' to roll out smart meter upgrades to everyone by 2030, this 'switchboard defect' scenario is a recognised dead end; if a switchboard requires upgrades to have a smart meter installed, there's no obligation on other co-owners or landlords to fix the problem, and that home just gets left behind. It's a scenario that will more often affect strata homes (with shared switchboards) and renters (in generally older, less well-maintained homes).

We need to have homes with smart meters and ready for all-electric appliances as quickly as possible. But requiring owners to spend thousands of dollars out-of-pocket at a random moment could impose genuine hardship and is unlikely to be acceptable.

Rewiring Australia believes there is a solution that's straightforward and fair:

1. *The Stick*: require owners, including co-owners and landlords, to upgrade switchboards to the standard we need for a modern electric homes with smart meters - and to share in the costs of shared upgrades when they need to happen;
2. *The Carrot*: offer those owners a loan that covers the full cost of the upgrade, secured on the property, and indexed to inflation, that only has to be repaid when their property next sells.

This would mean there's no upfront cost or repayment risk for the owner, and we get homes that are future-proofed for zero emissions and all-electric appliances, while still minimising the cost to the federal budget, which only has to cover the small cost of the inflation interest rate concession on the loan.

If a million homes borrowed an average of $2500 each under this scheme, the cost to the budget of the interest subsidy for the first 4 years would be under $40 million a year, and that cost would decrease every year as properties sell and loans are repaid, with half of loans repaid within 18 years based on existing property sales data.

It's a solution for investments in household electrification that could also be extended to cover other electrification upgrades that we'll need over time. But before we get to that, let's at least make sure that the Australians in older apartments and rentals don't miss out on the savings they could have from three hours of free electricity - they've already missed out on enough savings from lacking access to solar, batteries and electric upgrades.

3. Ensure that public education and comparison tools are updated for the launch

As Time-Of-Use plans, VPPs, demand charges and wholesale variable pricing become more important for consumers, the complexity of comparing energy retail plans is higher than ever.

As part of the rollout of the Solar Sharer Offer, it will be crucial to ensure that Energy Made Easy website is updated in time to help users consider this plan - and other types of retail offer - and potentially allow the user to simulate actions such as moving EV charging or hot water heating into the free window for a more dynamic and realistic price comparison.

There should also be public information campaigns to help people better understand the opportunities and benefits of the Solar Sharer Offer, and similar plans that incentivise demand and make more use of Australian solar energy, delivered by both government agencies and community partners that can raise awareness and engagement with the offer.

4. Align ‘controlled load’ tariffs to the Solar Sharer Offer

Controlled loads (CL) - mostly made up of conventional electric hot water heating - should be a key consideration for the Solar Sharer Offer, and represent a large opportunity to move loads into the solar peak period.

The requirement for Solar Sharer customers to have a smart meter makes it possible at a technical level to ensure that controlled loads are managed in a way that accords with usage of the ‘free hours’.

Alongside the Solar Sharer Offer, there should be a Solar Sharer CL Offer that offers the benefits of three free hours to CL-connected customers.

Because the CLs are managed by networks, there is a potential to use CL to help manage some of the load ramping issues that could occur if there is high uptake of the Solar Sharer Offer. This might involve moving those loads to slightly before or after the actual free period. If networks choose to activate CL loads outside of a customer’s three free hour period, there could be consideration given to accounting for that demand on the basis that it is part of the three hours free per day for the customer in the retail bill.

5. Appliance standards and star ratings should consider flexibility capabilities

As the potential of the Solar Sharer Offer demonstrates, the timing and flexibility of energy usage is becoming just as important as underlying energy efficiency.

As a complementary policy measure, there should be updates to star rating systems for appliances that includes an evaluation and indication of the appliance's ability to deliver flexible energy consumption, based on features like timer and delay controls, and smart connectivity features. This will help drive better consumer understanding and uptake of the demand shifting that the SSO seeks to achieve.

About Rewiring Australia

Rewiring Australia is an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to accelerating household and community electrification as a practical pathway to lower emissions, reduced energy costs and improved health outcomes. Co-founded by engineer, inventor and energy systems researcher Dr Saul Griffith, we combine rigorous technical analysis, policy expertise and community engagement to inform government and market decision-making on Australia's energy transition.

Our research provides an empirical foundation for electrification policy. The landmark *Castles and Cars* report, as well as the 2025 *The Electrification Tipping Point* report, quantified the financial and emissions benefits of replacing household and transport fossil-fuel technologies with efficient electric alternatives[1]. It showed that electrification can save the average household thousands of dollars each year while significantly reducing national emissions. This evidence base has influenced federal and state policy directions and has become a reference point for consumer and regulatory discussions about the future of energy.

We also coordinate the Electric Communities Network[2], a national alliance of more than seventy community-based groups working on to support their communities to electrify. These groups provide valuable insight into the lived experience of households, including how they navigate technology choices, financing and interactions with existing

[1] https://rewiringaustralia.org/research-and-resources
[2] https://rewiringaustralia.org/community

regulatory systems. Their experiences reveal the barriers and opportunities facing households as they move away from gas and adopt efficient electric technologies.

Through our demonstration project *Electrify 2515* in the Illawarra region[3], Rewiring Australia is supporting the electrification of 500 homes while capturing data on household participation, costs and consumer motivations[4]. Together, our research, national network and demonstration projects give us a unique perspective on how the transition is unfolding in practice, and on the regulatory reforms required to ensure it proceeds fairly, efficiently and in line with consumer demand.

[3] https://www.electrify2515.org/

[4] https://arena.gov.au/knowledge-bank/brighte-electrify-2515-community-pilot-customer-insights-report-1/