

Introduction



SolarCitizens

Why are we doing this?

Right now is a critical time for solar and the future of renewable energy in Australia. Public support for the Renewable Energy Target is riding high at more than 80%¹ and it's clear that most Australians realise solar just makes sense - for jobs, for families and for the future of our energy system.

But the Renewable Energy Target is at risk. A review commissioned by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and headed by noted sceptic Dick Warburton recommends cutting or axing the policy, despite finding that Target would bring down power prices by 2020. The government is considering the report and how it will respond, and is trying to get the Opposition to negotiate on cutting the Target².

But while the vested interests in big power companies can hold sway over politicians, we know that members of parliament always want to listen to their constituents.

We know that there are a variety of views on the Renewable Energy Target across the Parliament - especially in the Coalition - about the future of the Target and right now we have an opportunity to make sure our politicians know that local voters expect them to Keep Solar Strong. The next few weeks are critical - reaching out now by visiting your MP is the best thing you can do help protect the Target.

Whether your MP shares our views, disagrees with us on every point, or hasn't even heard of the Renewable Energy Target before, every single meeting will have an impact. Take this recent example from Terry, a Solar Citizens volunteer team leader on the Sunshine Coast:

"We recently met with the chief of staff to our local MP Clive Palmer and told him the stories of solar owners and businesses on the Sunshine Coast, businesses that would be forced to cut jobs if the Target is scrapped. Later we saw that Clive spoke at length about the very same people and businesses during his speech to Parliament about his stance on protecting the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Renewable Energy Target. Going to meet with his office really put those local examples on his radar!"

- Terry, Sunshine Coast Solar Citizens

¹ http://www.afr.com/p/national/surge_plans_support_for_renewables_dKKIhjwKNMdfRxbJcdaUO

² <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/costs-of-australias-renewable-energy-target-not-justifiable-review-20140828-109m04.html> ; <http://reneweconomy.com.au/2014/ret-review-panel-calls-for-large-scale-solar-schemes-to-close-39648>

As your local member, your MP's first priority should be representing your views - it's their job. To them, you are an important person – you live in their electorate and as such they are there to represent you. Telling your story about why solar and the Target are important to you will help your MP understand how important they are for Australia and that they should do the right thing by their local constituents.

The following pages contain everything you'll need to meet your local MP and have a successful meeting. Remember, you don't need to be an expert on the policy or on solar power. All you have to show is that you care enough about solar and the Target to turn up in your MP's office and have a conversation. So let's get cracking!

What's involved?

Here are the 5 essential steps:

- STEP 1: BOOK YOUR MEETING
- STEP 2: REGISTER YOUR MEETING WITH SOLAR CITIZENS
- STEP 3: PREPARE YOUR MEETING
- STEP 4: HAVE YOUR MEETING!
- STEP 5: REPORT BACK TO SOLAR CITIZENS

This guide will run you through each of these steps in detail - and if you have any more questions, we are here to answer them - simply send an email to us at info@solarcitizens.org.au.

Also, don't forget to check out the Time to Shine [resources page!](#)

Contents of this guide

- **STEP 1 – Book your meeting**
 - Request a meeting with your MP
 - Template for meeting request
 - Follow up call to your MP’s office
- **STEP 2 – Register your meeting with Solar Citizens**
- **STEP 3 – Prepare your meeting**
 - Get your team together
 - Run through your meeting
 - Meeting runsheet template
 - Meeting agenda template
- **STEP 4 - Have your meeting!**
 - Things to bring with you
 - In the meeting
- **STEP 5 - Report back to Solar Citizens**
- ***Additional Resources***
 - Media release templates:
 - To send out the day before your meeting
 - To send out as soon as possible after your meeting
 - What can you do next?

STEP 1 – BOOK YOUR MEETING

To find out who the MP for your electorate is go to the Australian Electoral Commission's Electorate Search page: <http://apps.aec.gov.au/esearch/>. Once you've found out who your MP is, book a meeting by getting in touch with their office. Find contact details for your MP [here](#).

Request a meeting with your MP

The best way to make first contact with your MP when you want to set up a meeting is to send an email/letter to their electorate office. You can find their contact details in [this spreadsheet](#).

