



# Business Solar Programs

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

In this document we answer the most common questions people have about our Solar Saver program, including some information about Environmental Upgrade Agreements also. We look forward to doubling solar in Darebin with you!

If you have any questions, please get in touch:

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## Darebin's solar programs

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### Solar Saver vs Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUAs)

We have two distinct streams for commercial (non-residential) solar installations.

#### Solar Saver Program – solar only

Council can fund up to 99kW through the Solar Saver program by applying a special charge to the property. This is GST free, interest free and paid off over ten years. Council has selected a panel of suppliers via a competitive tender process.

#### Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA) – various environmental upgrades

Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUAs) provide funding for building upgrades which improve the environmental performance, or waste reduction for existing buildings. EUAs can include solar, efficient lighting and glazing, HVAC, and even electric car charging infrastructure!

### The benefits of installing solar through Council

Through these programs the upfront cost of your installation is paid, and you can be cash-flow positive from day one, even while paying back the system over several years. You benefit financially, and you reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

#### Benefits of the Solar Saver program

- You don't pay GST because Council is GST exempt
- We have worked to find reliable installers and value for money
- We have negotiated a 10 year warranty for parts and installation

#### Benefits of Environmental Upgrade Agreements

- You can get finance for larger solar power systems over 99kW
- Can finance a broad range of energy efficiency and waste reduction upgrades, like solar, HVAC, efficient lighting and glazing, etc.
- Attractive terms for building owners, repayments by tenants

## What is the process of getting solar through Council?

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### Who can apply? How do I apply?

- Everyone in Darebin can apply. The owner will need to sign the agreement along with the ratepayer and tenant if applicable.
- Register online at [www.darebin.vic.gov.au/solar](http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/solar) or call us on 8470 8985 and we can register your details over the phone

The steps involved are:

- Step 1. **Register:** You register your interest in our solar programs. We will contact you to determine whether your install would fall under the Solar Saver or Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA) stream.
- Step 2. **Site visit and quotation:** We will assist you in organizing a site visit and quotation. These are obligation free.
- Step 3. **Signing agreement:** If you accept the quotation you sign an agreement for the Solar Saver program or EUA.
- Step 4. **Installation:** Through Solar Saver we pay the installer directly. The supplier will contact you to arrange a time to install your system. For EUAs you receive funds required for the works upfront.
- Step 5. **Repayments:** After installations are complete you make repayments through a special rates charge from Council.

### How long will it take?

Administering the Solar Saver program and Environmental Upgrade Agreements are complex administrative tasks which take time, likely several months from start to finish. We'll be keeping you informed throughout the process.

### Will I need a permit?

Generally, even if you are in a heritage area, if your panels are not visible from the street (or a public park) you won't need a permit. Even if you do need a permit it is very rare for solar installations to be knocked back.

If you're installing more than 30kW you may need permission from the network provider. The installer will do the application for you.

### What happens if my lease ends or the property is sold?

#### Solar Saver:

Ultimately the owner is responsible for repayments. These can be passed on to the tenant, so if a lease ends then the repayments can be passed on to the new tenants. When a property is sold, any outstanding payments will be taken out of the proceeds of the sale, like any other rates or charges which may be owing to Council.

Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUA): The system and repayments can transfer to the new owner, or be paid out at the time of sale.

## Details of your solar installation

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### System sizing and future needs considerations

The solar provider will advise what size system will fit on your roof and best meet your needs in consultation with you.

You may consider over-sizing your solar system if:

- you're going to be switching some processes from gas to electric
- you expect to install electric vehicle charging stations in the future
- you otherwise expect your electricity usage to increase over the coming years from extra plant, processes or heating/cooling.

### Warranties: How long will it last?

Solar Saver: All components (inverter and panels) come with a 10 year product warranty. The installation and workmanship also come with 10 year warranties.

Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUA): Warranties are negotiable between yourself and the supplier, subject to Australian consumer law. Many solar installers give a 5-10 year warranty as standard.

