What are Smart Energy Communities?

Smart Energy Communities will support volunteer community energy groups to access legal and technical expertise, tools and funding to deliver practical smart energy projects in towns and suburbs across Australia more quickly and efficiently. The program would also remove the red tape holding back innovative community energy enterprises.

The Smart Energy Community Program seeks to halve the build time for community energy projects, by connecting communities with the expertise and early stage funding they need to deliver smart energy projects. The program draws in successful Coalition Government supported programs such as Solar Towns, the National Landcare Program and the NSW Growing Community Energy program.

The proposed Smart Energy Communities Program will create 10 Regional Energy Hubs across NSW to provide the coordination, expertise and funding needed to implement clean energy initiatives that empower and benefit, locked out energy consumers (e.g. renters and low-income households), communities, farmers and a range of other local energy actors. These hubs, combined with a Community Energy Innovation Grant Fund and a Smart Energy Communities Network, would provide the framework for a rapid expansion of community power in NSW.

With just $16.6 million in NSW funding over the next four-years, and $49.6 million over 10 years, the NSW Government could unlock over $150 million of investment in local renewable energy and energy efficiency projects; creating local jobs, reducing power bills and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

The Smart Energy Communities program would leverage the efforts of existing volunteers, willing contributions from the private sector and community enthusiasm for renewables, to support all Australians to access innovative and emerging energy technologies.

Australians love local renewables

Community power is popular: 63% of Australians would be more likely to vote for party with a policy to ensure solar is installed on every home that is suitable and on buildings like hospitals and schools.

Community power can cut spiraling energy costs: As major retailers announce 20% price increases in NSW, voters want Government to take action on energy prices. Community power creates real opportunities for households of all stripes to affordably and reliably reduce their energy costs.

Community power is spreading fast: There are now over 34 community energy groups and over 25 operating community energy projects in NSW. 27% of the voting public now live under a solar roof.

Community power creates regional jobs: Research shows that if there is a community ownership component of a renewable energy project, the economic and job benefit derived from the project by the community is 1.5-7 times greater than it would otherwise have been.

But red tape and an outdated energy market are holding back the smart energy rollout: More than 35% of households - including renters and apartments - are not able to put solar on their roof. Community energy means they can still invest in our energy system, even without their own rooftop. To date projects have been hampered by outdated market regulations that get in the way of innovative communities wanting energy independence.

A more detailed breakdown of the Smart Energy Communities Program can be found online at www.fundcommunityenergy.org.

Smart Energy Communities Policy Briefer