There are a few things you should be sure to include in your email/letter:

- An introduction - let them know who you are and that you are a local constituent
- Why you want to meet with them, i.e. to talk about solar and the Renewable Energy Target that has recently been reviewed
- Mention all the other people you know in the local area who also want to keep solar strong and include the number of solar homes in your electorate (which you can get from [our Solar Briefers here](#))
- Ask for an appointment (pick a reasonable time frame - not tomorrow, but not four months from now, within 2-4 weeks is good)



*Solar Citizens meeting with Glenn Lazarus,
Leader of the Palmer United Party in the Senate,
September 2014*

Template for email/letter for meeting request:

[Your name]
[Your postal address]
[Your email address]
[Your mobile phone and/or home telephone number]

Dear [Mr/Ms] [Name] MP,
My name is [name] and I am a resident of [suburb] in the [X] electorate. I am writing to you on behalf of a team of Solar Citizens supporters who are also residents of [X] electorate.

There are more than 5 million Australians living under a solar roof, and [X - you can get number of homes with solar PV from your electorate's [Solar Briefer](#)] solar homes in your electorate.

As one of your constituents, I would like to request a thirty-minute meeting with you on a date convenient to you [[a convenient timeframe, e.g. within the next 2 – 4 weeks](#)].

The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss the policy issues that are important to our local community and to Solar Citizens supporters, namely the Renewable Energy Target that has been recently reviewed and is at risk. The Target has helped more than 1.3 million Australian families go solar, created thousands of solar jobs and generated billions of dollars in investment.

[In your own words, a sentence or two about why the Target is important to you personally.]

In turn, the meeting will also allow local Solar Citizens supporters to learn where you stand on these important issues and how you plan to tackle them and represent our views while you are in office.

I look forward speaking to your diary manager as soon as possible to discuss your availabilities and I would appreciate the courtesy of responding via email or telephone by

Follow up call to your MP's office

Follow up your email or letter to your MP with a phone call 1-2 days after your written meeting request. It's likely you'll speak to a member of staff, like a personal assistant, or electorate officer. It's a good idea to ask to be put through to the person in charge of the MP's calendar - usually this person is called the diary manager.

After they transfer you, introduce yourself and tell them you're calling to set up a meeting about the importance of solar and protecting the Renewable Energy Target. Let the staffer know you have already written and requested a meeting, then ask what availabilities your MP has.

The staffer will likely not know availabilities off the top of their head and will ask you to call back at another time. If they say this, ask them specifically when to call back and get the staffer's name and their best contact details.

If the staffer offers you a time, book the meeting with your MP. You should ask for a half an hour meeting, but be willing to work with their schedule and needs. If your MP is a Minister or an opposition front-bencher, it is reasonable for them to offer you a meeting with their staff member - but this is such a critical issue, you should push for a meeting with your MP face to face.

If they are being a bit hesitant, mention that you may discuss this important community issue with your local paper/radio/TV.

Be persistent! Don't be worried about making multiple calls over a period of several days or weeks - remember, it's your MP's job to listen to you.

STEP 2 – REGISTER YOUR MEETING WITH SOLAR CITIZENS

The next step is to let us know that you've booked a meeting, so we can keep track of which MPs still need to be met with. All you need to do is fill in [THIS online form to REGISTER YOUR MP MEETING](#) with details like time and date, which MP you're meeting and who's going with you.

You can also let us know if you'd like us to publish your contact details, so other Solar Citizens in your electorate can come along to your meeting if they so wish. MP meetings are better with friends!

STEP 3 – PREPARE YOUR MEETING

So you've got a meeting booked, what next?

Get your team together

We suggest getting a team of 3 - 4 people together (definitely no more than 5). If you can find the right people, the ideal roles to have covered are: a solar owner, a solar worker/business person and someone who wants to get solar, but don't worry if you can't fill all those roles. The most important thing is that you're all from the MP's electorate.

And remember to [let us know](#) once you've booked your meeting so we can add it to our list of Time to Shine meetings happening around the country.