In addition, solar panels come with 25 year performance warranty, meaning that if they degrade to a point where they do not meet performance expectations within that period, they will be replaced. Solar panels have a life expectancy well over 25 years.

### What about batteries?

Many people are interested in batteries, but they are not yet economical in most situations. While a grid connected solar system will typically pay for itself in 3-5 years, at current costs a battery will take closer to 15 years or more, even in ideal circumstances.

However, prices are expected to come down over the next few years, and you can add batteries at a later time.

### What about insurance?

We recommend that you check with your insurance provider to ensure that your system is covered by your insurance in case something happens to them that is outside the conditions of the warranty.

## Costs, savings and repayments

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### How much will it cost?

The solar provider will supply a detailed quotation, and the cost can vary widely depending on things like system size, inverter type and roof type.

Additional associated costs may include switchboard or electrical rewiring upgrades required to allow for the solar install, and property repairs or asbestos removal.

### How do I pay my system off over time?

#### Solar Saver program

- Council pays the upfront cost
- After installation you will be sent a quarterly Special Charge notice for repayment over 10 years, or you can choose to pay it off more quickly
- No interest is charged on the repayments
- Once the repayments are finalized the system belongs to the property owner

#### Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA)

- The installation is financed by Sustainable Melbourne Fund
- Repayments are collected by Council through the rates department
- Interest is charged at a low rate
- The system belongs to the building owner from the outset

#### How much money will I save?

These programs are designed to be cash-flow positive from day one, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Savings will differ for each install depending on:

- The size of the solar system
- How much power you use, when you use it and what you pay for it
- The feed-in tariff rate. This is the price you get paid when you export power to the grid, i.e. excess power generated by your solar system that's not being used by you

#### Important note on savings from solar power systems:

Your electricity bill only shows how much electricity you buy and sell to the grid, however it won't show you how much of the solar power you produced was used onsite by yourself.

This means that most of your savings are not visible on your bill because by generating and using your own power you simply don't need to buy as much. Most of your savings are simply because you'll need to buy less.

However, your inverter and monitoring software will record how much power has been generated by your system, real-time and cumulative over time. Monitoring systems are also available which measure and compare both your solar production and use, as well as import and export.

It's like growing your own food. Your bill only shows how much food you bought and sold at the market, but it won't show how much of the food you grew that was eaten by yourself. Yet you save because you didn't need to buy as much.

#### What is the feed-in-tariff? What will I see on my bills?

When your solar system generates more electricity than you're using, excess power is exported to the grid and you receive credits on your bill for that amount.

How much you are credited for the electricity you export to the grid is called the 'feed-in-tariff'. A higher feed-in-tariff means you get paid more for what you export.

- The minimum flat rate feed-in-tariff that electricity retailers *must* offer is currently 12c/kWh as of July 2019. This is expected to change to 10c/kWh next year.
- Some retailers offer higher feed in tariffs but tend to bundle them with higher electricity rates. We encourage you to shop around!

## Owners and tenants

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### What are the benefits for landlords?

The potential benefits of installing solar on a property that you rent out to tenants include:

- Increased property value
- Increased attractiveness as a rental property because of lower energy costs to tenants
- Repayments can be passed onto tenants
- Ownership of the asset after paying it off
- Contributing to local clean energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

### Do landlords need permission from tenants?

Solar Saver: Council will form a legal agreement with the property owner. Tenants also need to agree because access to the property will be required and the lease may need to be amended to allow cost recovery of the repayments.

Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA): Tenants are not party to the agreement, but changes or amendments to the lease would need to be signed by both parties if the landlord seeks to pass repayment costs on to the tenants.

### I am a tenant, can I participate?

Yes, but you will need permission from the owner of the property. The owner will need to sign an agreement with Council to make the additional Special Charge payment applicable to the Solar Saver program. We can help you with the discussion with your landlord.