

David Booth

**I want a fair go for solar owners and if one does not emerge then I will probably take action to remove my home from the grid**

13/2/16

To the Essential Services Commission - Inquiry into the true value of Distributed Generation to Victorian Consumers

I have installed 5 kW of solar capacity in Wheelers Hill for which I receive at the moment an 8 c/kWh feed-in tariff. This system has proved very effective and I have rearranged our energy use to take maximum advantage of it. It does still greatly annoy me to feel exploited by power suppliers. The difference between consumption and feed-in tariff is, in my opinion completely unjustifiable and a blatant ripoff. I have considered going off the grid by installing extra capacity and storage. At the moment that is not the best way to go because of the state of battery technology and costs. However, this limitation is rapidly being improved and I am watching carefully - largely because I feel exploited.

I have a beach house for which the usage and economics are very different. I have been awaiting the outcome of the present Inquiry before deciding on my future direction there. If the current planned 5c rebate continues to apply then I expect to take this house off grid with solar and a little wind. In this way I feel sure that I can learn lessons which will better inform my decisions in Melbourne.

I feel strongly that Victoria needs to ensure we have power companies committed to maximising the flexibility that renewable energy offers to the power grid. This flexibility should be used to allow use of power stations in such a way that greenhouse emissions are minimised for the benefit of the community and indeed the whole world. No technically-competent unbiased person doubts the fact that climate change is the biggest problem facing the world today. It needs immediate action. One of the simplest ways to get positive changes is to make maximum use of renewables. At the moment solar power installed on domestic roofs is a major asset. It can grow but it will only grow properly if it does so as part of a sensible whole-of-system plan. Proper feed-in tariffs are essential for this.

Power companies have made many mistakes in planning their systems. They and their shareholders should accept responsibility for these errors and suffer whatever losses result. They should not be subsidised to shield them from the consequences of mistakes by exploiting domestic solar owners.

I am a retired professor of physics. I have also been a Dean of one of Melbourne's engineering schools and a senior university administrator. I do understand many of the technical and other issues involved in power provision. These issues are not simple but they need to be addressed by both Government and power companies. The Government needs to have a definite strategy for the modernisation of our essential power systems. Home solar owners need to be encouraged to be partners in total sustainable generation. This will not happen without sustainable feed-in arrangements - not just tariffs but wider

arrangements. It is in nobody's interest to see home solar systems disconnected from the grid and the positive role they can play in its operation.

Rooftop solar is not about to go away. Indeed there are technology changes likely to be imminent which will see the costs of installing these systems drop very considerably. It is not in the interests of Government or the power companies to see householders alienated just because of short-term thinking.

Solar owners should be paid a fair price for the energy they create. A fair feed-in tariff for solar power would be the amount it costs to buy that energy from an electricity company - a 1-for-1 unit price.

I strongly urge the ESC to immediately recommend to the Andrews Labor Government to set a fair price for solar at 1:1, before further cuts to the feed-in tariff take effect at the end of 2016. Even more important is that there be long term planning done by Government and power companies. It is essential that the detail of these plans be made widely available to the public and that feed-in tariff decisions be explained in terms of these plans.