

ACTIV GROUP

A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION · 21 OCTOBER 2026

A faster, fairer way to recycle Australia's solar panels

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Purpose. To put a simple, practical model on the table for solar panel stewardship in Australia. It is offered as a starting point for discussion. Anyone is welcome to use, test and improve it.

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The problem

- **A levy lands on families and businesses.** Panel makers are carrying billions in losses and cannot absorb a material charge, so it goes straight onto the quote. In a cost-of-living squeeze, that is a real barrier to installing solar – and young families buying their first system would be paying to clear panels installed 15 to 20 years ago under generous subsidies.
- **A committee price, not a market price.** A levy is set from estimates and is slow to correct as costs fall with innovation and competition: set it too high and households overpay; too low and collectors walk away. As boom-era panels retire, the waste each new sale must fund keeps growing.
- **Administration bloat.** A non-government body managing the scheme adds fees, overheads and margin on top of the real cost. In our experience that can come close to doubling what collection and recycling cost in an open, market-tested system.
- **Collection from site falls through the gaps.** Levy schemes typically fund panels from a consolidation point to the recycler. Getting panels off site when the installer can't take them is the hard logistics – and it is where services need to be accessible and flexible to suit each job.

The principle

> The cost arises when the waste arises – where it arises, at what it actually costs – and falls on whoever caused the panel to come down.

How it works

1. **A panel comes down.** The licensed electrician who removes it opens a Solar Decommissioning Certificate, using records that already exist: the electrical certificate and panel serial numbers held by the Clean Energy Regulator. The owner's responsibility ends at handover.
2. **The right party pays, at the time** (see table), including collection from site.
3. **Custody passes digitally.** Each handler stays responsible until the next accredited party accepts the panels.
4. **An open market does the work.** Accredited collectors, transporters, assessors, repairers, reuse operators and recyclers compete on price and service.
5. **The certificate closes within a set timeframe – no more than 90 days – in one of three ways:** recycled, with recovery verified against the standard; reused, after testing and grading, with the destination recorded and the panel re-registered so it is tracked again at its next removal; or retained by the owner, who becomes its registered holder.
6. **An independent regulator keeps the record.** A thin national register matches certificates to installation records, flags missing panels and publishes tonnages, reuse and recovery rates. Industry keeps its own job apps through open data links.

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Who pays

When a panel comes down because of…	Who pays
Upgrade or genuine end of life	The owner
Storm, hail or fire damage	The insurer, where the policy covers it; otherwise the owner
Warranty failure	The manufacturer or importer
Solar farm or commercial repowering	The asset owner, backed by financial assurance for large farms
Demolition	The property owner, through the demolition contract
Dumped, abandoned or orphaned panels	A capped, time-limited fund (see below)

Rules first

The rules should be set up front and apply equally to everyone. The full scheme can follow the proper regulatory process, but the triggers can start now – the market is ready and the infrastructure exists.

- **Now:** a national landfill ban for intact and broken panels; the decommissioning certificate; penalties for late certificates and dumping; and an export ban unless the destination is proven.
- **Set once, for everyone, from day one:** accreditation tiered to risk, collection and storage standards, and a two-part recovery standard – frame, glass and copper; and the cell laminate – each starting around 60% and rising to around 80% within three years. Removing the frame and landfilling the rest is not recycling.
- **Safe reuse:** used panels go back on the grid only once an Australian reuse test standard exists.
- **A truly independent regulator** at EPA level – not a recycler, a commercial operator or an industry body – plus education for households, installers and councils.
- **Investment follows the signal.** Existing grants already help recyclers with equipment. A clear, mandatory requirement gives them the confidence to invest privately.

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A lesson already learned

Where collection and evidence standards changed after launch rather than applying equally to everyone from the start, and where a levy was only a "contribution" to real costs, a dominant player was able to win concessions, undercut compliant collectors and lock up collection channels. Fixing the levy took years, and by then the market had closed. The guardrails must come first.

Stockpiles, orphaned panels and regional Australia

Existing stockpiles are a one-off problem, never charged to new buyers. Holders declare them within six months of the scheme starting and recycle them within 12 months at their own cost; undeclared stock found later is an offence. A capped, time-limited fund from existing grants pays per verified certificate for genuinely orphaned panels only. The same rules apply everywhere: accrediting existing logistics businesses solves most of the distance problem, with time-limited grant support for regional facilities where the data shows a need.

What's covered

Panels and the balance of system – inverters, racking, cabling and isolators – named in a published list of in-scope products, as the national TV and computer scheme does today.

Why it works

Stewardship 1.0 is familiar, which is why it keeps being copied: a levy, a fund and one administrator. Recyclers can have the volume now without repeating it.

- **Faster and better value:** no levy and no central fund – costs are paid directly, at the time, at market prices.
- **Fair and open:** the cost sits with whoever caused the panel to come down, and everyone who meets the standard can compete.
- **Proven demand:** around half of the households and small businesses that ask Ecoactiv about panel recycling go on to pay for it, as do around 60% of commercial and solar farm operators.

Contact

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