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To AEMC commissioner Chair  
Trim Record 18-11731 20.7.2017

Dear Mr Pierce,

I am a committee member of Repower Shoalhaven, a NFP Community Energy Group, that facilitates the uptake of renewable solar energy for businesses through community finance. Repower Shoalhaven was formed 5 years ago after a public meeting in Nowra.

During these 5 years Repower Shoalhaven has become one of the countries leading community energy groups. Since inception we have facilitated over \$1 million in community investment, installed 680kW of solar (2667 panels) on 15 business sites.

This is estimated to save businesses \$4.5 million dollars over the life of the solar systems, installed by community investors, at no cost to the businesses.

In December last year The Australian Energy Commission changed the legislation with regard to meter installations.

This has complicated the process and caused massive and unnecessary delays in getting solar systems fully operational.

It has and continues to cause increased costs and much wasted time for anyone having solar installed.

Repower Shoalhaven would like the governing body to immediately reverse the Power of Choice changes that are impacting on behind the meter solar installations.

If this is not possible, it is requested that at the bare minimum:

- The time allowed for meter upgrades be reduced from the current 6 weeks down to 4 weeks.
- Financial penalties are streamlined and regulated to incentivise retailers to create the capacity to deal with the Power of Choice changes and install meters on time.
- Repower suggests that retailers credit their customers with an on-bill credit for the lost savings calculated (expected generation of solar \* length of delay \* retailers peak energy rate for that customer). note \* denotes a multiplication

I hope you will consider this submission, look into these issues, and act.

Kind Regards,

  
Sigrid Cooper  
Repower Shoalhaven



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# POWER SHOALHAVEN

REPOWER Shoalhaven Incorporated  
PO Box 799, Nowra NSW 2541  
ABN: 73 379 383 110

## Power of Choice – Repower Submission

April 4<sup>th</sup> 2018

Daniel Jones, Cathy Gorman and John Clark

The Power of Choice metering changes, which came into effect from December 1 2017 have led to significant delays for residential and commercial energy users wishing to switch on their newly installed solar generation systems.

From the AEMC website:

“This ground-breaking review put consumers in the driving seat. Power of Choice is all about opportunities for consumers to make informed choices about how they use energy; and incentives for efficient investment so community demand for energy services can be met by the lowest cost combination of demand and supply options.”<sup>1</sup>

These customers are less empowered and are confused. Customers have increased costs due to delays to solar being switched on, confusing processes and customers are now required to engage in the process where previously trained professionals were responsible.

To summarise the real effects of the Power of Choice Changes for customers:

- Delays of up to 3 months in switching on their installed solar system
- Forms are ambiguous and when this ambiguity leads to errors in filling in information the retailers use this as an excuse for further delays.
- Lost energy savings from solar systems being switched off
- Lost feed-in tariff income from meters that are waiting to be upgraded or re-configured
- Wasted time trying to find answers from their retailers, whose own departments were not aware of the new changes and how to deal with customer requests for metering changes
- Misinformation from retailers: incorrect costs, wrong forms, sending customers to the wrong department

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aemc.gov.au/our-work/our-current-major-projects/power-choice>

To summarise the real effects for the solar industry:

- Reputational implications – customers expect solar systems to work when installed, but experience significant delays and solar service providers have no control over the delays
- Increased costs arising from the time required to educate customers about the reforms, and to assist customers navigate the process with their retailers.
- Increased costs arising from the countless time spent communicating with retailers
- A quote from one solar company: “This extremely cumbersome and inefficient system replaces a very smooth and efficient system where Level 2 Service providers were often able to install the solar meter/upgrade the metering on the same day that the solar system was commissioned with no loss of solar power for the customer.”

In summary, the implementation of the new reforms have been a complete failure and represent a significant burden for energy users installing behind-the-meter solar generation systems and for the industry who supply these systems and are the front-line professionals whom these energy users rely on for technical information.

Please find a report summarising the experience of a number of commercial energy users in NSW on the following page.

