

Media Release

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Much-needed help for Australians wanting to ‘plug in’ to new energy tech

Australians looking to buy or use new energy technology like rooftop solar, home batteries and electric vehicles can do so with greater confidence and reassurance after the launch of a new campaign that provides them with clear, independent and easy-to-use information.

The ‘Plug In’ campaign features a dedicated information hub with fact sheets, blogs and videos that help remove the guesswork for consumers thinking about purchasing or using new energy technology.

“We know that millions of Australians have already bought and installed rooftop solar panels, and increasingly are purchasing home batteries and electric vehicles and that these decisions are a huge part of Australia’s push towards a cleaner and better energy system,” Energy Consumers Australia Chief Executive Officer Lynne Gallagher said.

“Consumer adoption of these technologies has been a massive success story and we need to see even more of it over the next decade as our energy system transforms. But we also know that for some who have gone through it, the process has been challenging, confusing and even disappointing.

“These decisions are not easy for consumers and represent significant investments of their time and money. Australians need to be able to find information that explains the kind of products that meet their individual needs, how to find a reputable supplier and installer, how to use these technologies for their own benefit and what to do if something goes wrong. That’s what Plug In offers.”

The materials were created by Energy Consumers Australia in response to a request from State and Federal Energy Ministers under the Council of Australian Governments Energy Council. As well as appearing at the website <https://www.energytechguide.com.au/> they are ‘white-labelled’ and can be downloaded and used by others, including consumer groups, NGOs, market bodies, local councils and government websites.

Recent years have seen a flood of complaints from Australians unhappy with the sale, installation or operation of rooftop solar and other energy technologies. State Electricity and Water Ombudsmans’ offices are currently unable to investigate such complaints but have been calling for the power to do so.

“Complaints about new energy services often involve multiple service providers and require customers to navigate several forums in search of a satisfactory response,” New South Wales Electricity and Water Ombudsman Janine Young said.

“Increasingly, aspects of complaints involving energy products and services are out of EWON’s jurisdiction causing increased customer detriment and frustration. We’re proactively working with our state-based energy Ombudsman peers to ensure we influence reforms and regulation so that complaints raised by energy customers affecting their supply can obtain dispute resolution from their energy Ombudsman – reform needs to happen now.”

The Plug In campaign launches as Energy Consumers Australia reveals consumer interest in buying and installing such technology remains high. Three million Australian homes and businesses already have a solar system on their rooftop. New research from ECA’s Energy Consumer Behaviour Survey finds:

- 22% of households are currently considering purchasing rooftop solar
- 27% are considering adding a household battery

- 27% are considering purchasing an electric vehicle

Despite high interest levels around these new technologies there remains a high degree of uncertainty and trepidation. ECA's recent 'Pulse Survey' found that half of all household consumers (49%) felt they did not have access to the information they needed to make decisions around their energy use.

Separate research funded by ECA's Grants Program and carried out by the Australian Energy Foundation is released today, finding that although information and advice is available, it is complex, confusing, and often not delivered in a way that resonates with households. This work, which also examines how to create information materials that build trust with consumers and meet their needs, has been used to inform development of the Plug In campaign and ECA's ongoing work.

"This problem has been around a long time, and it hasn't gotten any better," Ms Gallagher said. "In 2017 we asked consumers about these issues and found that 32% wished they had been provided with better information about their system before they had it installed. Since then, nothing has really changed."

The Clean Energy Regulator released [a review into the integrity of the rooftop solar PV sector](#) last year, finding that stronger measures were required to protect consumers and that greater access to reliable information was needed. In its submission to the review, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said it had received "a large volume of complaints concerning the consumer experience with retail solar panels," noting that the scope of its role meant that it was not able to investigate many of them.

Specific issues included sales representatives making claims about the output of particular systems that could not realistically be achieved due to weather conditions or the type of inverter used, making false representations about where panels were manufactured and underquoting the cost of installation. Another issue was suppliers giving misleading information about the true cost of systems over time, relying on rebates, feed in tariffs or other cost inputs consumers were not eligible for or that had already expired.

Plug In materials have been compiled by subject matter experts at ECA, with input from not-for-profit sustainability advocacy organisation Renew. They walk consumers step-by-step through researching, buying, installing and operating new technologies, what questions to ask along the way and where to turn if something goes wrong. Subjects include:

- Buying and owning a rooftop solar system
- Buying and owning a home battery system
- Buying and owning an electric vehicle
- Going and living off grid
- Participating in a virtual power plant (VPP)
- Buying and using energy monitoring technology

"We are so pleased to launch these resources because we know from talking to consumers how great the need is for independent and easy-to-use information," Ms Gallagher said. "So many of the information sources out there at the moment come from commercial operators who are selling something."

"Better information on its own will not solve all the problems we see in this space. We absolutely need stronger consumer protections and we need the industry to lean in to better conduct. But this will be an important addition," she said.

About Energy Consumers Australia

Energy Consumers Australia is the independent, national voice for residential and small business energy consumers. We enable residential and small business energy consumers to have their voices heard by the sector by working with other consumer groups to gather evidence-based research with a national perspective, distil it to key viewpoints, and feed it back to the market to influence outcomes.

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