

FACT SHEET

South Australia's Feed-In Scheme for Small-Scale Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Installations

April 2011



Government of South Australia

Department of the Premier
and Cabinet

South Australia's Solar Feed-In Scheme

INTRODUCTION

The Electricity (Feed-In Scheme-Solar Systems) Amendment Act 2008 was the first solar feed-in law in Australia. Under the scheme, eligible customers currently receive a premium guaranteed tariff of 44 cents for every unit of electricity (kilowatt-hour, kWh) that they feed back to the grid.



Photovoltaic installation on the South Australian museum

THE CURRENT SCHEME AT A GLANCE

If you are a 'small electricity customer' in South Australia – that is a household, small business, community building, church or other facility that consumes less than 160 MWh of electricity per annum – and have installed or intend to install, a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity system on your premises, you are able to receive a premium price for any excess electricity you return to the electricity grid.

The scheme rewards customers whenever they generate more electricity than they are using – NOT just the balance at the end of the month or

quarter, but whenever generation exceeds consumption during the day.

You will need a meter that separately records the electricity you return to the grid so that, even if it is only for a second, the meter will keep track of any electricity you return. When the meter reader comes around at the end of the month or end of the quarter, the total amount of electricity you have returned and the total amount you have consumed will be read and passed onto the state's electricity distributor, ETSA Utilities.

Currently, under the feed-in scheme, ETSA Utilities will credit you with 44 cents for every unit of electricity you return to the grid from your solar system (as read by the meter reader). ETSA Utilities will then forward your incentive to your electricity retailer. Your electricity retailer is obliged to pass through the incentive payment which will appear as a credit on your electricity bill. It is expected that electricity retailers will add a further amount to pay for the electricity they receive from you.

Depending on how much solar electricity you produce, and how much electricity you consume while the solar electricity system is generating, this credit could see your total electricity bill approach zero. It may even send you into credit! Some electricity retailers offer an additional credit for excess electricity fed into the grid. Any such offers will be determined by the electricity contract between you and your retailer.

The scheme will be available from 1 July 2008 until 30 June 2028.

10MW REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

On the 31st of August 2010, the Premier and Minister for Sustainability and Climate Change, the Hon Mike Rann, announced the Government's decision to

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make a number of changes to the scheme as a result of the review.

The intended changes to the scheme aim to increase the benefits to solar customers while limiting the total cost of the scheme to all customers in the state.

At a glance, the Government has decided to:

- increase the bonus, from 44 cents to 54 cents per kilowatt hour;
- obligate retailers who choose to contract with solar customers to pay a minimum rate for the power that they receive from the owners of solar panels;
- limit eligibility for payment of the bonus to the first 45 kilowatt hours exported to the grid per day;
- limit eligibility to one generator per customer or entity;
- specifically exclude generators operated primarily for the purpose of generating a profit from the scheme; and
- close the scheme to new connections when an installed capacity of 60MW is reached.

The Government stated that the changes would not result in any diminished benefit for existing solar customers. However, intending purchasers of solar systems were alerted that, subject to the passing of the legislation, all customers that receive permission to connect for their solar system from ETSA Utilities after the announcement on the 31st of August 2010 would be subject to the new eligibility criteria.

Further information about the Review, is available at

www.renewablessa.sa.gov.au

ELECTRICITY (MISCELLANEOUS) AMENDMENT BILL 2011

On 6 April 2011, legislation to give effect to the announced changes was tabled in Parliament.

The Government has decided to replace the previously announced cut-off point, which was a total scheme capacity of 60 megawatts, with a closure date of midnight on 30 September 2011.

Together with the amendments introduced to Parliament, this strikes the right balance between providing the necessary financial support to solar energy and creating a framework that gives consumers the certainty they need in to make long-term investment decisions.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE *ELECTRICITY (MISCELLANEOUS) AMENDMENT BILL 2011*

The answers below explain the intent of the Government's proposed legislation. ***The situation may change as a result of the Parliamentary debate.***

When does the solar feed-in scheme close to new entrants?

The solar feed-in scheme will close to new entrants from the start of the designated day - 1 October 2011. Effectively, the scheme will close at midnight on 30 September 2011.

Why close it off to new entrants from 1 October 2011?

The Government has decided to replace the previously announced cut-off point, which was a total scheme capacity of 60 megawatts, with a closure date of midnight on 30 September 2011.

