



Media Release

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Solar gardens to bring rooftop solar to all Australians

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) has today announced funding for a feasibility study that could allow the third of Australians who rent, live in apartments or live in low income housing to access the benefits of rooftop solar.

On behalf of the Australian Government, ARENA is providing \$240,000 to the University of Technology Sydney's Institute of Sustainable Futures (ISF) to undertake a feasibility study on 'solar gardens', a popular concept in the United States that is yet to be introduced in Australia.

A solar garden is a centralised solar array that offers consumers the opportunity to purchase or lease solar panels with the electricity generated credited to the customer's energy bill. This provides an innovative solution to accessing renewable energy for those who are unable to place solar on their homes.

The \$555,000 project brings together energy retailers, councils, community energy agencies and social welfare organisation and the NSW Government to examine the viability of a solar garden in five potential locations - Blacktown in western Sydney, Swan Hill in northwest Victoria, Townsville in North Queensland, Shoalhaven and Byron Bay in New South Wales.

The study aims to consider both consumer demand and feasibility, and identify barriers to adoption.

ARENA CEO Ivor Frischknecht said initiatives such as this are an important step in giving the consumer more options when it comes to their energy bills.

"Solar gardens have been popular in the US, with the fast growing market seeing 200 MW of shared solar gardens already in operation."

"Almost a third of Australians are unable to put solar on their roofs because they are renting, live in apartments or live in low income housing. Solar gardens give consumers the benefits of rooftop solar, even if you don't have a roof available to put it on," Mr Frischknecht said.

"We're excited to be supporting the feasibility into a concept that will allow people from all backgrounds and living circumstances to benefit from renewable energy," he said.

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“While over 1.8 million households now enjoy the benefits of cheap solar power, unfortunately not every household owns a sunny roof suitable for solar panels,” said ISF Research Associate and Director of Community Power Agency Nicky Ison.

NSW Minister for Energy and Utilities Don Harwin said: “We’re excited to be supporting the Social Access Solar Gardens trials because we know that local renewable energy can help consumers save money on their energy bills.

“These trials will help renters, and people in apartments and low-income households who are currently missing out on the benefits of rooftop solar to share in the renewable energy boom currently underway in [NSW].”

The project builds on previous work undertaken by ISF in the ARENA funded project *Facilitating Local Network Charges and Virtual Net Metering* which explored the theoretical impact of reduced local network charges for partial use of the electricity network, and the conditions required to support local electricity trading.

Primary project funders

ARENA
NSW Government

Project partners

Bendigo Sustainability Group
Blacktown Council
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Byron Shire Council
Community Owned Renewable Energy Mullumbimbi (COREM)
Community Power Agency
Energy Queensland
Enova Community Energy
Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney
Norton Rose Fullbright
Pingala
Powershop
Queensland Council of Social Services
Repower Shoalhaven
Shoalhaven Council
Swan Hill Shire Council