Run through your meeting

Next, it's time to prepare to ensure you get the most out of the time you spend with your MP. There are a few things you can do to make sure you're ready:

- Think about what you'll say and about your **solar story**: What has your solar experience been? Why does keeping solar strong matter to you? It may help to make notes on this to make sure it's concise and it's a good idea to practice with a family member or friend.
- Download the **Solar Briefer** for your electorate, it has helpful facts and figures for your meeting: www.solarcitizens.org.au/solarbriefers_3
- Check out our **Objection Handling** section below for some help answering MP's questions, or responding to their answers.
- Read our [RET fact sheet](#) if you still have questions about the Target.
- Put together a **meeting agenda** and send this to the MP's office a few days *before* the meeting (see an example below).
- Print out the [Solar Pledge Card](#) for your MP to sign.
- Make sure you have a **camera** ready to bring along with you.
- Make a **run sheet (see [here](#) for our template)** - A run sheet is a brief plan for what topics you will discuss in the meeting and how much time you'll allocate for each. Writing one will help you prepare and keep you on track during the meeting.
- If you want, you can learn more about your MP and look at their biography on Australian Parliament House website: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members.
- Send out a **media alert** to let local media know that you're meeting with your MP and why (see below for a template).

This might seem like a lot - so if you have others coming to the meeting, talk about who is going to do what within your team and make sure the work is divided fairly. It's a good idea to make a note of who is responsible for which tasks to make sure everything gets done.

You'll need someone to bring the camera, someone to take notes, someone to make sure the agenda is kept and you fit in the most important thing - asking for your MP to protect the Target and to be in a **photo** with the [pledge card](#). If you can get you MP to sign the pledge card, even better!

Meeting Runsheet

This is an **internal document** for you or your team to use so your meeting runs smoothly. By filling this out, it will help by providing a quick outline of a typical meeting plan to all team members, so that your whole team knows who is doing what and what comes next - a 30 minute meeting will fly by once you're in the room. We've drawn up a Time to Shine Meeting Sheet you can use to help you structure your time and record responses from your MP – find it [here](#).

Meeting agenda

This is an external document that should be sent to the MP's office **a day or two before** the meeting. It's a good way to demonstrate that you take your time together seriously, and give an outline of the issues you want to discuss on the day.

Here is a template:

Date: [meeting date]

Location: [address of your MP's office]

Attendees: [Your MP and team members in attendance. Include a contact phone number for the main contact.]

Objective: The objective of the meeting is to present local solar data and views of Solar Citizens members living in [electorate] and to hear about the views of [MP] on solar power and the Renewable Energy Target.

Schedule:

Time allocated: [X] minutes

1. Introductions
2. Presenting the Solar Briefer for [X] electorate
3. Discussion of policies affecting solar, especially the Renewable Energy Target
4. Discussion of [MP] views on solar and the Renewable Energy Target.

STEP 4 – HAVE YOUR MEETING!

Things to bring with you:

- Copies of the [meeting runsheet](#) - one for the facilitator and one for the recorder
- A print out of the meeting confirmation the staffer should've emailed to you
- A CAMERA/SMARTPHONE to take your photo
- A copy of your electorate's [Solar Briefer](#)
- A print out of the [Solar Pledge card](#).

In the meeting:

- Confirm the amount of **time** the MP has available and make sure you've practiced your agenda and that it fits into your allocated meeting time. Respect your MP by arriving on time and not going over time.
- **Introduce** yourselves - tell them how long you've lived in this electorate, why you love it
- Share your **solar story** - let your MP know if you have solar, want solar, know a solar worker or just want the better future for Australia that solar power will bring.
- Ask your MP to **share their thoughts on solar** – what do they think of it, what's their vision for a solar Australia? **Remember to ask: Does she/he have solar?** Finding out those stories, simply by asking your MP a few questions, can be a great way to connect with your representative in a real way and can give you the insight you need to talk to them in a persuasive way
- Ask your MP to support the campaign by signing the [Solar Pledge](#)
- Take some **photos** of your team members (ideally all of you) with your MP holding the Solar Pledge!
- Offer your sincere **thanks** for your MP's interest and let them know that you will be in touch again as the campaign progresses.

**REMEMBER TO TAKE
A PHOTO!**

Make sure you are **polite** in the meeting - but also be **persistent**. While we want to avoid being negative, we don't want to understate the importance of solar and the Renewable Energy Target to Australians and it's okay to let that show in the meeting. **Make sure you don't leave the meeting without asking firmly for their support and to be in the photo.**

Again, it's great to remember that this is a big part of your MP's job: meeting with constituents, listening to them and representing their views. So be passionate and be yourself - they work for you! You may even want to remind your MP - politely - of this fact.

