TENANT NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE TENANTS' UNION OF NSW • 2017 • #114

SPECIAL EDITION:

ENERGY & CLIMATE

CONTENTS:

TENANTS' UNION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

EDITORIAL:
TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY FOR RENTERS

Julie Foreman – Executive Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW

Energy bills. Most of us don't look forward to getting them. They are often difficult to understand with different tariffs, discounts, rebates etc. But the worst part is looking to the spot in the bill where the dollars and cents owed sit in heavy black numbers. And it seems like every few months now there is a warning in the media that the next round of bills is likely to be worse.

Its' bad enough for homeowners but at least they have more control over what they can do to make their houses more energy efficient. They also have the opportunity to install rooftop solar power and reap the benefits in terms of electricity and/or the feed-in tariff generated.

Renters aren't usually in that position. How much control renters have varies with what kind of property they rent and who their landlord is, as stories in this edition of *Tenant News* show.

Many renters want to take action to reduce their energy use – for the climate as well as for the household budget – but they are limited by the laws and structures which govern renting. One of the key problems is lack of security. It's difficult to negotiate with the landlord for improvements in energy efficiency or to install rooftop solar, when you feel like you might be unfairly evicted at any time. This is one reason why the Tenants' Union is campaigning to Make Renting Fair, by removing the laws allowing 'no grounds' evictions. For more detail, see page 7, or join the campaign at **rentingfair.org.au**.

Another problem faced by tenants who wish to lower their energy use is the lack of energy efficiency standards – an issue which the NSW government is looking at addressing. TU Advocacy and Research Officer, Leo Patterson Ross examines the government's draft Climate Change Strategic Plan and its possible impact on renters on page 11.

"Many renters want to take action to reduce their energy use – for the climate as well as for the household budget – but they are limited by the laws and structures which govern renting."

As we know, doing something about climate change and shifting to renewable energy are big ticket items internationally and domestically. How is Australia doing here? The article on page 14 from Peder Palmstierna shows how renters in Sweden are tackling the problem in line with the climate goals of the European Union. Here in Australia, responses at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels are patchy as Brad Smith of the Nature Conservation Council reports (page 3).

What are the other legislative and regulatory areas that need to be addressed to get a better deal for all householders? The article from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (page 4) outlines how the National Electricity Market works. On page 8, Rachel Mimmo writes about the Coonamble Power Savers Program, an energy efficiency program for renters and others, funded by the NSW Environmental Trust covering households in Coonamble, Gulargambone and Quambone.

Some community housing providers are stepping up to the challenge. We have an interview with Patrick Ryan from St George Community Housing on their retrofitting and new build initiatives whose benefits will flow on directly to their tenants' wallets (page 12).

Julie Lee, Residential Parks Officer with the TU, details just how complex the issue is in land lease communities, which are governed by a range of laws, regulations and guidelines that overlap and don't always correspond (page 17).

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW outlines what action householders can take if they are having problems with their energy or water provider (page 16), and the Minto Resident Action Group give us a good news story of renters taking successful action (page 5).

Erland Howden, Blue Mountains tenant and member of the Blue Mountains Renewable Energy Co-op offers a hopeful account of how tenants can participate in the renewable energy revolution, through community power projects (page 19).

TU Principal Legal Officer, Grant Arbuthnot, reviews three key decisions by the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, each of which has implications for tenants and solar power (page 18).

There is much work to be done if we are to address climate change, meet our ongoing energy needs, and also ensure fair outcomes for all members of our society – including renters. We invite you to learn more in this special edition of *Tenant News*, and join us on the journey.

As always, if you need more information or advice relating to renting, please contact your local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service – see **tenants.org.au**.

LIVEABLE HOMES AND A LIVEABLE CLIMATE

Brad Smith – Energy and Climate Campaigner with the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales

The sun falling on Australia's deserts in just four days could power the whole planet's electricity needs for a year. That's a win for the cost of energy in Australia and for the future of the planet. But how are we doing in transitioning from fossil fuels to solar?

Your electricity bills have probably gone up recently, and they'll probably rise again soon. And on top of that it's still almost all dirty energy from coal and gas plants, which are slowly making our climate unliveable.

As renters, our options to save energy at home are limited. We can't insulate the ceiling or put solar panels on the roof. Even when I upgraded my old incandescent light bulbs to LEDs recently, it felt like I was doing my landlord a favour. (I wasn't - the payback time is only six months, seriously, do it now!)

So it'd be nice to know that the government is upgrading our electricity grid to renewable energy and that sooner or later our climate will return to normal and we will consume less energy.

Sadly, we're not there yet. Currently, New South Wales gets a tiny 7.7 percent of its electricity from solar and wind. If you add in hydro-power, the total is 14 percent renewable energy. That still puts us at the back of the pack in Australia. Meanwhile Italy, Spain, California and Germany are all over 25 percent renewable, while Denmark, Scotland and even the ACT are rapidly approaching 100 percent renewable.

While Victoria, ACT, South Australia, and Queensland all have strong renewable energy targets that foster investment in new energy sources, NSW has no such plan. But things are not all bleak. The NSW government is considering setting minimum standards for rental properties, which would make living in them more comfortable, more energy efficient, and cheaper. That's welcome.

Also, right now there is a renewable energy boom in NSW. Eight large-scale wind and solar plants are under construction this year, and they will power hundreds of thousands of homes with clean energy, as well as bringing jobs and investment to regional NSW.

On top of these eight projects are another 59 large-scale solar and wind projects in the approval pipeline across NSW. These renewable energy sources are now the cheapest way to generate energy, and there's no shortage of it.

That's just as well, because Australia and over 190 countries agreed in Paris to limit temperature rises below 1.5 degrees, or 2 degrees at worst. To achieve that, we'll need to completely phase-out coal power and replace it with renewables in just 13 years.

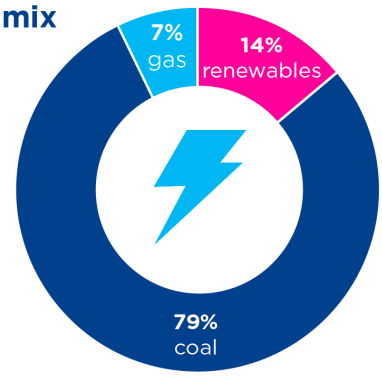
Not only is that aim achievable, but the benefits of transitioning to clean energy are startling. NSW could avoid $700 million per year in health costs caused by air pollution from our five coal power stations. And CSIRO recently forecast transitioning to renewable energy would save Australia $100 billion by 2050. After all, the sun shines and the wind blows for free.

With a little bit of vision we could be powering our lives on clean energy in no time. Let's get on with it.

