Peter Biggs

Enquiry into true value of rooftop solar

10/2/16

To whom it may concern,

I wish to submit my thoughts to your enquiry, into the true value of exported rooftop solar power.

I am a homeowner in the south east suburbs of Melbourne. I have a 3Kw system on my roof. I currently generate and export excess power when we cannot use it at home.

I see our investment in rooftop solar systems, along with all other's in Australia, as benefitting the entire grid and connected population. I have seen evidence of our exported solar power lowering peak supply levels at strong (and other) demand times. This, I believe, significantly assists the overall network as more transmission capacity and generation does not have to be 'built in', to satisfy the occasional peak demand periods.

The generation of power from solar panels does not in itself generate any pollution, however there was pollution generated to build the solar plant in the first place – and will be at the end of its life, when we dispose or recycle.

I am seriously annoyed at being ripped off when my supplier bills me upwards of 30 cents for a Kw of power, and only gives me 5 cents for the same! How is that fair? How is that right?

In addition to that, the energy suppliers are seeing the writing on the wall and instead of charging enormous amounts for power delivered, they are ramping up prices for connection to the grid. I am paying $1.20 per day for the luxury of being connected to the grid. Again, how is this right? How is this fair? I should not be charged for the mismanagement and lack of foresight of the energy industry.

I am waiting for the price of batteries to come to a point that breaks even with what I am paying for power from (and to) the grid. When this happens, I will disconnect from the grid if charges remain high. This is very disappointing because if this happens on a large scale, energy networks will unfortunately loose an asset that they can use to assist their own networks – people with solar. Think of smoothing peak supply, think of less investment in transmission, think of smart grids and the associated cost savings that can come from that.

Additionally, If I am forced (by the economics) to disconnect from the grid, I'll also be forced to look for my own 'peaking' generator. Consider what impact that may have on our cities if every individual found it cheaper and easier to purchase and use a fuel generator in the back yard for those days when the clouds hover… $3 worth of petrol on those days sure beats what we can purchase from the grid! (See what's happening to the oil price recently? Getting pretty cheap isn't it? It will be around for a lot longer than many people realise…because there are complex issues and motivators driving all the players; exporters, oil companies, foreign states, even the banks that lent money to these guys who want their loans repaid! etc…)

Ie: Think very carefully about the consequences of your decisions. If the population doesn't particularly like, or see value in what you provide, they will be motivated to a better, cheaper, easier solution. Also, not all people are motivated by the environmental aspects of green energy. Take a look and find out how many people are motivated by the economics. That might scare you. For an example of people going ahead regardless of the Government, you only need to look at what's happened to Solar in Australia – it has been picked up by consumers, not because the Government has handed out cash, but because it's a damn fine idea and when the sums are done, it makes complete sense. I'm a little annoyed at all governments dragging their heels on green energy, smart grids, etc etc.

Here we are where you are running yet another inquiry. Why? There's an incredible depth of knowledge and study and assessment done out there. Why are you not seeing or using that? (Have a look at the Rocky Mountain Institute's great work in this field as an example, go and have a chat to some of the people at Dyesol, or Redflow – both tremendous Australian companies, trying to survive in a climate where they receive very little assistance from the Australian Government and associated bodies! Do you know about Ceramic Fuel Cells, in our own state of Victoria? They went under, again, because the domestic political climate was so incredibly negative towards the work that they were doing. What a lost opportunity for Australia as a whole!

Finally, I would love to see some real work done on allowing everyday people to participate in arbitrage – ie: selling their generated capacity for gain (either from panels or from storage such as batteries), when they don't need it and when the price is good… This is yet another incentive for everyday consumers (and generators) to be motivated to both getting great value from their investment and assisting the wider community when there is a requirement within the community for power above that which can/is provided by baseload generation. I believe there's an organisation located in the ACT that does arbitrage? Their name escapes me at the moment – may be reposit?

In summary, I do ask you to take my comments into consideration. I would like to see results from this submission and I look forward to seeing tangible positive change from this. Focus on Government being the enabler for a better, more prosperous community, not the roadblock. In the end, that's what a Government is there for.