

Submission to the Inquiry into Solar Panel Reuse and Recycling in Australia

Summary:

Australia needs a clear waste hierarchy for solar panels: prioritising expansion of existing systems, followed by reuse, and recycling only as a last resort. Current regulatory and financial settings unintentionally encourage premature panel removal and undermine higher-value pathways.

Key Points:

1. Expansion First: Policies should support adding capacity to existing rooftop systems rather than replacing functioning panels. This reduces waste, preserves embodied carbon, and avoids unnecessary recycling.
2. Reuse Second: Many removed panels remain functional. Australia needs a national testing and certification standard to enable safe reuse, including for community groups, low-income households within Australia under proper documentation.
3. Recycling Last: Recycling should apply only to panels that fail testing or reach true end-of-life. National standards for recycling quality, reporting, and enforcement are required to prevent illegal dumping or low-quality processing.

Recommendations:

- Introduce incentives for system expansion that retain existing panels.
- Create a national standard for testing and certifying used panels.
- Establish a legal and safe pathway for reuse and export.
- Require recyclers to meet minimum recovery and reporting standards.
- Align electrical rules and financial incentives with a circular economy approach.

Conclusion:

A policy framework that prioritises expansion, reuse, and responsible recycling will reduce waste, lower emissions, and support a sustainable solar industry.