NSW electricity mix

Renewable energy made a record-breaking contribution to the mix in 2015 at

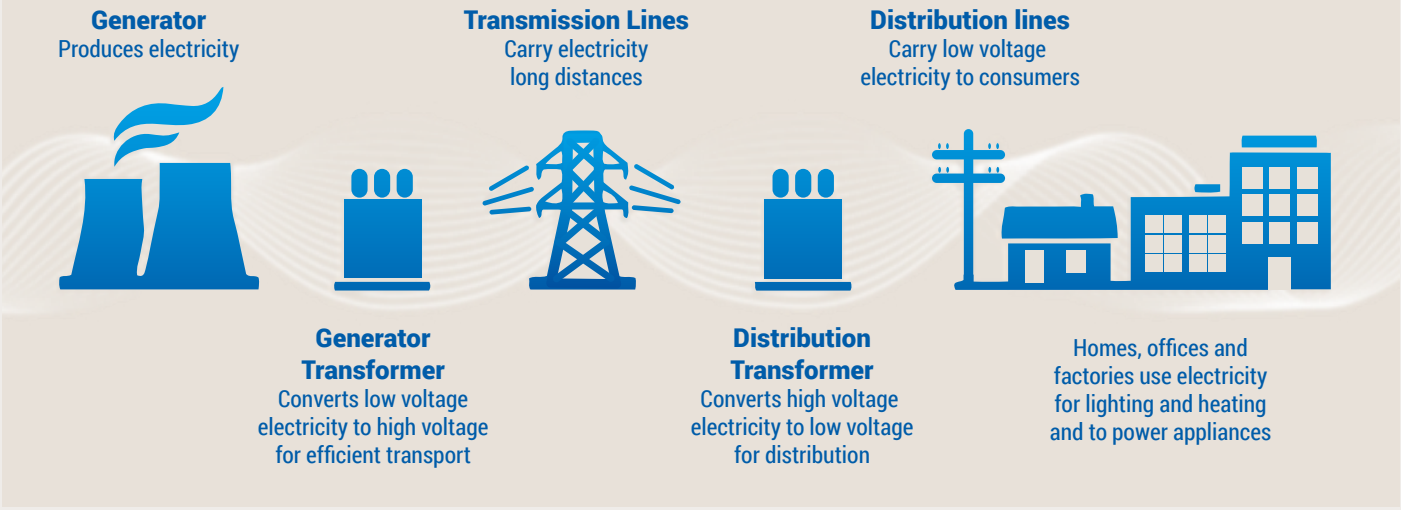
14%



ELECTRICITY SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Public Interest Advocacy Centre

TRANSPORT OF ELECTRICITY



Electricity is an essential service. It is easy to take for granted that it will be available to power fridges and lights, heaters and hot water systems every single day, without interruption. But how is it generated? How is it transported? And how is its price determined?

The answers to these questions are notoriously complex. This is partly because the electricity market has changed rapidly in recent years. We no longer buy our electricity from a single electricity retailer, and may no longer have it delivered via poles and wires owned by the local distribution business. As a result of new technology as well as the privatisation and deregulation of parts of the electricity system, there is now a wide range of new products and services that are transforming the energy landscape. For example, households can generate their own electricity, store it using batteries, monitor and manage their energy consumption with smart meters.

In some states, consumers can also shop around for the best deal. While this has the potential to promote competition amongst retailers and thereby reduce bills for savvy consumers, it also places the onus on households to understand and evaluate the packages on offer, and make considered choices.

Unfortunately, at this stage retail competition isn't strong in many regional areas, and not all households have the same capacity to make informed choices. This means that regional customers and some urban households are unable to take full advantage of the benefits of the competitive market.

The National Electricity Market (NEM)

In NSW, electricity is supplied to consumers via the National Electricity Market (NEM), which is one of the longest interconnected power systems in the world, carrying power to residents and businesses in all of Australia's eastern states.

The NEM controls an interconnected grid that dispatches power to meet demand. It also describes the systems involved with enabling generators to sell electricity and retailers to buy it to on-sell to consumers. The NEM also has a financial function. Since it's establishment in 1998, the NEM has acted as a wholesale commodity market, underpinned by sophisticated information technology systems that control both the supply of electricity to users and the spot price of electricity. (The spot price is the current price in the market.)

How is the electricity system governed?

The Australian Energy Market Agreement (AEMA) sets out the NEM's legislative and regulatory framework. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) entered into the AEMA in 2004 in recognition of the need to establish a broad national architecture for electricity and gas. The NEM comprises the COAG Energy Council and the three NEM institutions: the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) and the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO).

How is electricity generated in NSW?

NSW's electricity is generated from a mix of coal fired power stations, gas powered generation, hydro-electricity, wind, large solar farms and finally household photo-voltaic panels. At times of high demand and low generation in NSW, electricity is supplied from other states in the NEM via interconnectors (high voltage lines connection each states transmission system).

The increase in renewable energy across the NEM provides a cleaner source of generation but requires

storage and other services to ensure that when energy is needed it can be supplied. Batteries have become cheaper and the technology has improved such that they are becoming a viable part of the energy system either at household level or large battery solutions within the distribution grid.

What's in a bill?

The governance and function of the electricity system has a direct impact on household electricity bills. Through their bills consumers pay the following costs:

- **Wholesale costs:** costs involved in generating electricity.
- **Transmission costs:** costs to build and maintain the high voltage power lines or high-pressure pipeline network.
- **Distribution network costs:** costs to build and maintain the network of pipes, low voltage poles and meters that deliver, measure and record energy to households and businesses.
- **Retail Costs:** costs to connect customers, to provide customer service and manage accounts.
- **Green costs:** costs that arise from government programs to save energy and support the development of renewable energy.

How are prices set?

The price on an electricity bill comprises a range of costs, as discussed above. A complicating factor in price setting in the electricity industry is that parts of the electricity system are regulated and parts are deregulated. In most States and Territories, the generation and the retail aspects of the electricity system are deregulated. The prices for the generation and retail aspects of electricity are therefore subject to and determined by market forces. Network services, on the other hand, are natural monopolies and are therefore subject to regulation.

A significant proportion (approximately 40%) of electricity is network costs. As the network businesses are natural monopolies, network prices are decided every five years by the AER. The AER sets an overall revenue allowance that network businesses can recover from consumers to provide safe and reliable services. The revenue allowance is based on the AER's assessment of efficient costs. If a network business can subsequently provide the required services at a lower costs it can 'keep the difference' for a period of time. Conversely, if the network business incurs higher costs, it will bear the difference. Once the determinations are made, networks then set the individual tariffs, subject to a number of rules.

In NSW, electricity prices have risen dramatically in recent years. Since 2008, electricity prices have doubled, mainly due to general inefficiencies in the way the network businesses operate, as well as massive overspending on infrastructure in an environment where demand for electricity is declining. This 'gold-plating' appears to be particularly prevalent in NSW, where it costs twice as much to get electricity from a power station to a home as it does in Victoria.

The Energy and Water Consumers' Advocacy Program (EWCAP)

One of PIAC's projects is the Energy and Water Consumers' Advocacy Program. This program works to enable all residential consumers, especially low-income and vulnerable households, to have access to affordable and sustainable utility services. The team works with community organisations including the Tenants' Union, consumer advocates, state and federal governments, regulators and industry stakeholders. For more information, see **piac.asn.au/projects/energy-and-water**.

WATER METERING WIN

Pay only for what you use. That's what the Family and Community Services (FACS) Housing policy says, and that's what will happen for hundreds of social housing tenants who've been overpaying for their water use for several years.

Jen Rignold and Lorraine de Vere, Bradbury tenants

A few years ago, Minto Resident Action Group (MRAG) and social housing tenants in newly built multi unit buildings in Bradbury noticed that they were being charged water as a percentage of their rent even though they had a separate meter and the meter was being read by Sydney Water. That's not what is supposed to happen. Under FACS Housing policy, where there are separate water meters for each unit then the water charge for a tenant in a unit must be calculated on what their meter records as usage. That's fair. But it turned out that the Land and Housing Corporation only held a single account for each new building.