Together with the amendments introduced to Parliament, this strikes the right balance between providing the necessary financial support to solar energy and creating a framework that gives consumers the certainty they need in to make long-term investment decisions.

Which systems are included in the feed-in scheme?

A customer who receives the feed-in tariff before the designated day of 1 October 2011 is eligible to remain in the feed-in scheme until it expires on 30 June 2028. This is conditional upon the customer avoiding disqualification from the scheme.

The amendments specify the grounds for disqualification – disconnecting from the scheme or installing additional panels.

The Government intends that the clause disqualifying generators upon disconnection should apply to substantive disconnections. In particular, the clause is

intended to apply to circumstances in which a solar system is moved from one point on the network to another.

It is not intended to apply to less substantive disconnections. For example, disconnections that arise as a consequence of changes of property ownership; repairs, maintenance and renovations; default on electricity payments; power outages; and from actions by ETSA Utilities and other power suppliers.

In relation to installing additional panels, if a customer receiving or eligible to receive a feed-in bonus on the designated day increases the size of the system on or after 1 October 2011, the person will not be eligible for the feed-in tariff of 54c / kWh for any part of their system. This aims to limit the costs of the scheme to consumers at large.

Also, the Bill provides that a person who received Permission to Connect from ETSA Utilities before 1 October 2011, but has yet to install their solar system, will have 120 days from 1 October 2011 to book with ETSA Utilities a change of their meter to an import / export meter to be considered eligible under the scheme.

The actual meter change can occur after 120 days, but to be eligible for the 54c / kWh tariff, the booking must be made within 120 days.

A person applying to ETSA Utilities to connect their solar generator on or after the designated day will not be eligible to receive the feed-in tariff of 54c / kWh in respect of electricity exported to the grid.

When does the scheme close for those who are receiving the 54c / kWh feed-in tariff?

The 54c / kWh feed-in tariff payments will cease to be paid to all customers on 30 June 2028. After this date, all customers in the scheme will cease receiving the 54c / kWh feed-in tariff, but will continue

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to receive a credit from their retailer for electricity fed into the grid in an amount no less than that prescribed by the Essential Services Commission of South Australia.

The Government announced its intention to increase the feed-in bonus to 54 cents on the 31st of August 2010. Will this benefit be backdated to that date?

The new benefit of 54 c / kWh will apply to eligible customers from the proclamation date and will not be backdated to August 2010.

However, should ETSA Utilities require time to implement system changes up to 1 July 2011, the payments to eligible customers will be backdated to the proclamation date.

What is the retailer credit going to be and when will it become available?

The Bill obligates retailers to credit small customers with a solar system a minimum amount prescribed by the Essential Services Commission of South Australia (ESCOSA) for electricity fed into the grid.

ESCOSA will make a determination within 6 months of the amendments being proclaimed. ESCOSA will determine a minimum rate for customers, having regard to the value of the energy to electricity retailers.

Unlike the feed-in tariff, the minimum retailer credit will not stop on 30 June 2028 and will be payable on all exported power from any size system up to 30kW in capacity owned by a small customer.

What does Permission to Connect or approved for connection mean?

This means that a customer, or their solar installer, has applied to ETSA Utilities for permission to connect their proposed solar system to the electricity grid and that ETSA Utilities has given the customer permission, ie approval, to connect the solar system.

ETSA Utilities' approval strictly relates to the technical compliance and suitability of the grid-interactive inverter arrangement proposed for use in the solar system to be connected to the network. The approval does not mean or imply the applicant is eligible to receive any feed-in rebates or other subsidies. ETSA Utilities' approval does not obviate or diminish the applicant's responsibilities and obligations of a generator of electricity.

ETSA Utilities' approval to connect a solar system does not imply that the applicants system will not impact the quality of supply for other customers in their area. If it can be determined at any point in the future that an applicant's solar system is impacting on the supply of other customers they will be required to take action, which may include turning off or modifying their system or contributing to the cost of localised network changes.

When approval is granted by ETSA Utilities it is done in writing and a unique approval number is provided.

How long does it take to receive permission to connect?

It is understood that for all domestic customers with systems <5kW, approval is provided within minutes of receipt of the request for connection. A domestic customer is classified as a non-commercial customer within the metropolitan area or township boundary.

For rural and commercial/industrial customers for any size system or for domestic customers with systems >5kW, approval can take several weeks as a site investigation has to be conducted and the customer may be required to sign a specific terms and conditions agreement before approval is granted.

