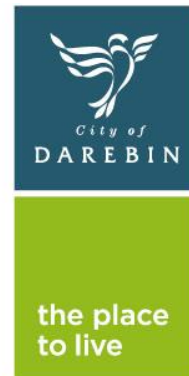


Darebin Solar Saver (Bulk Buy stream)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Thank you for your interest in Darebin’s Solar Saver program!

In this document we answer the most common questions people ask about **the Bulk Buy stream** of the Solar Saver program. If you’re interested in participating, please read through this document carefully so that you understand all the steps and processes involved.

If you have any remaining questions please don’t hesitate to get in touch:

Phone: 03 8470 8389
Email: solar@darebin.vic.gov.au
Web: darebin.vic.gov.au

If you’re viewing this document on a computer you can click any heading or sub-heading in the Contents below to go straight to that section. Click “Back to top” at the bottom right of any page to navigate back to this first page.

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General information about the Solar Saver program

Solar Saver Rates stream vs Bulk Buy stream: What's the difference?

This is the FAQ for the Bulk Buy stream of the Solar Saver program. If you are not sure which stream is right for you, please read on about the differences between the two.

Solar Saver Program	
Rates Stream	Bulk Buy Stream
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In 2020, ONLY low-income households are eligible for this stream.• Our waiting list for 2020 is currently full, but you can join the waiting list for future rounds of the program.• Council pays the upfront cost of the system.• You pay it back over 10 years, interest free.• You don't pay GST because Council is GST exempt.• Choices are limited to set packages at set prices (batteries are not included).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All Darebin residents are eligible to join.• All Darebin businesses and other organisations are eligible to join.• You pay the upfront cost of the system, including GST, but access the financial benefits of participating in the Bulk Buy.• You may have more choice of products than with the Rates stream (e.g. batteries, different inverters) – at the discretion of the solar company.• You will get your system installed sooner because you don't need to wait for the Council process of administering the Special Charge and the waiting list is much shorter.

Benefits of installing solar through Council

The Solar Saver program is designed to help Darebin households and businesses install solar power with confidence, both for their own benefit, and the benefit of the broader community. Many people in Darebin are interested in installing solar but are not sure where to get started.

[Knowing which company to trust](#)

- We've done the homework for you via a competitive tender process to find reliable providers who offer quality and value for money.
- We have arranged industry-leading 10-year product and installation warranties, and the panels have a 25 year performance warranty.
- Our installers use best-practice safety measures.

Technical details

- You don't need to understand all of the technical details to choose the right product.
- We have set high quality and efficiency standards for the products we allow through the program, and our installers will help you choose the right size of system for your roof and your needs.

Financial benefits

- The competitive tender process delivers good value for money for Council and our community.
- The solar provider will give you an indication of how much you can expect to save.

What about solar for business and other organisations?

Businesses, NGOs, community groups and other organisations can participate in the Bulk Buy stream of the Solar Saver program for installations up to 10kW.

For larger installations you can access funding through an Environmental Upgrade Agreement (EUA). For more information on EUAs please visit:

<https://sustainableaustraliafund.com.au/>

Can I also get the State Government rebate?

Households in any Solar Saver stream can apply for the State Government Solar Homes rebate as a point-of-sale reduction to the total cost of your solar system.

Please visit the Solar Homes website for more details and to check your eligibility:

<https://www.solar.vic.gov.au>

What is the process of installing solar through the Solar Saver Bulk Buy?

- Step 1. **Register:** You register your interest in the Bulk Buy program.
- Step 2. **First contact:** Council passes your details on to the solar provider and they contact you to arrange a quotation – they may ask you for photos or need to visit your home.
- Step 3. **Quotation:** You receive the quotation and if you wish to proceed you arrange payment directly to the solar provider.
- Step 4. **Installation:** Your solar system is installed.

What if I change my mind?

Participation in our solar programs is completely voluntary - there is no obligation for you to go ahead with a quotation. If you decide to go ahead and enter into an agreement with the solar provider directly, you will need to negotiate with them if you want to change or withdraw your agreement.

When will my system be installed?

From registering for the Bulk Buy stream to getting your system may take a couple of weeks to a few months, depending on demand, COVID-19 restrictions and other factors.