MRAG, tenants and the Tenants' Union have been working together to get this practice stopped and for a system to be put in place that sticks to the law. In December 2016, the TU received a letter from the Land and Housing Corporation confirming that Sydney Water will be creating individual accounts for over 5,000 units so tenants in the units will only pay for the water they use. Sydney Water has also given a commitment that individual accounts will be created in future for all new social housing properties where individual meters are installed.

UNFAIRLY EVICTED

FOR CHALLENGING ELECTRICITY MISUSE & EXCESSIVE RENT

Jeremy Kerbel, Resource Development Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW

For the last few years, my partner Mari and I were living in a nice apartment in Sydney's inner west. It was in one of those old mansions that's been converted into a block of a dozen units, and it had some pretty features – wooden floorboards, high ceilings, that sort of thing. There's even a refurbished stained glass window in the building foyer, which includes a little picture of the landlord. He owns the whole block (and a number of others nearby). His picture smiles down benevolently on the tenants as they arrive home every night after a day at work earning his rent. It was a fancy place to live – perhaps too fancy for a tenant like me – but the rent was even fancier. Even by Sydney standards, it was pricey.

"We stood up to the landlord. That's the real reason we were evicted."

Every six months the rent would go up. Over and over again we copped the increases – because we didn't want to move. Over the four years we were there, we saw every one of our neighbours leave. Most of the apartments were re-let multiple times, at a higher rent each time.

And the building wasn't without its problems. There were recurring issues with the sewer system. The landlord was happy to send a plumber to unblock the drains when we asked, but he wasn't willing to invest in a more permanent fix.

There was also an electric ventilation fan under the building, which ran off our electricity (we were the first unit on the ground floor). But it's not legal to make a tenant pay for electricity used in communal areas.

A few years ago in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, a tenant won almost $3,000 in compensation because the landlord had required them to pay for electricity used in the common area (for a garage door and a pool filter). The Tribunal found that this meant the premises weren't separately metered, which constitutes a breach of agreement (see *Keen, Witchard v Peirpoint (Tenancy) (2012) NSWCTTT 511*). Under Section 38 of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010*, a tenant only has to pay for electricity (or gas) if the premises are separately metered.

Late last year we got two rent increases in less than six months. We tried to negotiate. We spoke to the landlord's agents and asked them not to increase the rent, or at least consider a smaller amount. But they weren't willing to compromise. I guess I don't really blame them – it's their job to look after the landlord's financial interests.

We decided to resist the rent increase by applying to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Our claim was that the rent was excessive, and that the communal fan running off our electricity was illegal. We got advice from a Tenant Advocate, and had plenty of evidence to back up our case. On the second visit to the Tribunal, the landlord offered to give us three weeks free rent in exchange for withdrawing our case. We saw this as a victory, and agreed. But we suspected there would be repercussions.

Sure enough, a few months later we received a 'no-grounds' eviction notice. Luckily, we'd already started looking for a new place, and found one within the time required. We could have gone back to the Tribunal with a claim for retaliatory eviction, but this would have been difficult to prove. It was easier to move on with our lives instead.

Officially there was no reason for the eviction, but unofficially the landlord said he was evicting us because he wanted to renovate the apartment. This 'reason' was provided as a courtesy (and no doubt to protect himself against a claim of retaliatory eviction). Less than two weeks after we were evicted, the apartment was re-listed – at a higher rent of course. It had been painted and a new oven had been installed, but that was the extent of the renovations.

MAKE RENTING GREEN BY MAKING RENTING FAIR

Not being able to access energy efficient homes is just one way in which our unfair renting laws harm tenants. If tenants knew that they would be able to stay in their homes long term, they would be more likely to take steps to improve energy efficiency. They would also be able to make decisions like jointly investing in solar panels and be more confident in identifying and reporting problem areas such as drafts or aging and inefficient heating systems.

Along with more than 60 other organisations, the Tenants' Union has launched a new campaign to address a fundamental issue with renting laws in NSW. Landlords have the ability to terminate a tenancy without having to give a reason – this doesn't just make for some unfair evictions, it interferes with all other aspects of renting. Tenants are cautious about enforcing their rights, even around energy costs, because it is too easy for a landlord to avoid their responsibilities by removing the tenant from the property. This is a valid concern, as Jeremy's story on the facing page demonstrates.

The Make Renting Fair campaign calls for the removal of so called 'no grounds' notices, and to replace them with an expanded list of 'reasonable grounds' which a landlord can use if they legitimately need the property back. This is a very simple change, and will bring NSW more in line with the experience of tenants across the world – Australia is one of only five countries which allows these unfair evictions.

You can support the campaign by visiting **rentingfair.org.au** to find out more, read our stories and share your own. Make sure to sign the petition and tell a friend! Over time we will have many opportunities for people to be involved, so please sign up for regular email updates! Organisations can show their support for the campaign at **rentingfair.org.au/supporters**

make renting fair.

Find out more at rentingfair.org.au

"Anything else you're trying to do in your life – you just have to put it on hold. Everything else stops while you try to work out where you'll be living."

Penny received a $100 per week rent increase notice which she thought was excessive. She tried to negotiate with the landlord. In response she received an email telling her she was being evicted.

rentingfair.org.au/story/pennys-story

"I wasn't only losing my home, they were divorcing me from my community and all the people I'd formed relationships with where I had lived."

Claire had been living in her home on the coast just north of Wollongong for 6 years when her landlord knocked on the door one afternoon early last December to tell her she had to move out. The flat is now advertised on AirBnB for $259 a night.

rentingfair.org.au/story/claires-story

POWER SAVERS
MAKING GAINS IN COONAMBLE

Sixty households in Coonamble have signed up to a community program to cut their electricity bills. The Coonamble Power Savers Program is an energy efficiency program in operation since July 2016. The Program is funded by the NSW Environmental Trust and covers households in Coonamble, Gularambone and Quambone. The program aims to reduce a household's energy use by an average of 15%, while improving the households' self-reported comfort levels. When fully operational the program will support 100 households.

"The Coonamble Neighbourhood Centre was coming across more and more people who were struggling to pay their high energy bills ", says Rachel Mimmo, the program manager, from GeeMimmo Pty Ltd. "Some were over $2,000 a quarter. We knew we needed a program like the Power Savers to help people understand why their bills were so high, and also understand how to read their utility bills."

GeeMimmo is a consultancy firm with expertise in energy efficiency programs, especially around vulnerable households and provides education for sustainability, organisational change and community engagement programs.

The program is for renters and owners of both houses and units. For renters, Coonamble Neighbourhood Centre seeks permission from the landlord before any alterations are made to the home.

The program's main partners are Coonamble Neighbourhood Centre, Landcare, Coonamble Shire Council, and GeeMimmo Pty Ltd. The energy assessors are contracted through Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation which is the peak provider of services to Indigenous communities in Western NSW.

To be eligible for the program, householders must:

- Live in NSW
- Contribute to the energy utility bills of the household
- Be an energy utility hardship customer or hold a concession card from Centrelink or the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Once households have joined, an energy assessment is undertaken at the home by an assessor from Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation. The energy assessment takes around 2 hours, and increases the households' energy literacy and 'smart' use of energy by taking households through their energy bill, helping the household understand where they are using energy in their house (including appliances) and what measures they can take to reduce the amount of energy they use.

An action plan is then sent to the house, which sets out what the assessor has spoken about with the household, and reiterates the steps the households can take to reduce the amount of energy they use in their home.

Some of these actions are simple, such as turning off the lights when leaving the room, switching off all appliances at the plug rather than leaving them on standby, taking shorter showers, washing clothes on a cold wash, and hanging out washing rather than using the tumble dryer.