What is the 45kWh/day limit and will I be affected by it?

The 45kWh/day limit will only apply to systems that receive permission to connect from ETSA Utilities after the announcement on the 31st of August. The limit of 45kWh/day is equivalent to around

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75% of the typical daily generation from a 10kW system operating in Adelaide in the middle of summer.

The average size system in South Australia is 1.56kW and therefore most systems will not be affected by this limit. However customers installing large systems, in excess of 7.5kW, need to be aware that under the new provisions they would only be eligible for the feed-in tariff for the first 45kWh per day that they export to the grid.

Does this mean that my meter will be read every day?

No. The 45 kWh per day limit will be averaged across your normal billing period, in line with current billing practices.

I am already receiving the feed-in tariff for one solar system and I am considering installing a second system. How will the "one per customer" rule be applied?

The legislation seeks to make the feed-in tariff available to as many customers as possible. Under the proposed changes, a small customer (whether this is a business, a community organisation or a physical person) is eligible to receive the premium feed-in tariff for the output of only one solar generator.

Why dedicated generators and multiple connections and how are they defined?

The scheme's intention is to support solar systems which offset small customer's electricity use. To ensure we provide this opportunity to the highest number of small customers possible, it is necessary to exclude solar systems installed for the dominant purpose of generating revenue for electricity fed into the grid and multiple solar system connections at a location. ETSA Utilities will identify dedicated generators and multiple connections during the application and installation process.

What would happen if I were to upgrade my generator?

Persons that received their permission to connect before 1 September 2010 are not subject to the proposed limitations.

However, should a person have upgraded their system after the 31st of August 2010, and on or before 30 September 2011, this person would become subject to new eligibility criteria.

If a person receiving or eligible to receive a feed-in tariff before the designated day has increased the size of the system after the designated day, the person will no longer be eligible for the feed-in tariff. This aims to limit the costs of the scheme to consumers at large.

What would happen if a customer were to disconnect its generator?

If an existing a generator has been disconnected after 31 August 2010, it will become subject to new eligibility criteria.

If a generator has been disconnected on or after 1 October 2011, it will lose its eligibility to receive the feed-in tariff.

The Government intends that the clause disqualifying generators upon disconnection should apply to substantive disconnections. In particular, the clause is intended to apply to circumstances in which a solar array is moved from one point on the network to another.

It is not intended to apply to less substantive disconnections. For example, disconnections that arise as a consequence of changes of property ownership; repairs, maintenance and renovations; default on electricity payments; power outages; and from actions by ETSA Utilities and other power suppliers.

Will a community entity be eligible for the feed-in tariff?

Provided that the entity is an eligible customer in its own right, it may be eligible for the feed-in tariff if it is individually metered and billed for its electricity consumption.

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Will other technologies be eligible for the scheme as a result of the review?

No. The Government has decided not to expand the scheme by making provision to include other technologies. The economics and attributes of each small scale technology are different and unique therefore it is not necessarily appropriate to support other technologies under a scheme that was specifically designed to support solar photovoltaic systems.

Will the scheme be open to community-based installations?

The proposed changes to the eligibility criteria exclude multiple installations, dedicated generators and introduce one generator per customer limitation. The purpose of these restrictions is to make the feed-in bonus available to as many customers as possible. These changes effectively mean that community-based solar projects are not eligible for the premium feed-in tariff as it is not possible to isolate community-based projects from these requirements without creating undue complexity and arbitrariness in the arrangements for administering the scheme. Further, the Government announced that it will provide \$1 million worth of grants to kick start the development of community-owned and operated solar projects.

When will these new provisions come into place?

The changes to the scheme are subject to passing of the legislation. It is intended that the new eligibility criteria be backdated to apply from the announcement on the 31st of August.

Customers that receive permission to connect for a system after the August 2010 announcement and connect their system before the new scheme is implemented will initially receive their payments under the existing scheme. They will then be automatically transitioned to the new scheme once it is implemented. These customers will not be required to pay back money received under the provisions of the old scheme

between 1 September 2010 and the date of when legislation comes into force.

How do the proposed changes affect systems that received permission to connect before 1 September 2010?

On the 31st of August 2010, the Government announced the proposed changes and outlined the transitional arrangements. Those qualified customers that received permission from ETSA Utilities to connect their eligible solar system before 1 September 2010, and that fed electricity back into the grid within 6 months from when this legislation has passed through Parliament, will not be affected by new limitations. i.e. they will not be affected by the "one per customer" rule and "multiple connections", "dedicated generator" and "45kWh daily cap" limitations. These customers will receive 54 c / kWh and a retailer credit for electricity they generate and return to the grid.