The installation itself can usually be completed in a single day, or two days for larger systems. Once your system is installed it may take some weeks for your retailer to connect your system to the grid (eight weeks is not uncommon). The installer will submit this request on your behalf once your system has been installed.

Will I need a permit? What about heritage status?

You won't need a planning permit to install solar unless you are in a heritage area or your property is a listed heritage building. 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. Usually only about 5-10% of Darebin applicants need a permit. You will need to lodge a planning permit if you reside in a heritage overlay area and decide to proceed with an installation. The installer can help you with this process.

Details of your solar installation

What size solar system will I need?

The solar provider will talk to you about what size system will fit on your roof and best meet your needs. With the current feed-in-tariff, larger systems will generally deliver greater financial savings. Unless you have extremely low electricity usage, we often recommend you install the largest system that can fit on your roof.

Through these programs we can offer systems between 1.5kW (6 panels) and 10kW (36 panels), which will suit most homes and smaller businesses and organisations.

What are the technical details of the systems?

- Panels: Trina Honey panels (330w) (Tier 1)
- Inverters: Sungrow
- Mounting: Clenergy
- Three-phase inverters will be available for larger systems.

Who will install the systems?

Local business EnviroGroup is the solar provider for this round of the Darebin Solar Saver program.

Where are the panels and inverter made?

While Council would like to offer Australian-made panels and inverters, currently the price is prohibitive. We offer Trina panels and Sungrow inverters (both made in China).

Through the tender specifications Council has ensured that all panels and inverters are both affordable and high quality. Panels are sourced from Tier 1 manufacturers (the highest level in the Bloomberg ranking system), and inverters must meet the highest efficiency standards.

Warranty: How long will it last?

All components (inverter and panels) come with a 10-year product warranty. The installation and workmanship also come with 10-year warranties. In addition, the panels come with a 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. As a rough guide, solar panels have a life expectancy of around 25 years. These panels are made with a low-iron tempered glass face and are specifically designed and certified to withstand large hailstones. The aluminium frames are anodized for extra durability and long life.

What about insurance?

We recommend that you check with your insurance provider to ensure that your panels are covered by your insurance in case something happens to them that is outside the conditions of the warranty, particularly during the period when you are still paying them back.

Costs, savings and repayments

How much will it cost?

An indication of costs for various system sizes is given below. These figures include Small-scale Technology Certificates (STCs) discounts, but do not include the State Government rebate (of up to \$1,850), which can reduce the cost to you even further. These should be used as a rough guide only as there may be additional costs depending on your property (see below).

1.5 kW	2 kW	3 kW	4 kW	5 kW	6 kW	8 kW	10 kW
\$2,500- \$4,000	\$2,500- \$4,500	\$3,200- \$5,000	\$4,000- \$5,500	\$4,500- \$6,000	\$5,200- \$7,000	\$7,000- \$9,000	\$7,800- \$10,00

The exact cost of your solar system depends on:

- The size of your system (i.e. how many solar panels you get installed)
- The type of roof and property you have. There are extra charges for:
 - Double storey properties
 - Steep roofs

- Properties requiring additional equipment or access methods such as scaffolding, scissor lifts etc
 - Tilt frames for flat roofs and brackets for tiled roofs
 - Split arrays – when panels cannot all fit on one section of the roof and have to be split across more than one
 - Tiled roofs
 - Unconventional roof types
 - Optimisers if your roof has some shading or the configuration is split
 - Three-phase power.
- Potential additional associated costs outside of the solar programs
 - If you don't have a smart-meter you will need a new one installed. The provider we use will organise this.
 - If you have two meters you will need to have them consolidated. This could cost around \$500. This is not common, but if you are in this situation we will roll any associated costs into your Special Charge.
 - If your switchboard needs to be upgraded or replaced in order to accommodate a solar system safely, this could cost up to an additional \$800-1,000. You can arrange for this yourself, or you can have it included in your repayment plan.
 - If your house needs to be rewired in order to accommodate solar safely, you would need to pay for this. You should seek an assessment and quote from an electrician for this before proceeding and be aware that rewiring can be very costly.
 - If your property needs repairs or asbestos removal in order to accommodate solar, you will need to arrange and pay for this yourself.

Our solar provider will give you a quotation after they visit and assess your property. They will check whether any of the above upgrades are applicable to your property and if required they will be explained to you and, if applicable, reflected in your quote.