Small retrofit items are given to the household to help them start reducing their energy use, such as LED lightbulbs, power boards, door snakes, a shower timer and a temperature gauge for the fridge and freezer. A further $50 is given to each participant to put towards buying either a new Fridge or TV through the Home Energy Action Program run by the NSW Government, or to spend at the local hardware store in Coonamble.

Follow up visits are made to the household after two, six and twelve months to assist with implementation and evaluation.

From follow up phone calls made two months after the first energy assessment, the majority of households stated that their latest bill showed a reduction in energy use from the same time the previous year.

> ***"I knew a few things before like turning off my lights, and power at the plug, but I learnt some other things about how to run my air conditioning properly and the correct temperature for my fridge. My power bills are down since the same time last year."***

One participant stated: "The energy assessment was really useful. I knew a few things before like turning off my lights, and power at the plug, but I learnt some other things about how to run my air conditioning properly and the correct temperature for my fridge. My power bills are down since the same time last year and I am back on track with my payments."

If you are interested in participating in the program, please contact the Coonamble Neighbourhood Centre on 02 6822 1872. If you are interested in running a similar program in your area, please contact Rachel Mimmo on rlmimmo@aol.com.

SAVE POWER, STAY WARM, STAY COOL

POWER $AVER$

Save energy with the Power Savers fact sheets at *powersavers.org.au*

1) Door snakes and seals 2) Seal gaps and cracks
3) Curtains and pelmets 4) Ceiling insulation
5) Windows 6) Pedestal and ceiling fans

The original Power Savers project started in 2013 and assisted over 1,000 low-income households in NSW, including tenants, to reduce their power bills and improve comfort in their homes. Participants received tailored education and energy solutions, as well as ongoing support and advice.

The project partners were United Voice, the Nature Conservation Council NSW, Solahart Industries and the Institute for Sustainable Futures at UTS.

The TU participated in the Power Savers advisory committee. We helped ensure that the program was accessible to tenants.

Power Savers produced a set of factsheets on saving power at home, through cooling, heating, draft-proofing, efficient lighting, windows and appliances. Check them out at **powersavers.org.au**.

"Power Savers showed me a few great tips that I didn't need landlord approval for. Things like installing a 'valve cosy' and pipe insulation on my hot water system – the energy assessor was really knowledgeable, and estimated I could save up to $10 a quarter just through this small change! Every little bit counts, right?" – *Leonie*

"I am so happy with the savings. They may be small amount, but it all adds up... whenever I visit the supermarket, I'd buy 1 or 2 LED bulbs if they are on sale. They might cost more than other light bulbs, but LEDs will save me more money in the long run, and I am making a positive difference to the environment!" – *Prem*

BILL BUSTERS

CAMPAIGNING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Jason Ray – Friends of the Earth Sydney

Simple, energy saving technologies are not only good for renters, they are good for the whole country and planet because they reduce the energy demand which is driving up domestic energy prices, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Electricity prices in Australia have doubled in the last ten years, and are now some of the most expensive in the world. This has come about through a combination of things including privatisation and deregulation.

A lot of the energy debate in Australia has focused around the supply side of energy. However, on the demand side, homeowners have been increasingly taking up solar and energy efficiency measures to save on electricity bills and reduce their carbon footprint. Unfortunately tenants are usually excluded from energy efficiency home modifications used by owner-occupiers, which can save an average of $1,000 per year on energy bills.

Bill Busters is a campaign by Friends of the Earth (FOE) Sydney to ensure tenants have access to affordable and sustainable energy in comfortable homes. FOE members and people we have spoken with have had numerous problems with their rental housing. Many of us run fans or air conditioning throughout the hot summer nights to cool down in homes that don't even have flyscreens with natural ventilation.

In winter, tenants in public housing in Claymore have told us that it's almost impossible to protect their kids from drafts that run through their homes due to gaps in doors and windows. People are forced to use cheap heaters, air conditioners and appliances to run their homes, but because the homes are badly designed and maintained it becomes very difficult to run them efficiently, and tenants are faced with huge electricity bills.

"Tenants in public housing in Claymore have told us that it's almost impossible to protect their kids from drafts that run through their homes due to huge gaps in doors and windows."

Our members have tried resorting to some pretty strange tactics, like putting bubble-wrap over windows to insulate homes in winter. One person tried to put sheets over his north facing windows in summer to reduce incoming heat that was roasting the house and his landlord came into his room when he was away to take them down.

There are little things that tenants can do around the home, without permission from landlords to save energy and we've got these up on our website at **foe.org.au/tenantrights**. These small things help, but we believe that the energy system and tenant housing in NSW needs a systematic change. This is why we're campaigning for energy efficiency standards for all tenanted housing across the state. This will provide:

- Tenant homes that are affordable and comfortable to live in through Australia's temperature extremes.
- Reduced strain on the national electricity supply at times of peak demand, when so many people are running air conditioning in hot-box houses.
- Reduced greenhouse emissions from coal fired power plants.
- Improved homes for improved health outcomes. Recent research has shown 1 in 15 deaths in Australia come about through long term exposure to the cold. These deaths would be totally preventable if energy was more affordable and used in energy smart homes with simple things like insulation, draft sealing, & window coverings.

These changes can be won, as seen through the introduction of energy efficiency standards throughout the world in Europe, America and Canada. Even in NSW, water efficiency standards were effectively introduced in 2010, which means tenants don't have to pay water bills in rental homes that don't have basic water saving features. We believe we can and should do the same thing for energy.

If you would like to learn more, or get involved in the campaign, check out our website at: **foe.org.au/billbusters.**

BILL BUSTERS
SUSTAINABLE & AFFORDABLE ENERGY

Leo Patterson speaking at the Bill Busters campaign launch

A RENTERS' PLAN TO SAVE ENERGY AND MONEY

Leo Patterson Ross – Advocacy and Research Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW

In the midst of our stories about the issues facing renters and energy bills, we might ask what (if anything) is the NSW government already doing to address these issues?

The main work the NSW government is doing around energy issues for renters is embedded in the office of Environment and Heritage driven Climate Change Strategic Plan which is currently in draft form following a consultation process at the end of 2016. The final plan is working through government processes and is likely to be announced during 2017.

The Climate Change Plan covers a wide range of strategies, covering all aspects of energy from generation to transportation and use. It brings together options to continue existing policies as well as proposing new ideas. In this article, I will look at the two parts of the plan that affect renters and some of the options that may be implemented.

Private renting

The Draft Plan proposed significant changes to improve energy efficiency in private rentals, acknowledging that tenanted homes are generally of a lower standard and that tenants have less ability to make changes to improve the energy efficiency of their home.

The plan proposed to address this by introducing a standards and rating system for homes to both improve the energy efficiency of homes to a minimum standard, and also allow tenants to see information about the energy efficiency of a home before they move in.

Raising standards

If the minimum efficiency standards system is adopted, this will most likely take one of two forms. There may be a performance standard where the standard that must be met is the cost in kilowatt hours needed to power, heat and cool the dwelling. This can be complicated to measure, as different temperature conditions throughout the year can effect the cost over a period of time. However, it would also be the most effective and efficient standard as it would allow property owners to choose the best method for the particular property.

The other standard may be a "technology" based standard where property owners will need to install a particular amount of items, such as insulation, window glazing, or

Continued on page 13

Bill Busters campaign launch

ST GEORGE COMMUNITY HOUSING ENERGY EFFICIENCY STRATEGY

TU Senior Project Officer Paul van Reyk spoke with Patrick Ryan, Head of Innovation and Impact, St George Community Housing (SGCH).

