

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
2012-13 Additional Estimates Hearings

Outcome Number: 7

Question No: 169

Topic: SIHIP

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Senator Scullion asked:

Please provide the technical rationale the Department came up with two years ago for installing electric hot water systems instead of solar hot water systems in refurbished or new houses.

Answer:

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments are committed to making all new housing under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing energy efficient. However, the choice of hot water system is a matter for the Northern Territory Government.

However, the Department understands that the Program developed specific sustainable design requirements in relation to hot water systems which state that electric hot water systems will not be used in new housing and hot water systems are to have a proven solar hot water preheat system or an energy efficient equivalent such as a heat pump system.

New houses constructed have used a mix of solar hot water systems and thermal heat pumps. This is because different house designs are being used in different communities, some use solar hot water systems and some use a heat pump supply.

With respect to refurbished houses, the program has generally replaced like-for-like i.e. an electric hot water system with an electric hot water system. The replacement of existing electrical hot water systems must consider the capital cost of solar systems and the associated costs of any decision to replace the technology. Current regulations require that if the electrical or plumbing system undergoes a major change it must be compliant with current standards. This may mean the installation of an additional power circuit to an old dwelling may require a complete upgrade of the power board and possibly a rewiring of the house.

Thermal heat pumps are regarded as a green, low energy alternative comparable in energy efficiency to the familiar flat solar panel systems which are prone to damage; it is commonplace in communities for rocks and other items to be thrown onto roofs.

The selection of the most effective hot water services considers a broad range of criteria such as house size and design, water quality, performance, safety, capital cost, operation cost, maintenance cost and cost to the consumer. In remote communities power charges are generally via pre-paid charge card metering.

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The use of thermal heat pumps in remote Indigenous communities is supported by the Centre for Appropriate Technology who released a report, *Hot Water Use and Water Heating Systems in Remote Indigenous Communities* in 2000.