Should these customers, however, have upgraded their systems after the announcement in August 2010, they will become subject to new eligibility criteria.

I'm thinking of installing a solar system, should I hold off until the new legislation is passed?

No, there is no need to wait to install your system. However, intending purchasers of solar systems need to be aware that, subject to the passing of the legislation, all customers that receive permission to connect for their solar system from ETSA Utilities after the announcement on the 31st of August 2010 will be subject to the new eligibility criteria.

Customers that receive permission to connect for a system after the announcement on the 31st of August 2010 and connect their system before the new scheme is implemented will initially receive their payments under the existing scheme. They will then be automatically transitioned to the new scheme once it is implemented.

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These customers will not be required to pay back money received under the provisions of the old scheme between 1 September 2010 and the date of when legislation comes into force.

ABOUT THE SOLAR FEED-IN SCHEME

What is a feed-in tariff?

South Australia's feed-in tariff is a premium electricity tariff (cost per unit of electricity) available to South Australian electricity customers for electricity generated by a small-scale grid-connected solar photovoltaic (PV) system, which is in excess of the household's consumption. To receive the incentive, this electricity must be returned to the grid.

I am thinking of buying a solar PV system - where should I start?

The Clean Energy Council's website (www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au) lists the accredited installers of solar PV systems in Australia as well as providing information about solar systems and about the federal government rebate scheme.

Once you have decided on the system you would like to buy, your installer should be able to guide you through the connection process, which will include fitting the correct meter.

Your electricity contract will change to allow you to access the feed-in tariff. Check with your electricity retailer to find out what offers they are making to solar PV owners. If you feel you need to shop around further for a good deal, the Essential Services Commission of South Australia (www.escosa.sa.gov.au) offers advice to help in purchasing electricity and gas.

I am considering installing a solar PV system - do I need to do anything to receive the feed-in payments?

If you meet the eligibility criteria your electricity bills should automatically be updated to include feed-in payments.

A number of solar PV owners have older style spinning disc meters and will not receive feed-in payments until the meter has been upgraded.

It is worth checking with your electricity retailer to find out what offers they are making to solar PV owners. If you feel you need to shop around further for a good deal, the Essential Services Commission of South Australia (www.escosa.sa.gov.au) offers advice to help in purchasing electricity and gas.

How much is it?

The minimum guaranteed tariff is currently set at 44c per kWh.

The Government intends to increase the level of the tariff to 54c per kWh, and the legislation is currently being considered in Parliament.

How do I know what my electricity retailer will offer?

Those electricity retailers that agree to connect solar PV owners are obliged to pass through the 44c feed-in payment which will appear as a credit on your electricity bill. Some electricity retailers pay an additional amount for the solar electricity they receive from you.

The *Electricity (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2011* seeks to obligate retailers, who contract with solar customers, to pay a fair price for the power they receive from solar panels.

The minimum price will be determined by the Essential Services Commission of South Australia and is expected to be in the order of 6 cents per kilowatt-hour.

How long is the tariff available for?

The scheme commenced on 1 July 2008. The legislation that establishes the scheme has a "sunset" clause that means the scheme is due to finish on 30 June 2028. Once the scheme commences, all eligible PV systems will be able to receive the tariff until the scheme concludes.

The Government has announced their intention to close the scheme to new entrants on 1 October 2011. Eligible

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customers will continue to receive the feed-in tariff until closure in 2028.

Will any of the scheme elements change again?

A review of the scheme has been undertaken and the Government has proposed to make a number of changes to the scheme as a result. Legislation is currently being considered in Parliament for these changes to be implemented.

It is not known if any further changes will need to be made during the lifetime of the scheme.

Will the feed-in tariff be indexed or fixed until 2028?

No, there is no provision within the legislation for the tariff to be indexed.

It is important to bear in mind that if electricity prices rise, any power your solar system is providing directly to your home will be worth more.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible to benefit from the feed-in scheme, a PV system must:

- be operated by a small customer (ie a customer who fits in to the 'small customer' category, defined as consuming less than 160 mega watt-hours of electricity per annum)
- be grid-connected to a distribution network which supplies electricity to 10,000 or more domestic customers (eg ETSA Utilities)
- be connected to the grid via a 'bi-directional' or 'import/export' meter
- fit the definition of a small (PV generator meaning a PV system with capacity up to 10kVA for a single phase connection and up to 30kVA for a three phase connection**)
- comply with Australian Standard-AS 4777.