SGHC's newly completed, energy efficient, affordable housing development in Lawrence Street, Peakhurst

Patrick can you tell me what led to SGCH starting on a program of making your properties more energy efficient?

SGCH put in place a sustainability strategy in early 2015. In the strategy there are a number of targets around energy efficiency, including: design benchmarks for our new properties; reducing energy costs, mainly electricity costs for tenants; reducing the amount of electricity they use from the grid; and also softer targets like improved comfort.

We were successful in getting a contribution of 50% of the total cost of the project from the NSW state government through the Office of Environment and Heritage with the rest coming through the Clean Energy Corporation.

What did the program involve?

There were two parts to the program, one focussed on properties we were designing and constructing and the other was retrofitting existing homes.

The largest measure by far in the retrofit was rooftop solar. We are just about at the end and we will end up rolling out about 700 roof-top solar PV systems on one and two bedroom social housing dwellings wired into the individual dwelling where the tenant will be the sole beneficiary while they are in the property. They may save from $300 to $500 per year on their electricity bill. We also switched over their hot water systems to on-the-ground heat pumps that use atmospheric conditions to heat the water. It's super-efficient. We've also done LED lighting, draft-proofing and we are about to begin the roll out of ceiling batt insulation.

With the new builds there were two targets we were aiming for. The first was for two measures in the Nationwide Home Energy Rating System: improved window glazing systems and insulation in floors, in walls, in ceilings and also in basements in multi-story apartments. We also use ceiling fans for poorer performing units like apartments facing west.

The other measures were fairly similar to the retrofits. We looked at some hot water systems where it was appropriate. Because of the nature of the buildings which were tall and thin we put in common property solar power systems so the benefits will go to SGCH in terms of reducing operating costs for running lifts and lights and so on. There were a few other bespoke measures like window shading; it very much depended on the site. The first phase of the retrofit was wrapped up in June this year. Obviously new dwellings take longer to build so they'll go through till 2018 and possibly into 2019.

How did you go about deciding which properties to retrofit?

Part of our broader plan is to retrofit our entire portfolio but we did have

Clarissa and her twin teenage boys are tenants with St George Community Housing. They were over the moon to move into their new energy efficient, affordable housing home earlier this year.

"I have been renting for the past four years but paying rent in the private market has not been easy.

"Having a home that is affordable will make a big difference to our lives. It is exciting and is like a new beginning for us," she said.

"I juggle a permanent part-time job in childcare with raising my two boys, who mean the world to me. It is important that I live close to work and the boys' school and our new home is in a great location – everything is close by. I just want to do the best I can for my kids and I finally feel like I am able to achieve something. Being able to also save money on our energy bills will mean I can put money towards other things that the boys may otherwise miss out on," she said.

to make some hard decisions about which properties were in the first program. We took a cluster approach so if we were going to do improvements in an area we would have to do that entire area and not do salt and pepper because of tenant equity issues. We've probably retrofitted about a third of our portfolio.

Was there tenant input to develop & roll out the program?

We got tenant input in the retrofit part about the overall design of the program, how best to go about it for minimum impact and biggest benefit. The actual selection of which properties to retrofit wasn't a process where we invited tenants to participate. We took a property portfolio approach, so we looked at which measures would work best on which property type – we have units, we have homes, we have town houses, we have high rises and certain measures won't work on some properties. We did size certain systems based on the size of the household, so a hot water system would be sized appropriately to the number of household members and so would the solar system so we weren't over-capitalising. The next time around we are going to look at testing a more direct tenant approach where we could look at an envelope of measures and an envelope of funds giving tenants a choice. Tenants could choose what they think are most valuable to them, and we'd look at expanding options like water savings devices and not just energy efficiency.

Did you do any tenant education during the program?

Both funders required us to run a tenant education program. We ran workshops for each of the measures explaining what each was about and the benefits. Every measure had a letter and a FAQ in plain English about the process explaining the measure and the benefits. Tips about what tenants themselves could do were also interwoven into all the communications: put on a jumper, don't put the heater on, turn the lights off when you leave the room, that sort of thing.

A RENTERS' PLAN
TO SAVE ENERGY AND MONEY

Continued from page 11

efficient appliances in order to satisfy the standard. This is a simpler standard to understand and test, but also means that some properties will meet the standard without actually having to be very efficient.

We supported a combination of performance and technology standards in the Tenants' Union submission to the Climate Change Draft Plan. This might look like a defined list of technologies – each with a minimum standard which can be installed in different combinations to allow the landlord flexibility in choosing which measures to implement, but still ensuring an effective improvement in the efficiency of the home.

Ratings aren't everything

The Draft Plan also proposed a ratings system where the rating of the dwelling would be provided to tenants before the tenancy begins. The ratings system may be a star system, such as the ACT introduced for sale of property, or it could be a letter-based system such as exists in the UK.

We are in favour of a rating system which gives tenants greater information about the property they are moving in to. However a ratings system would be most effective if implemented alongside mandatory energy efficiency standards.

A ratings scheme operating by itself does assume a relatively balanced bargaining position for the two parties. It must be open (in a practicable sense) for a tenant to choose not to move in to a property if it does not meet their standards, and it must be open for the tenant to negotiate on price and terms. For the overwhelming majority of tenants this is simply not the case.

The scarcity of homes affordable to households of lower and moderate incomes means that tenants are not generally in a position to choose not to move in to a property, nor negotiate on terms. Whatever the motivation of leaving their previous home, tenants are generally moving out of necessity. They are forced to compete as customers in a market place for very limited stock.

HEAP in Public Housing

The Climate Change Draft plan also addresses the need for greater energy efficiency in social housing homes. FACS-Housing and its predecessors generally accepted the convention that tenants should not pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. However, energy has been excluded from this calculation, despite forming the second highest part of many tenants housing costs.

We hear from public housing tenants across the state who are having to either expend unreasonable amounts of money on heating or cooling, or more likely, change their behaviours (e.g. go to bed extremely early rather than turn on heating, leave their home or use risky alternatives) to make up for their inefficient homes.

Several community housing providers have been able to access funds to install technology such as solar power panels on their properties. The providers share with the tenants the benefit of the energy created. Tenants receive a reduction in their energy costs, and the providers are also able to lower their costs and potentially increase their revenue.

One program that assisted with this was the Home Energy Action Program run by the Office of Environment and Heritage. The Climate Change Draft plan proposed to extend this program to public and Aboriginal housing as well as more community housing tenants. This would be welcome and make a great difference to those tenants who receive the benefit.

ENERGY ISSUES IN SWEDEN

Peder Palmstierna – Swedish Union of Tenants

Peder Palmstierna, from the Swedish Union of Tenants (SUT) visited the Tenants' Union in March this year and Paul van Reyk, our Senior Project Officer spoke with him about energy issues in rental housing in Sweden.

Peder, thanks very much for talking with the TU. What are the climate change goals for Sweden?

The climate goals are the same as the EU climate goals for 2020 and it seems Sweden will reach those goals and some more.

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent relative to 1990 levels.
- Increasing renewable energy sources' share of final energy consumption to 20 per cent. Sweden already exceeds this. Approximately 50% of the energy used in Sweden stems from renewable resources.
- Strive to increase energy efficiency by 20 per cent.

What's been the impact of implementing change to achieve these goals?

