

# Solar panel systems

Before you buy a solar panel system to generate electricity from the sun, it is important that you understand what you are buying and that you thoroughly examine the power and money saving claims made by retailers.



## Obtaining a quote

There can be big differences in the power generated by different panel systems. The output will also depend on their position on your roof and the associated inverter.

It is best to get several quotes for the total cost to compare value. Each quote should include:

- photovoltaic (PV) module or panel and mounting frame costs
- relevant specifications, location on the property and any relevant building approvals
- costs or associated fees, equipment requirements, and electricity or meter connection costs
- any associated requirements to connect the system to the electricity supplier or grid
- user manual and maintenance instructions
- proposed installation start and completion dates.

Contact only accredited installers who use licensed electricians (see the list at [cleanenergycouncil.org.au](http://cleanenergycouncil.org.au)). The CBS website has a list of licensed electricians.

## Contracts

If the contract is:

- **less than \$12,000** a written contract or indemnity insurance is not legally required. However a written quote is advisable. You should not pay any more than \$1,000 as deposit.
- **more than \$12,000** there must be a written contract.

Before signing, read the contract to check:

- There is a clear start and completion date
- What was offered verbally has been included.
- The terms and conditions, and if there are terms that you do not understand, ask questions or seek independent advice.

Get a receipt for all payments you make.

If the supplier approaches you uninvited (e.g. via telemarketing or door to door trading) you get a 10-day cooling off period. The supplier must not take any payment from you during this period.

## Electrical certificate of compliance

You must receive an electrical certificate of compliance within 30 days of connection. Otherwise this could jeopardise your insurance if there is a subsequent fire or damage to the property.

## Connecting to the electricity grid

The energy generated by a solar panel system will reduce your electricity consumption costs.

If you have a traditional accumulation electricity meter (with a spinning disk) this will need to be replaced with an interval meter or smart meter.

## Feed-in tariffs

Feed-in tariffs were initially available to encourage the uptake of solar panel systems. The tariff scheme for new entrants in South Australia closed on 30 September 2013. If you already have a system with a feed-in tariff, the tariff contract is with the property. Any future owners of the property will have the tariff benefit.

You may forfeit your right to the feed-in tariff if you increase the inverter size or capacity without permission from the energy retailer.

## Warranties and guarantees

Obtain written confirmation of statements made by your installer, including performance claims, guarantees and warranties. You will be protected by these written warranties as well as consumer guarantees under the Australian Consumer Law (ACL). If the panels are not: of acceptable quality; fit for purpose; matching the description given by the supplier; or installed with an acceptable level of care and skill, you are entitled to a remedy (e.g. refund, repair, or having the panels replaced).

Your installer should provide you with a system manual and an energy output estimate. Documentation will be essential if you need to make warranty or insurance claims.

In addition to your rights under the ACL, claims against a statutory warranty can be made up to 5 years after the work was completed. However the builder may be liable for defective building work under the *Development Act 1993* for 10 years. These warranties stay with the property, rather than the owner.

## More information / resolving a dispute

Who you should contact to raise a concern will depend on the nature of the problem:

Office of the Renewable Energy Regulator <a href="http://orer.gov.au">orer.gov.au</a> Ph: (02) 6159 7700	If installers or agents are dishonest about payments, discounts, rebates or grants and the conditions applying to them.
Clean Energy Council <a href="http://cleanenergycouncil.org.au">cleanenergycouncil.org.au</a> Ph: (03) 9929 4100	Useful information on connecting your home system to the electricity supply grid and a useful solar panel guide.  Breaches of the Accreditation Rules, Accreditation Code of Conduct or relevant Australian Standards.
Consumer and Business Services <a href="http://cbs.sa.gov.au">cbs.sa.gov.au</a> Ph: 131 882	Advice about warranties, terms and conditions, level of service provided, quality of the work provided or any overselling of benefits.
Energy Advisory Service <a href="mailto:energyadvice@sa.gov.au">energyadvice@sa.gov.au</a> Ph: 8204 1888 or 1800 671 907 (free call from fixed lines)	Free independent information and advice about minimising home energy use and reducing related greenhouse gas emissions without compromising on comfort.