What if your MP won't sign the pledge? Explain politely that MPs from all over NSW are being approached to support the campaign and that you are really disappointed they won't support the Renewable Energy Target when 82% of Australians already do. As soon as you're back from your meeting, email us at info@solarcitizens.org.au.

STEP 5 - Report back to Solar Citizens

Reporting back is a very important step - we'll be recording how all the MP meetings are going around Australia and if your MP signed the pledge so we can hold them to what they say, and let the rest of their electorate know where they stand on solar. We'll also upload your photo to the gallery.

So, we'd like you to:

- Fill out the [MP visit report back form](#) (don't forget to attach your photo!) on our website.
- Get your local media to run a story by sending out your media release.
- If you have Twitter, tweet at your MP (and at @solarcitizens) saying thank you with your photo attached.
- **Celebrate and congratulate yourself – you did it!**

Additional Resources

Media release templates:

MEDIA ALERT: To send out the day before your meeting:

****MEDIA ALERT TODAY****

[XX MONTH] 2014

TODAY: [YOUR AREA] RESIDENTS MEET [YOUR MP] TO TALK ABOUT PROTECTING THE RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGET

WHAT: [Your electorate] residents will meet with [Your MP's name] today to show how many Solar Citizens supporters live here and how they want the Renewable Energy Target protected in Parliament.

WHERE: Electorate office of [Your MP], [Exact address of your MP's office].

WHEN: [Date, time].

WHO: A group of [number] Solar Citizens members will ask [your MP] to take the Solar Pledge and deliver the Solar Briefer to [MP's name] - the report shows more than [number from briefer] people with solar panels on their roofs live in the area.

PIC OP: The group will be available outside [Your MP]'s office after the meeting. We can also provide a photo.

MEDIA RELEASE: To send out as soon as possible after your meeting:

[XX MONTH] 2014

[YOUR AREA] RESIDENTS MET [YOUR MP] TO KEEP SOLAR STRONG

[Your electorate name] residents met with [Your MP's name] today to show how many Solar Citizens supporters live in the area and that they want the Renewable Energy Target and the future of solar in Australia protected.

The group of [number] Solar Citizens members delivered a Solar Briefer report, which shows there are more than [the number of people] of people with solar panels on their roof in the electorate.

They also asked [MP name] to sign the Time to Shine solar, which asks him/her to commit to protecting the Renewable Energy Target and keeping solar strong in Australia.

“(Your quote here about why it was important for your MP to hear directly from your team and why it was important to question them about the issues that matter to your electorate),” team organiser [your name] said.

This is one of many meetings happening around the country with federal MPs being asked to keep solar strong.

“We want to make sure that before our MPs make the right decisions for the future of solar in Australia,” said Claire O’Rourke, National Director of Solar Citizens.

“Solar Citizens all over Australia are speaking with their local MPs to show them how the Renewable Energy Target is helping millions of Australians go solar and take control of their power bills.

What can you do next?

As you might have guessed, meeting with your MP is just the start - there’s so much more you can do! We have listed some suggestions below, and you can also email us at info@solarcitizens.org.au if you have any ideas or questions.

- Invite friends in other electorates to schedule a meeting with their MP.
- Hold a solar stall in your local shopping centre.
- Do some doorknocking or hold a forum or community event to raise awareness of the threat to solar and the Target.
- Ask your friends to sign the [Keep Solar Strong petition](#) so we can demonstrate growing community support.

Objection Handling

There's a lot of misinformation about the RET out there, and MPs may ask you some strange questions or state some things that are just plain wrong. It's okay to correct them but remember - be polite about it! It's okay to have differing views about something - that's a fact of our great democracy - but a fact is also a fact, and it's important that our MPs get the full story.

MP: There's no need for the RET as it since the establishment of the RET, Australia's energy market has also experienced a decline in electricity consumption which has reduced the need for further investment in large scale generation.

SC Team response:

While it is true that there is an oversupply in the electricity market at the moment, this should not affect the RET. An efficient market should correct itself in terms of excess supply, which would see electricity prices decrease and would create benefits for consumers.