Energy prices for household consumers have risen almost every year during the 2000's, but in recent years, falling electricity and oil prices in the market has led to lower prices for household consumers. Taxes account for a large part of the energy price of electricity and heating oil, which means that prices for consumers have not fallen as much as the market.

Electricity costs (adjusted for inflation) have increased by almost 80 percent between 1996-2015, electric heating (single-family homes) by 20 percent, natural gas by 100 percent and district heating by 50 percent. District heating is when you have a power plant that heats water which is distributed within an urban district or town through insulated pipes to the multi-storey or single storey buildings.

This is energy efficient, and you can control emissions by cleaning the smoke. It can be climate efficient using renewable fuel like wood chips. Most Swedish cities have this.

Over the last 20 years, the use of fossil fuels for heating has decreased from 20 percent to 3 percent.

The use of energy per square meter in housing has decreased by 14 percent between 1995-2014. There are three main reasons for this: installation of heat pumps in single-family homes and multi-storey buildings, conversion from fossil fuels to electricity and district heating and increased energy efficiency.

Who pays for energy use in rental accommodation? What's the relationship, if any, between energy costs paid and the rent set through collective bargaining?

Approximately 95 percent of rents are set by collective bargaining between landlords and tenant organizations in much the same way wages are set in negotiations between employers and trade unions. The SUT negotiates almost all negotiated rents, but there are some other independent organisations. Rents are negotiated locally at a municipal level. The fairness of the rent can always be tested in a rent tribunal, which compares the rent with the rent in other similar apartments with negotiated rents.

Rents are set according to the utility value system that takes into account a number of factors including location, apartment size, and the standard of bathroom and kitchen.

In Sweden, hot water, heating of the apartment and electricity for the apartment building are included in the rent, which gives landlords an incentive to reduce these costs. Relatively cheap energy reduction measures (such as new windows, fine tuning heating and electricity consumption, installation of heat pumps) give good results, it is done on a large scale.

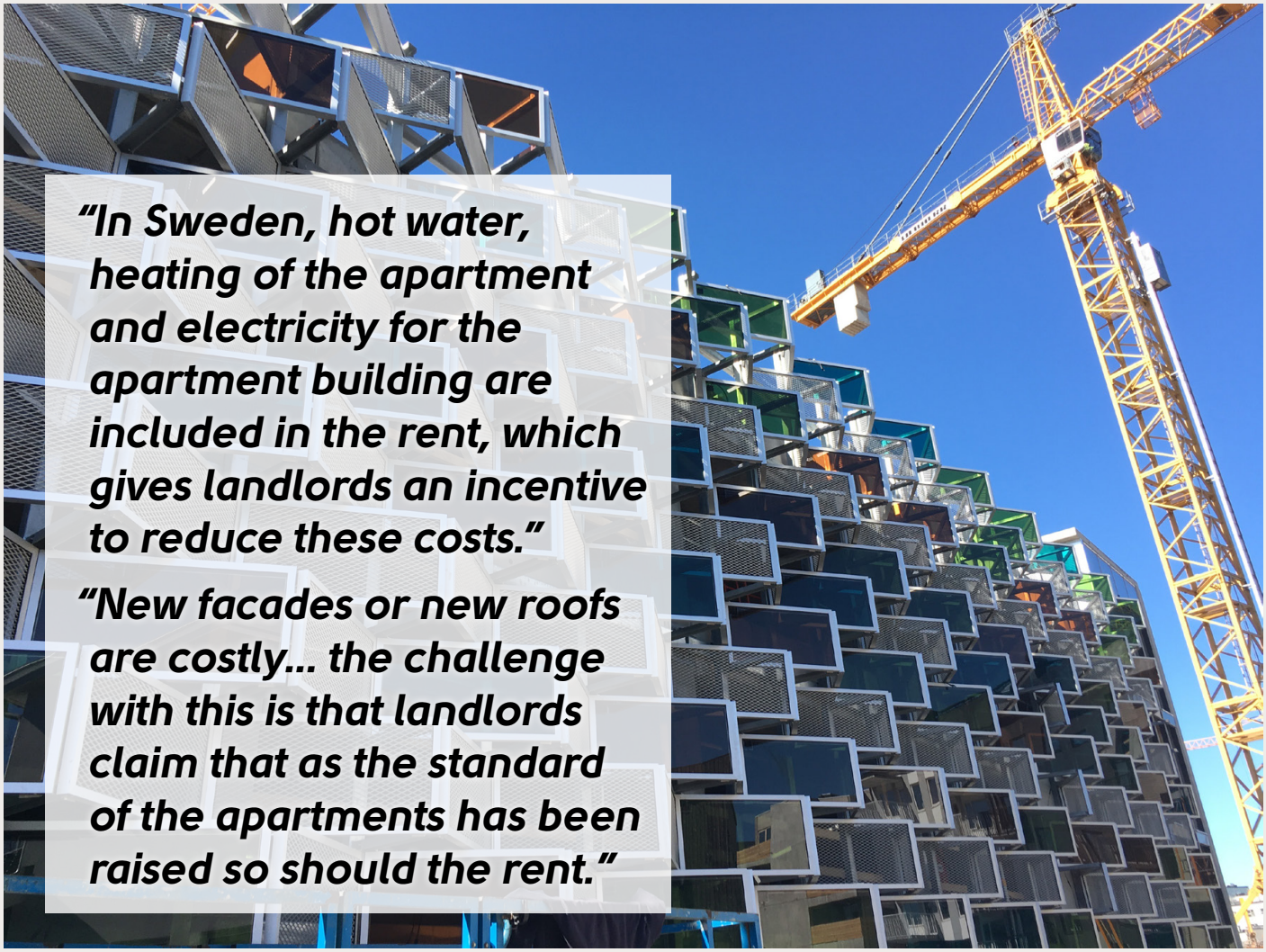
More thorough measures like new facades or new roofs are costly and usually conducted at the same time as other significant changes. The challenge with this is that landlords claim that as the standard of the apartments has been raised so should the rent – increases of 50 percent and sometimes more are not uncommon. This is something we have been fighting for years.

Tenants themselves pay for their individual consumption of electricity in their apartment such as cooking, lights and appliances.

What's the picture of energy efficiency in rental accommodation? How does it compare with owner occupied dwellings?

District heating is the most common way of heating homes, offices, and stores etc.

During 2014 district heating accounted for 58 percent of total energy use in residential and commercial buildings. In rental housing district heating accounts for heating in 91 percent of the buildings. Half of the district heating was used in apartment buildings, 37 percent was used



"In Sweden, hot water, heating of the apartment and electricity for the apartment building are included in the rent, which gives landlords an incentive to reduce these costs."

"New facades or new roofs are costly... the challenge with this is that landlords claim that as the standard of the apartments has been raised so should the rent."

in commercial buildings and the remaining 13 percent, in single-family houses.

The proportion of disposable income spent on energy averaged 10.9 per cent in 2012, of which 7.1 per cent went to transportation (cars, public transportation), and 3.8 per cent to accommodation (heating etc.)

What are the implications of Sweden's membership of the EU for increasing the energy efficiency of housing?

Sweden was on track to reduce greenhouse gases and energy consumption well before the EU, largely due to the oil crises in the 1970's. Sweden is a cold country and heating of buildings is an important part of housing costs. We also have 'cleaner' sources of energy– hydroelectric power and nuclear energy produce most of the power used.