How much money will I save?

These programs are designed to save you money on your electricity bills. The exact amount of savings will be different for each participant and depend on:

- The size of the solar system you choose - larger systems typically result in greater savings.
- How much electricity you use and what time of day you use it. You save more when you use the power that your system generates during the day, rather than exporting it to the grid.
- How much you pay for your electricity.
- The feed-in tariff you receive. This is the price you get paid when you export power to the grid.

It is impossible to calculate exactly how much you will save because of all the variables involved, but your quote will include an indicative range of savings expected for your property.

Important note on savings:

Your power bill will not show you how much money you have saved by using your own solar power, it only shows how much electricity you sold back to the grid (exported). That is the energy that you generated additional to what you used yourself. This means that most of your savings are not visible on your bill because you simply used the power from your solar system and didn't need to buy it. Your inverter records will show much power you produced, however, and you should notice a significant drop in your bills.

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

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

It is rare for people to export so much that their bill goes below zero, but in theory it's possible, and your retailer would have to pay you the difference (or more likely give you a credit for a future bill).

How much you are credited for the electricity you export to the grid is called the 'feed-in-tariff'. To find out the current feed-in-tariff rates see:

<https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/victorian-feed-in-tariff/current-feed-in-tariff>

General information about solar power

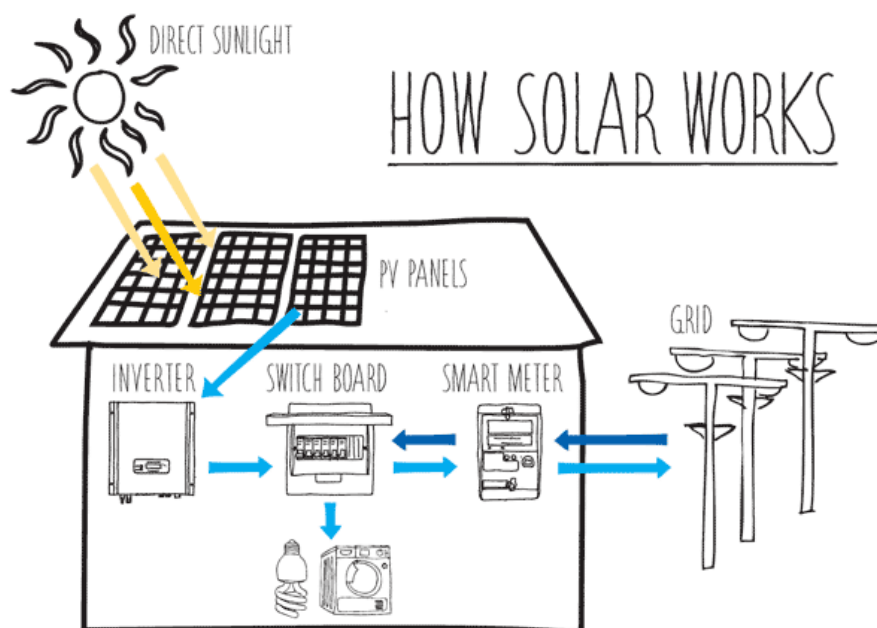
Why go solar?

- By generating your own solar power, you'll be saving on your electricity bills.
- By installing clean energy you help keep our air clean and our climate safe.

How does solar power work?

- Solar panels on your roof convert energy from sunlight into direct current (DC) electricity, and the inverter then transforms the DC electricity into alternating current (AC), which is used in your house or exported to the grid.
- Whenever you produce more solar power than you're using in your home, the remainder is exported (sold) to the grid.
- Your smart meter records electricity being exported and imported to and from the grid, and you get credited on your bill for the electricity you export to the grid.
- The amount you get paid for your electricity exports is called the *feed-in tariff*. (See also: [What is the feed-in-tariff? What will I see on my bills?](#)).

- Generally, you pay more for what you import than you get paid for what you export. This means that the more your daily power usage happens during the day, the more financial benefit you will get from solar.



You can find out more about solar on [our website](#).

Is my roof suitable for solar? Which orientation is best?

When you apply for one of our solar programs, our solar provider will first do a desktop assessment using satellite imagery to see whether solar is suitable for your roof.

