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Renewable energy on farm

Stuart Armitage, Queensland Farmers' Federation president 20 Mar 2019, 9:48 a.m.

News

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According to the Australian Energy Regulator, 316 small businesses customers have already been disconnected by Ergon Retail in the first two quarters of 2018-19. This should not come as a surprise as farm businesses have been on the receiving end of electricity cost increases of more than 200 per cent in 10 years, while CPI has increased by just 24pc over the same period. And also unsurprisingly, farmers are looking to alternative energy solutions.

Despite the growing adoption of renewable energy, particularly solar, farmers continue to experience several barriers preventing their connection. With funding from Energy Consumers Australia, the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF), Cotton Australia and the NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) recently conducted a research project to identify the unique challenges farmers face with connecting, installing and integrating of on-farm solar PV to find possible policy and regulatory options to improve the process.

Farmers identified a range of barriers and challenges with the planning, design, installation and connection of on-farm solar PV systems. The project found that although some of the barriers and challenges existed due to the complexity of the network connection process, there was a lack of expertise which prevented farmers from effectively engaging with the network companies. Moreover, farmers were often unable to scrutinise the advice of the solar PV supplier or installer who often do not have the required knowledge of the farming systems and technologies which the solar is powering.

Streamlining the connection process and improving the information flow between the network business, solar installers and farm businesses would realise untapped renewable energy opportunities across the agricultural sector. Two factsheets were created as part of the project to assist farmers make decisions and inform on farm renewable energy policy and regulation. They are available on the QFF website.

Farmers continue to see opportunities in the renewable energy sector - all that is needed now is that the regulatory and policy setting to be an enabler and not a constrainer.