



Smart Energy Communities

Bringing together families, communities, small business and landholders to deliver practical smart energy projects

Australians love local renewables

Energy efficiency, renewable energy and the smart grid are the new frontier, not only for local environmental conservation but also economic development and community empowerment.

It's 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.

It's affordable: average installed solar PV prices have fallen 30% since 2012.

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

Its an international trend: In Germany, in 2012 47% of all installed renewables was owned by citizens and communities. In Scotland there are over 500 community energy projects, delivering affordable energy, independence and start-up funding for new regional enterprises.

It 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 local community is 1.5-7 times greater than it would otherwise have been.

But red tape and an out-dated 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. But to date projects have been hampered by outdated market rules and regulations that get in the way of innovative communities wanting energy independence.

With just \$16.6 million in NSW funding over the next four-year period, a total of \$49.6 million dollars over 10 years, the NSW Government could unlock over \$150million in investment in local smart energy projects, helping to create local jobs opportunities to reduce power bills while 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.



What is the Smart Energy Communities Program?

Communities across Australia are determined to build their own clean energy projects, which can be delivered by connecting them with the right technical expertise, innovative funding and red tape removal.

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 program draws in successful Coalition Government supported programs such as Solar Cities and Solar Towns, the National Landcare Program and the NSW Growing Community Energy program.

Projects eligible for funding in communities across Australia could include:

- Community solar farms
- Farmer bioenergy projects
- Community battery builds
- Solar gardens for renters (overcoming the split-incentive barrier)
- Peer-to-peer energy trading, using smart energy technology
- Community electric vehicle solar charging
- Community council partnerships to deliver energy efficiency and innovative solar financing solutions
- Community partnerships with developers (property and renewables)

Community groups are pioneering new local energy business models that can be self-sustaining over time. The real barriers they face are access to expertise, capacity building and the funding needed for the development stage (approximately 10% of the cost of the project) - to get a project from inception (an idea) to being investment ready. This is where a relatively small amount of government grant funding would unlock the potential for community energy and billions of dollars of community investment.

We propose that the Smart Energy Communities Program should start with piloting three Regional Energy Hubs (see explanation below) in the Northern Rivers, the New England and the Shoalhaven/Monaro region, with Funding delivered through the Climate Change Fund. These three locations are hotspots of community energy and broader renewable energy activity and are also politically relevant.



How the Smart Energy Communities Program works

The core elements of the Smart Energy Communities Program draw on the framework for the National Landcare Program.

	Smart Energy Communities Program	National Landcare Program
Aim	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.	“To harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainable manage Australia’s natural environment and its productivity.”
Organisations	Establish 10 Regional Energy Hubs - NFP organisations or social enterprises in 10 urban, regional and remote areas across NSW. Start-up funding for 2 years and ongoing 1/2 matched operational funding. Regional Energy Hubs would support many local volunteer community groups in their regions.	Regional funding stream – this is investing “over \$450million throughout Australia’s 56 natural resource management organisations over four years. This funding recognises the crucial role the 56 regional NRM organisations play in delivering NRM at a local and regional level.”
Programs and Funding	A Community Energy Innovation Grant Fund would provide funding for community clean energy organisations (both those with and without start-up funding) to develop local renewable community plans and develop and pilot and scale-up new models of community clean energy, that enable community members, renters, farmers, small businesses and more to participate in and benefit from clean energy.	National funding – this is funding is delivered directly by the Australian Government to support local implementation of priority programs such as Clean Up Australia, Whale and Dolphin protection and 20million Trees
Capacity Building Network	A Smart Energy Communities Network would ensure that models, business plans, implementation strategies developed are shared across the 10 Regional Energy Hubs established, as well as more broadly to regions and communities that were not successful in receiving start-up funding. The Network would also be tasked with developing case-studies, running trainings and a bi-annual conference.	Network and capacity building funding – funding is provided for strategic support that increases the capacity of Landcare Networks, including through information sharing programs and initiatives such as the Landcare Conference and the National Landcare Facilitator.

In addition, we are proposing the Smart Energy Communities Program cover reform processes:

Renewable red tape review	At present out-dated energy bureaucracy and other regulatory barriers are of the biggest hurdles to community energy investment. A review of these with a view to removing barriers would make a big difference to project progressing swiftly and more efficiently.
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For more information:

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