EU standards are a threat to the way energy costs are covered in rental housing. An EU directive demands individual measurement of heating and hot water (EPBD). This would cost tenants about SEK 20 billion (A$3 billion) or SEK 11,000 (A$1,660) per household. So far SUT has together with public landlords managed to obtain a temporary exemption. The way in which costs are covered in Sweden, being included into the rent, gives, according to our experience, better results. In houses where individual measurement has been tested tenants tended to increase their consumption of heating by raising the temperature of the apartment.

Energy consumption in different types of tenure 2014

	Heating and hot water energy consumption per family/ apartment	Heating and hot water energy consumption per square meter	Use of electricity per family kWh
Single-family homes	15,900 kWh	106 kWh	6,100 kWh*
Multi storey buildings**	10,300 kWh	134 kWh	2,000 kWh

** Increase from 3,800 kWh in 1970 part of which stems from installation of circulation pumps, ventilation and heating.*

*** Includes cooperative housing and rental housing*

HELP FOR TENANTS

DEALING WITH ENERGY AND WATER PROVIDERS

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) assists consumers who are having problems with their energy or water provider. EWON is an independent body – we don't advocate on behalf of consumers or represent the interests of the energy and water providers. Instead, we investigate and resolve complaints by working with each party to understand their perspective, and consider relevant laws and codes, good industry practice and what is fair and reasonable in the particular circumstances.

EWON helps consumers, including tenants, with issues including high and estimated bills, debt and credit default listings, disconnection or restriction of supply, provider actions that affect someone's property, reliability and quality of supply, connection or transfer issues, contracts, marketing practices, poor customer service, and more. Best of all, our services are free.

Who is responsible for the energy and water bills if you're renting?

As a tenant you can only be charged for energy or water if you have separate meters. If you have a standard Residential Tenancy Agreement, you are responsible for electricity and gas charges. You need to open and close your own accounts at each rental property.

Public housing tenants are required to pay for their water use in addition to rent. Generally private landlords are responsible for paying service charges for water and sewerage, however tenants in private rental accommodation can be asked to pay for their water usage – this should be stated in your rental agreement. You can only be charged for the metered amount of water you use, so make sure the meter reading is noted on the condition report when you move in or out.

If you live in a share house and open an account in your name, you must take responsibility for all future bills. If the account is in more than one name, each person can be held responsible. If you are living in share accommodation, make sure the account holder details are kept up-to-date. Everyone in your household needs to agree who's responsible for the bills.

Residential parks or strata scheme tenant?

Embedded networks are private electricity networks that serve multiple premises through a transmission system with one 'parent connection point' in the National Electricity Market. This type of system is used for residential parks, caravan parks, retirement villages, apartment blocks and shopping centres. The operators of embedded networks, known as exempt sellers, pay to receive energy from the grid and then on-sell the energy back to the individual customers.

EWON has jurisdiction to receive and investigate complaints from embedded network customers, however, exempt sellers are not required to be members of EWON. This means that while we can handle and generally resolve complaints about exempt sellers, currently those who are not members of EWON are not bound by our decisions.

Having trouble paying your utility bills?

All energy and water providers must offer payment plans to allow customers to pay off the debt they've built up over time, and most now also have hardship programs. Customers experiencing financial difficulties should ask their providers what payment options are available to help them to pay off debt and keep on top of their ongoing usage. If you can't work out an affordable payment plan with your provider, call us for assistance.

The NSW and Federal Governments offer a range of rebates and vouchers to assist people with their bills. These include Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) vouchers, the Family Energy Rebate, Low Income Household Rebate, Gas Rebate, Life Support and Medical Equipment rebates. Customers can talk to their energy or water provider or call EWON to find out which rebates they may be eligible for.

Saving energy and water around the home

You don't have to be a home owner to save energy and water around the home. Making small changes can lead to big savings on your next bill. For example, turning off a second fridge can save up to $300 a year and washing clothes in cold water will save you up to $124 a year. For more energy and water savings tips, visit **ewon.com.au/factsheets**.

If you or someone you know is having trouble sorting out a problem with an energy or water provider, call us on 1800 246 545, email complaints@ewon.com.au, or visit us online at **ewon.com.au**.

IT'S COMPLICATED:
ELECTRICITY IN LAND LEASE COMMUNITIES

Julie Lee – Residential Parks Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW

Electricity in land lease communities is a complex issue governed by a range of laws, regulations and guidelines that overlap.

Around 34,000 people live in the 497 land lease communities in NSW. These communities are either a caravan park or manufactured home estate where people live on a long-term basis. Approximately 88 percent of residents own their home and lease the land from the operator. The other 12 percent are tenants who also rent the home.

Homes in these communities vary greatly in type and style. Traditionally homes were caravans, often with annexes added to extend the living space. Many of these homes are gradually being replaced by manufactured homes, which are larger and contain fully equipped kitchens, bathrooms and laundries.

Who supplies electricity to the homeowner?

The operator of the land lease community is also the electricity supplier in the majority of cases. Operators can on-sell electricity to residents under National Energy Retail Law, providing they hold a retail exemption and comply with Retail Rules. The Retail Rules set conditions for a number of customer protections including supply, billing and pricing.

One of the effects of this system is that usually homeowners can't shop around for a better deal on the electricity retail market. The law does allow a homeowner in a land lease community to choose their supplier but they will generally need to arrange and pay for a new meter to be installed. And at upwards of $400 the switch is not cheap!

A change in law at the end of 2015 should have made electricity usage charges much cheaper for homeowners in these communities

but some operators have failed to change the way they charge. Many homeowners are overpaying for electricity and don't even realise it.

What about going solar?

Like tenants in the general community, homeowners in land lease communities face challenges to going solar.

The first challenge is that they are not permitted to make alterations or additions to their home unless the operator consents. Consent cannot be unreasonably refused but resolution of a dispute about what is reasonable has to be taken to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). Many homeowners don't want the hassle of having to go to the Tribunal to get solar power.

Secondly, some distribution networks in land lease communities would need upgrading to enable solar systems to work effectively and unless there is significant benefit to the operator they are unlikely to make such an investment.

One homeowner who sought permission from the operator to install solar panels on his home was given permission on the proviso that he signed a disclaimer which would make him responsible for any breakdown in the electricity infrastructure regardless of the cause. Needless to say, he declined.

A number of communities also have rules that say the operator may disconnect a homeowners' solar system from their infrastructure if they're of the view that the system is contributing to the deterioration of the infrastructure, or placing an unacceptable burden on it.

In the general community, solar systems may benefit a household by generating an income for the electricity fed back into the grid. However in land lease communities a homeowner may not be able to feed surplus energy into the community system. If they can, they will not be paid for that energy. Although new feed-in tariffs are small, no feed-in tariff lessens the benefit of solar to a homeowner.

On the positive side, storage batteries are getting smaller and cheaper and therefore more accessible. Batteries enable excess energy to be stored and used later and this may provide a better solution for homeowners in these communities. They could store any excess energy they generate and use it in their own home when they need it, rather than feeding it back into the system.

The bottom line

The cost of solar systems has fallen significantly and continues to decline but they are still a substantial investment. Add this cost to the other complications and there is little wonder solar panels are not as common a sight in residential land lease communities as they might be.

SOLAR POWER AND TENANTS

Grant Arbuthnot – Principal Legal Officer, Tenants' Union of NSW

This article will discuss three decisions by the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). Each of these decisions has implications for tenants and solar power. The decisions are by three different NCAT members over three years. Solar power in the tenancy market usually exists in premises that have previously been in the owner occupier market. This brings new and strange disputes.