All existing and new systems meeting the eligibility criteria will receive the benefit.

Following review of the scheme, the Government proposed to restrict eligibility so that the feed-in benefit can be made

available to as many consumers as possible. More specific eligibility criteria for the scheme will be included within the new legislation and will:

- limit payment of the bonus to the first 45 kilowatt hours per day;
- limit eligibility to one generator per customer or entity;
- specifically exclude generators operated primarily for the purpose of generating a profit from the scheme.

These new eligibility criteria will not result in any diminished benefit for existing solar customers. However, intending purchasers of new solar systems need to be aware that, subject to passing of legislation, all customers that receive permission to connect their solar system from ETSA Utilities after the announcement on the 31st of August 2010 will be subject to these new eligibility criteria.

*** Most residential systems are sized between 0.75kVA and 2.5kVA and easily fit this definition.*

I am a remote area customer, am I eligible?

To ensure that customers of small electricity networks are not exposed to significant costs as a result of the feed-in tariff, the tariff is only available to networks that supply electricity to more than 10,000 domestic customers. At this stage only the main grid network operated by ETSA Utilities has more than 10,000 domestic customers.

How does the tariff work?

Most solar electricity systems are connected to the grid through a 'bi-directional' or 'import/export' meter. This meter records the quantity of electricity you draw from the grid to use in your home separately from the amount your solar electricity system feeds into the grid (even if you only export for an instant, the electricity export will be recorded). When a customer's solar electricity system produces more electricity than the building is using, the meter will record some electricity 'exported' to the grid.

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Normal charges apply to the quantity of electricity drawn from the grid by the customer. The feed-in tariff of 44 cents per unit of electricity (kilowatt-hour, kWh) is applied to the total quantity of electricity returned to the grid and REDUCES these 'normal charges' by the subsequent amount.

For some customers, the feed-in benefit may exceed these 'normal charges' and they may end up in credit for some, or all, billing periods.

What if I am in credit?

The amendments to the *Electricity Act 1996* require that if a customer remains in credit after 12 months, the customer is entitled to have this balance paid rather than maintaining an ongoing credit with their electricity retailer.

What if I have an older Solar installation with a Spinning Disc meter?

Some older solar electricity systems use a 'spinning disc' meter that rotates backwards when electricity is fed into the grid. However, in order to receive the feed-in tariff the electricity you return to the grid must be separately recorded. To be eligible for the feed-in benefit you would need to install a 'bi-directional' or 'import/export' meter. Your electricity retailer is able to arrange for ETSA Utilities to install one of these meters. There may be a cost involved in this.

I have a solar hot water system, am I eligible?

No, this scheme is for systems that generate electricity and feed it to the grid, not for systems that generate hot water.

Are other renewable systems eligible?

No, this feed-in scheme only applies to small customers (consuming less than 160MWh per year) who own a small-scale grid-connected solar PV system.

What about schools and other non-residential sites?

The feed-in tariff is available to all sites in South Australia that fit the description of a

'small electricity customer'. As well as residential consumers, this definition will cover small businesses, community buildings, churches and some smaller schools, providing the facility consumes less than 160 MWh of electricity per annum* and meets the other eligibility criteria.

It is worth noting that if a customer has a reasonable daytime load it is likely to use all the electricity its solar system produces with no excess available to acquire the premium tariff. The customer may be able to maximise the income from their solar system by improving the energy efficiency of their operations and returning some or more power to the grid.

** As a guide, typical annual electricity bills would be in the order of \$30,000 or less*

What other solar rebates are available?

Households and businesses that install eligible small-scale solar photovoltaic, wind and hydro electricity systems from 9 June 2009 may also be eligible to receive extra renewable energy certificates under the federal Solar Credits program. Find out more about Solar Credits at www.orer.gov.au or by calling (02) 6159 7700.

The Federal Government's Solar Hot Water Rebate Program provides rebates for the installation of greenhouse friendly hot water technologies. Find out more at www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency/solarhotwater/

Under the South Australian Solar Hot Water Heater Rebate Scheme, rebates for installation of solar hot water systems are available. For more information phone (08) 8204 1888 or visit the website at http://www.dtei.sa.gov.au/energy/rebates_and_grants/solar_hot_water

How much energy does an average system generate? How much can I get back?

