



An Australian Government Initiative



RDA SOUTH WEST

Regional Net Zero Preparedness

Inquiry into solar panel reuse and recycling in Australia

Date: 18.03.2026

These comments were gathered by RDA South West from a range of stakeholders including Local Government waste services and the private sector.

Regional context

Outline

The South West Region of Western Australia has a population of 202,000 people. Waste services have remained a random collection of approaches despite a number of attempts to resolve issues at a regional level. Approaches are mainly through Local Government although some private sector services exist.

The main issue is that waste is not a sought-after ribbon-cutting opportunity and no one wishes to invest in the necessary infrastructure to put re-use, recycle and circularity principles in place. Cost is a significant barrier to implementing efficiencies at scale.

What happens in the South West

Note: RDASW understands that Western Australia is behind some other states.

Solar panel recycling for South West Local Governments is ad-hoc and not efficient. Most Local Governments try to collect and package old solar panels for transport to a processing facility outside Perth.

One of the largest waste facilities, extrudes the aluminium border for sale to a scrap metal merchant while other LGAs stockpile panels in sea containers until the container is filled and then send them off. LGAs charge for this on a per item basis.

RDASW knows that at least one of the major solar panel specialists donates old panels to a person who collects them and ships for refurbishment and re-use in South Africa.

From a community perspective, there is no information about solar panel recycling. There is some community perception that old panels are not recycled at all.

Regional risk

While the Australian and Western Australian Governments have waste policy alignment, there is limited appetite to support the lowest tier of government in their waste task. That is a growing issue as resources are depleted and circular economy thinking gains ground.

The challenge is exacerbated by political relevance as regional Australia is overwhelmed by the urban vote and the invisibility of the waste task. Residents and businesses have their waste carted away and do not think about what happens next. The reality is that landfill and waste handling sites sit outside cities.

Without fundamental support for Local Government in this space, State and Federal Governments will be caught in a cycle of inquiry and business-as-usual pilot programs. This will lack best practice consistency and fail to treat waste as a whole problem. Instead, programs such as the National Solar Panel Recycling Pilot will facilitate the cherry-picking of items than might turn a profit. That will deal with this particular waste stream, but does not help the overall picture which requires the development of regional level materials recovery facilities (MRFs).

Recommendations on solar panels

Australia has **100+ million panels installed**, with a major waste wave starting about 2030. This underpins the need for a response:

- Establish best practice processes for handling old solar panels (UNSW is undertaking work in this space)
- Adequately fund Local Government waste services to deal appropriately with the waste resources that they receive
- Ban solar panels from landfill given that 80-90% of panels can be recycled
- Make the switch from being reactive to being proactive in waste and circularity
- Be innovative – regulate manufacturing standards so panels can be easily disassembled at the end of life
- Integrate waste planning across all areas using MRFs

Submission

Charles Jenkinson, Director of Regional Development

