



Advocacy Report

This report outlines the advocacy conducted as part of Project Number 36:

Impediments to Grid Connection of Solar Photovoltaic: the consumer experience.

Summary:

This research was supported by a grant from the National Electricity Code Administrator Advocacy Panel and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

The objective of this research was to understand and relieve the issues impeding small renewable energy system owners negotiating grid connection of systems.

The research revealed that many consumers who independently choose to invest in solar PV systems, and contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, face considerable discrimination when negotiating connectivity into the National Electricity Market. These impediments are due to a regulatory framework which provides little incentive for electricity utilities to facilitate market entry of small renewable, provides little protection of system owners who are in a vulnerable negotiating position and allows unnecessarily high costs and complexity.

ATA recommends that these issues be addressed by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) and Government as a matter of urgency to ensure that end to discrimination of small renewable embedded generation. This includes clarification and effective enforcement of the existing regulatory regime, recognition of the vulnerable position of system owners and the development of standard grid connection agreements to simplify the grid connection process.

Project Outcomes:

- Research report titled *Impediments to Grid Connection of Solar Photovoltaic: the consumer experience* (available from http://www.ata.org.au/policy/impediments_to_grid_connection.pdf)
- Updated ATA Solar Electricity Booklet with sections covering grid connection, negotiating with utilities and Renewable Energy Certificates.

- 'How-to-guides' that provide system owners with information and guidance to assist with the currently burdensome grid connection process.
- Raised awareness among system owners (or prospective owners) of the challenges and how these may best be overcome with improved negotiating positions.
- Raised awareness among governments and regulators of the challenges facing small distributed generation system owners and the aspects of the regulatory framework which permit discrimination.
- ATA staff and members have an increased knowledge of these barriers and ability to provide future support for grid connection issues. This is available for phone support and inquiries from ATA members and the general public.

Advocacy:

- Updated Solar Electricity Booklet which is provided to all Solar PV system owners when applying for the Federal Government Photovoltaic Rebate Programme.
- Published findings and solutions in *ReNew* magazine.
- Published *How-to-Guides* on ATA's website for free distribution to public.
- Submissions to:
 - MCE Energy Market Reform Program (available at http://www.ata.org.au/policy/energy_markets_reform_review.pdf) > Note this was funded separately by the Advocacy Panel.
 - ESCoSA Standard Grid Connection Guidelines (submission available at <http://www.ata.org.au/policy/escosa.pdf>)
- Presentation of project findings and recommendations provided to the Solar Cities Best Practice Forum conducted by the Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria.
- Information and knowledge shared and published through a range of forum, including the NEM Network and Renewable Energy Industry.
- Research report sent to Victorian Minister for Energy and Minister for the Environment as well as to the secretariat of the MCE Renewable and Distributed Generation Working Group.
- Meeting with ESC Victoria to highlight and discuss the regulatory barriers and impact and interpretation of the Distribution and retail Codes.

Project Schedule:

ATA wish to acknowledge that this project took longer than planned, due to a number of factors largely beyond ATA's control. These include

- The Advocacy Panel funded ATA to prepare a submission to the MCE Distribution and Retail Pricing Framework Issues Paper. This took some 6 weeks from the project timeline.
- Timing with consultations input. This took a lengthier period than expected, particularly with finalising numerous drafts between ATA and the consultant. ATA believe this was essential to providing a high quality report.
- There was a need to liaise with the ESC and ensure that ATA understood their position and view on the many issues raised. This ensured a more focused and accurate final paper. It also provided ESC with a two week right of reply to the final draft before its release. Note, they did not provide any feedback during this time.

Conclusion:

ATA wish to thank the Advocacy Panel for their support.

ATA believes that this project has been most effective and successful in raising the profile of the many challenges facing market access of small distributed generation.

This project has resulted in the publication of considerable information to assist and empower consumers. As importantly, these issues have been highlighted to government and regulators. ATA will continue to advocate for the necessary changes in the regulatory framework to ensure a truly 'open access' market regime.