Tenant compensated for unrepaired solar inverter

In the first case (2015/17474), a tenant was living in premises which had a set of photo-voltaic solar panels. The tenant had established their own electricity account for the premises as required. However the solar power inverter was not working.

The tenant applied to NCAT for compensation and rent reduction because the landlord had not repaired the solar power inverter.

NCAT found that the landlord's general obligation to maintain the premises in reasonable condition included the solar power system, as part of the premises.

That the landlord had not repaired the solar power system in a timely fashion meant that the landlord was in breach of the tenancy agreement and liable to compensate the tenant for the loss of feed in tariff.

The evidence included electricity accounts from when the solar power system was working. NCAT calculated the average solar feed-in tariff at $80 per quarter. As the system was not repaired for three quarters, the landlord was ordered to pay the tenant $240 compensation.

National energy law prevents landlord from profiting from electricity

The second decision (2015, referred to in the third decision – 2016/38954) came from the

"NCAT treated the feed-in tariff as a rebate and so found that the tenant need only pay the landlord for electricity minus the benefit of the solar power system."

landlord's NCAT application for an order that the tenant pay the landlord $2,500 for electricity usage at the premises.

The landlord had kept the electricity account in the landlord's name. The landlord's view was that they should take the benefit of the solar feed-in tariff as they had spent the money to have the solar power system installed.

NCAT said that the *Residential Tenancies Act* is silent on whether the tenant is entitled to the benefit of the solar power. The Act says that the tenant shall pay all charges for the supply of electricity if the premises are separately metered.

NCAT questioned the idea that the landlord should be reimbursed for expenses not incurred. NCAT also thought that the capital expenditure position was not sustainable.

NCAT then referred to the *National Energy Retail Law* (NSW) (NERL).

Under the NERL (s88) anyone selling electricity must have an 'authorization' or 'exemption'.

As an exempt seller of electricity, the landlord was subject to the conditions for exempt sellers (class D2) of the *Australian Energy Regulator* (AER). One of those conditions (#12) requires application of the seller (landlord) rebates to the bill of the customer (tenant).

NCAT treated the feed-in tariff as a rebate and so found that the tenant need only pay the landlord for electricity minus the benefit of the solar power system. This resulted in a benefit to the tenant of approximately $900.

Landlord and tenant share solar benefit despite contract term

The third decision (2016/38954) referred to the second decision and used the same logic regarding feed-in tariff and the exempt seller conditions of the AER.

The solar power system was generating more energy than was consumed in the premises. Nevertheless, the landlord demanded payment for electricity from the tenant ($260).

The tenancy agreement included an additional term – *The tenant agrees for the electricity account to remain in the landlord's name and to reimburse the landlord for all electricity usage upon an invoice being provided to the tenant.* There was no discussion or express finding about this term.

The tenant told NCAT that the landlord's agent had said that landlord and tenant would share the benefit of the solar power.

NCAT was not convinced that the landlord was entitled to payment for electricity beyond what had actually been paid. The landlord had actually paid $100 and the tenant was ordered to reimburse the landlord that amount.

TENANCY Q&A: ELECTRCITY IN A GRANNY FLAT

Grant Arbuthnot – Principal Legal Officer, Tenants' Union

Q I am renting one of two granny flats behind a house. There is one electricity meter for the two flats. I have previously paid my neighbour for electricity, but she has moved out. The landlord says that I have to open an account for electricity and then charge my new neighbour when they move in. Do I have to? What if my new neighbour will not pay? What can I do?"

A It is illegal to sell unmetered electricity*. Neither you nor your neighbour has metered electricity because reading the meter does not disclose who has used how much. So, don't sell electricity to your neighbour.

The right way to pay for electricity at your place is for the landlord to have the account and pay the bills. The landlord cannot charge you for electricity for the same reason you cannot sell it to your neighbour*.

The *Residential Tenancies Act* says that the landlord must pay for electricity if it is not separately metered**. This is also a mandatory term of the standard tenancy contract in NSW.

I suggest you write to your landlord stating that they must open an electricity account for the premises. For assistance, contact your local Tenants Advice and Advocacy service. Their contact details are available over the page or at **tenants.org.au**.

*Section 88, *National Energy Retail Law* (NSW)

**Section 40, *Residential Tenancies Act* (NSW)

COMMUNITY POWER REVOLUTION

Erland Howden is a tenant in the Blue Mountains who is involved with the Blue Mountains Renewable Energy Co-op.

Being a tenant can make it harder to be part of the renewable energy revolution. I've got a pretty good landlord at the moment, but she still drops round without giving us proper notice – and I don't complain because I don't want to rock the boat and be forced to move. Similarly, I'd find it difficult to convince her to install solar power and share the benefits.

But, perhaps luckily for tenants, climate change won't be fixed through individual consumer choices. The real solution to climate change is in communities getting together and building larger-scale projects. That's why I'm involved with my local environment group – the Blue Mountains Renewable Energy Co-op.

We are a volunteer group of people working together to create community-owned renewable energy projects right here in our area. There are now many communities around Australia and the world who are generating their own clean renewable power on a community scale.

I'm proud to say we've recently completed two crowd-funding projects in the Blue Mountains. The first resulted in solar power installed at Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre and we're about to install the second system at the Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre.

We also do other political campaigning work. Just last week, we met with Mark Butler, the Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy. We expressed our support for the Australian Labor Party's idea of setting up a network of Community Power Hubs, and argued that they should scale up the number of these hubs from 10 to 50. These hubs could be fantastic for generating clean renewable energy, as well as invigorating the communities they are in, and making energy cheaper for low-income renters. We'd like to see one of these hubs located in Lithgow, where coal industry closures have resulted in many people losing their jobs and new industries are needed.

We have also been campaigning to keep the Renewable Energy Target. We need to keep our ambitions high if we're going to avoid suffering the worst effects of climate change.

I'd like to see more tenants getting involved with local community renewable energy projects such as Pingala in Sydney. Pingala works with local businesses and organisations to install on-site solar systems. They then activate the community surrounding that site to invest in the future of that site. The community owns the solar system for the first few years and provides the business with cheaper – and greener – energy, while earning a return on their investment.

Especially as tenants, it's time to move beyond the important (but insufficient) individual actions like changing light bulbs and riding our bikes. It's time to get together as communities and get involved in the solar revolution.

For more info, check out:

- *bmrenew.org*
- *pingala.org.au*
- *fundcommunityenergy.org*

STAY IN TOUCH

The Tenants' Union of NSW is a membership-based co-operative and a community legal centre specialising in NSW residential tenancies law. We're also the resourcing body for Tenants Advice & Advocacy Services.

The Tenants' Union has represented the interests of all tenants in NSW since 1976. We have a proven track record of improving tenancy laws and providing legal assistance and training.

We encourage you to support us in our work for safe, secure and affordable housing. Together we can achieve more. Please fill in this form, tick the appropriate boxes and return to the address below.

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Organisation: (if applicable)

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❒ I would like to participate in the TU's volunteer program.

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Membership fees (GST included):	1 year		5 years	
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TENANTS' UNION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Inner West Sydney	9559 2899
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Southern Sydney	9787 4679
South Western Sydney	4628 1678
Western Sydney	8833 0933
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Western NSW	6884 0969
Southern NSW	1800 672 185
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Free Tenants Rights Factsheets are available on the Tenants NSW website

www.tenants.org.au

Tenant News
ISSN-1030-1054

Printed on recycled paper.
July 2017

Editor: Julie Foreman