Furthermore, the RET operates as a totally separate mechanism to the electricity market. The electricity market balances supply and demand many times a day, whereas RET certificates are accounted for over each year.

Finally, if a similar approach - the exclusion of emerging competitors to avoid creating excess supply - was taken in other areas of the economy, this would be disastrous for the economy: for example, building a new freeway may create excess in public transport capacity, yet the freeway is still built.

Given the community support for renewable energy and the fact that increased competition and supply will mostly likely mean lower prices for consumers, presumably only the electricity companies would see the RET functioning as it was designed to as a bad thing³.

MP: The RET was introduced to encourage the generation of electricity from renewables and to reduce emissions in the electricity sector. The renewable industry is now established in Australia, particularly in the small-scale (solar panels and solar hot water) market. Renewable energy will continue to have a long-term role in Australia's energy supply.

SC Team response:

The renewable industry is definitely established in Australia, but representatives from all parts of the industry - many of whom are small to medium sized businesses - have expressed great concern about the fate of the industry should the RET be scrapped. Already, the uncertainty around the Target is harming the industry⁴.

³ <http://theconversation.com/factcheck-does-australia-have-too-much-electricity-31505>

⁴ <http://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/august-2014/140828-ret-review-report.html>

MP: Rising electricity prices have a crippling effect on industry and that in turn means job losses.

SC Team response: The RET adds something like \$1 to household electricity bills, it has contributed only 2-3% to rising electricity prices - most of the increases have come from over investment in infrastructure by the distribution companies and the gold plating of the polls and wires⁵. When the 18 000 additional jobs the RET would create by 2020 are taken into account it's clear the RET is hugely beneficial.

MP: Solar generators are subsidised by other users. I don't believe that it is fair for some users to have to pay to subsidise the energy use of others.

SC Team response:

People with solar panels contribute energy mostly in the middle of the day, when demand for electricity is highest. Furthermore, households with airconditioners who use them in the middle of the day in the peak of summer are being subsidised by by other customers without air conditioners, up to \$350 per year as found by the Productivity Commission. The fossil fuel industry is also heavily subsidised and always has been.

MP: In the longer term, lowering the RET would reduce prices as cheaper fossil-fuel supply displaces the far more expensive renewable supply.

SC Team response:

Almost all the modelling done - even when conditions unfavourable to renewable energy are used - has shown that electricity prices will be cheaper in the long run if the RET is maintained⁶.

* For more info see our [RET factsheet](#)

7 Reasons why we need Solar and the Renewable Energy Target

1. Australian households will pay over \$50 more for electricity in 2020 if the RET is dumped, and beyond 2020 household bills would be up to \$140 more per year⁷
2. The Australian people want it - 82% of people support keeping the RET⁸
3. From now until 2040, reducing or scrapping the RET would cost Australia \$8 billion or \$10.6 billion respectively in renewable energy investment by 2040⁹
4. More than 24,000 Australians were employed in the renewable energy sector in 2012, and the RET is set to generate 18,400 jobs by 2020 if retained in its current form⁶.
5. Getting rid of the RET would see 34.7 million extra tonnes of carbon emissions in the atmosphere by 2020.⁶
6. Solar is great for rural communities - most solar systems are in regional and rural communities (53%), only 43% are installed in capital cities¹⁰.
7. Solar PV contributes to meeting peak demand, which is especially useful during heatwaves.⁵

⁵ <http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2014/july/1404136800/jess-hill/power-corrupts>

⁶ <https://retreview.dpmc.gov.au/appendix-c-executive-summary-acil-allen-modelling-report>; <http://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/policy-advocacy/renewable-energy-target/ret-policy-analysis.html>; <http://theconversation.com/how-does-the-renewable-energy-target-affect-your-power-bills-29694>

⁷ <http://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/policy-advocacy/renewable-energy-target/ret-policy-analysis.html>

⁸ http://www.afr.com/p/national/surge_plans_support_for_renewables_dKKIhjwkNMdFRxqbJcdaUO

⁹ <http://theconversation.com/renewable-energy-target-cut-would-hit-budget-modelling-30598>

¹⁰ <http://www.recagents.asn.au/solar-facts/>

Need to check anything with us? Contact: info@solarcitizens.org.au

Thanks for your efforts – and good luck!