## Repower Case Studies from 2017 and 2018

### Customer 1 – Southern Highlands

December 20<sup>th</sup> – Solar System commissioned.

December 18<sup>th</sup> – Metering forms submitted to retailer.

Solar system installed on roof but still switched off over 3 months later due to retailer incompetency.

**Delay: Over 3 months (13 weeks) and still ongoing**

Retailer: AGL

### Customer 2 – NSW South Coast

28<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 – Solar System commissioned.

20<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - Metering forms submitted to retailer.

Solar system switched on with retailer permission but meter not upgraded, all solar energy which has been exported is not recorded and is lost to the customer.

**Delay: 5 weeks and still ongoing**

Retailer: Origin

### Customer 3 – NSW South Coast

13<sup>th</sup> December 2017 - Solar System commissioned.

15<sup>th</sup> November 2017 – customer contacted retailer to inform them of upcoming solar installation.

13<sup>th</sup> March 2018 – meter adjustment (remotely by computer) completed by retailer.

**Delay: 3 months**

Retailer: AGL

### Customer 4 – NSW South Coast

15<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 – Solar System commissioned.

23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018 – customer contacted retailer about meter upgrades.

Solar system switched off awaiting meter upgrade.

**Delay: 3 weeks**

Retailer: Origin

## Repower Comments from Solar Service Providers in 2018

### Solar Service Provider – NSW South Coast

“Well, it seems to have pretty much an unmitigated disaster. We have customers for whom we installed systems in December and they still don't have their meter. The retailers clearly were not ready for this.”

### Solar Service Provider – Sydney and NSW South Coast

“...we all know the issues, and that is that the retailers really did not have a clear process, many we have spoken to were completely unaware of what we were requesting was even their responsibility.

From a trades perspective, their process for accreditation meant that there were very few trades guys willing to accept the metering rates, and this means that there are still too few people doing it, and yet again, too many different meters, some will work in regional areas, others won't, and this is often not picked up until they arrive to do the job, after waiting many weeks already.

I am not sure of the answer, or how to improve the situation, as this “Power of choice” has effectively reduced the options, as we cannot purchase a net meter from the networks anymore!”

### Solar Service Provider – Sydney and Brisbane

“For solar companies, one impact of the more diffuse ownership of meters is that it can be extremely difficult to arrange meters to be upgraded or reprogrammed once a solar system is commissioned. This happens frequently and means solar systems can sit idle until the correct meter owner is found and is prompted to act.”

### Solar Service Provider – NSW South Coast

“Form are ambiguous and difficult to complete (Origin). This extremely cumbersome and inefficient system replaces a very smooth and efficient system where Level 2 Service providers were often able to install the solar meter/upgrade the metering on the same day that the solar system was commissioned with no loss of solar power for the customer. Definitely a nightmare!”

## Repower Recommendations

We would like the governing body to immediately reverse the Power of Choice changes that impact on behind the meter solar installations.

We seek this outcome immediately as the changes have only produced negative outcomes for customers and for the solar industry following their introduction. The list of the experienced reality for customers and the industry are outlined on page 1 and 2.

If this is not possible, it is requested that at the bare minimum:

- The time allowed for meter upgrades be reduced to 4 weeks.
- Financial penalties are streamlined and regulated to incentivise retailers to create the capacity to deal with the Power of Choice changes.
- Repower suggests that retailers credit their customers with an on-bill credit for the lost savings calculated as (expected generation of solar \* length of delay \* retailers peak energy rate for that customer).

If these or similar changes are not made, we ask in whose interest this is? As far as we can see no one has benefited from these changes and our energy retailers have an added area of control over customers. Where customers were previously empowered to contract reliable and timely services from solar companies and professional electricians, they are now disempowered and we are all spending hours on the phone trying to communicate with retailers who are unprepared and who are also not required or incentivised to offer the service that is needed.

Kind regards,

Jessica Burg (<title>), signing on behalf of John Clark,

Repower Chair  
Repower Shoalhaven  
0401 794 064 |



[WWW.REPOWER.NET.AU](http://WWW.REPOWER.NET.AU)