A 1.6kW PV system installed in South Australia would typically generate over 2000kWh per annum (depending on exactly where in the state it is installed, its

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orientation and any obstructions to its solar access).

In South Australia, on average, around half the electricity generated by solar electricity systems is returned to the grid.

If 1000kWh were returned to the grid, the owner would be eligible to receive feed-in benefits of \$440 per annum with the current rate of the feed-in tariff. If an equal amount of energy was consumed in the owner's household, the system would also be reducing the amount of electricity customers need to purchase, by around \$150-\$200 worth of grid electricity.

Some electricity retailers will add a further amount to pay for the electricity they receive from you, meaning you could receive as much as 50c per kilowatt hour in total. You may need to approach your electricity retailer and confirm the tariff that they will be offering solar PV owners.

The amount a household returns to the grid will depend on how much energy is being consumed in the house when the solar panels are generating power. PV owners may be able to maximise their income from their solar system by improving the energy efficiency of their house and returning more power to the grid. For example, one could switch off any appliances that aren't needed, shift some tasks to the evening, shade windows to minimise the need for air-conditioning and so on.

For more advice on ways to save energy, please contact the Government of South Australia's Energy Advisory Service on 8204 1888, or free call 1800 671 907 (for country callers only).

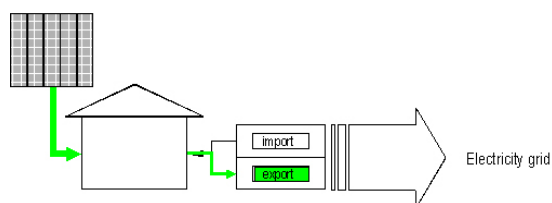
What are other benefits of going solar?

Solar electricity on your roof is one of the best environmentally responsible ways to take control of meeting your household's energy needs. By reducing energy consumption in our homes and sourcing green energy, we reduce the impact we have on our environment and help tackle climate change.

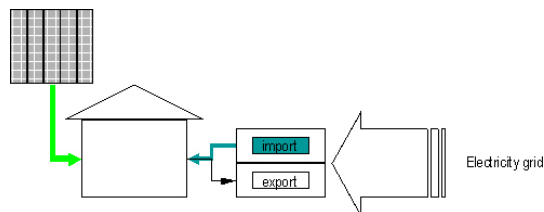
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METERING OF PV SYSTEMS

The output of the photovoltaic (PV) system is connected to the household loads which in turn are connected to the grid via a bi-directional or 'import/export meter'. When the output of the PV system exceeds the household loads, the excess electricity is fed into the grid via the 'export' register of the meter. The meter records the 'net export' rather than the 'gross production' of the PV system (ie gross production – household load = net export).



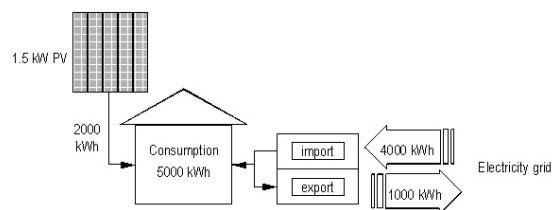
When household loads exceed the output of the PV system, the balance of electricity required is taken from the grid via the 'import' register of the meter (ie household load – gross production = electricity purchased).



Once per quarter, both the import and export registers are read and this information passed to the responsible retailer. Net exports (ie electricity returned to the grid), typically vary from 10 per cent to 50 per cent of the total production of the panels for the billing period depending mainly on household electricity consumption patterns and the size of the PV system. If 50 per cent of panel gross production is returned to the grid, this is equivalent to around 20 per cent of the average household's electricity consumption.

The following energy flows for a 'typical' household consuming 5,000kWh per year, with a 1.5kW PV system returning 50 per cent of production to the grid illustrates how the PV system not only produces 'export' electricity but, for a given level of household consumption, reduces the household's electricity demand from the grid.

A simplified example:



In this case, the annual return on the investment can be summarised as below:

Before installing PV: 5000kWh at an average 20c/kWh = \$1,000 per annum

With Feed-in: 4000kWh at an average 20c/kWh = \$800, less; 1000 kWh at a minimum 44c/kWh = \$440, leaving a net bill of \$360 per annum. In this case, the household reduces their electricity bills by \$640 per annum.

Note that each individual customer's circumstances will differ and that this saving may not apply in each case.

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