While due North is the ideal orientation for maximum solar generation, West and East also work. While they are a little less efficient than North-facing, for most households it will still be very worthwhile. If you use most of your power in the afternoon, then West-facing panels may even be better for you.

You may also have heard that the angle of your roof is important. The optimum angle is 20–25 degrees, but slightly more or less shouldn't be a problem. If you have a flat roof, an adjustable tilt frame may be used to bring the panels up to the ideal angle.

If solar is a viable option for your house then an **obligation-free quote** will be arranged for you.

Will significant modifications need to be made to my home?

No. Solar PV systems are typically installed with minimal modification to the house. The frames for the solar panels are usually built onto your existing roof, and the cables run inside the roof and walls where possible. On a flat roof a special kind of mounting called a tilt-frame is needed, which will add to the cost but will not affect your roof.

For a tiled roof, some of the tiles are removed, brackets attached to the rafters in the roof, and then the tiles go back into place. It's good to have some spare roof tiles handy during installation because old tiles often become brittle and crack during installation. Often the recommendation is for 20-30 roof tiles to be purchased prior to installation day. For a tin roof it is easy to install solar, because the panels are installed directly onto the roof.

Are there any reasons why I might not be able to get solar?

Yes, unfortunately solar doesn't work for all properties. Some of the problems that can come up include the following.

- If your roof does not have enough clear, unshaded space to fit at least the smallest system we can offer then we won't be able to install a system for you.
- Your switchboard and wiring need to be up to standard and able to accommodate solar power safely. If your switchboard or wiring are old they may not be adequate and may need to be replaced before an installation can go ahead. This can be costly and may need to be paid by you (though not up-front, in the case of switchboard works), so you need to weigh up whether it is worth the benefit and whether you can afford it.
- If asbestos is present in your house and/or your switchboard, our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works. You would need to pay for its removal prior to installation.
- If you are in a heritage area, and if your system would be visible from the street or a public park, you will need to apply for a planning permit. If this permit is not granted, you won't be able to go ahead with an installation.
- If your roof is made from decramastic roof sheets our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works. This is a kind of pressed metal roof sheeting that is made to look like roof tiles.
- If your roof is very difficult to access safely then our installer may not be able to carry out the necessary works.
- If we determine that the financial benefit to you might be marginal, then we will let you know so you can make an informed decision.

Is my smart meter compatible with solar power?

Yes, all smart meters are compatible with rooftop solar systems. Smart meters monitor how much power you use from the electricity grid (import) and how much is sent back to the grid from your panels (export).

When your solar system is installed your Electricity Distributor Network (CitiPower, Jemena or AusNet) will reprogram your meter remotely so that the smart meter knows you have a solar system. There will be a small, one-off fee for this service – usually in the order of \$50-100, which will be added to your next electricity bill.

If you don't yet have a smart meter, you will need to arrange for this before the solar system can be switched on.

What about batteries?

Many people are interested in batteries, however batteries are not yet as financially beneficial as solar panels alone. For this reason Council is recommending that you install solar power now, so you can start getting the benefits, rather than waiting for battery prices to drop.

Through the Bulk Buy stream you can negotiate a battery at extra cost.

Costs

At this stage batteries are still very expensive. A typical medium-large solar system might cost around \$5,000. But a battery on top of the solar system, can cost around \$10,000 extra, so a total of say \$15,000.

While a grid connected solar system will typically pay for itself in 3-5 years, a battery will take 10-15 years. Given that most batteries only carry a 10 year warranty, if they fail just after 10 years there may be no net financial benefit.

Benefits

Most people are not home to use the power that their solar system is generating during the day. By installing a battery, you can save what your solar system produces during the day and use it in the evening and morning.

This saves you money because you pay more for the power that you buy from the grid in the morning or evening than what you get paid for the power that you export back to the grid during the day when you're not home to use it.

Landlords, renters and owners' corporations.

What are the benefits of Solar Saver 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 (which may lead to longer tenancies, higher rent, and a higher occupancy rate)
- Ownership of the asset after paying it off
- Contributing to increasing local clean energy.
- Taxation Ruling TR 2017/2 Income tax: effective life of depreciating assets provides a table listing the effective life of depreciating assets. In accordance with TR 2017/2 the effective life of solar power generating system assets is twenty years.
- Further information on depreciating assets is available on the ATO's website, www.ato.gov.au by inserting 'QC 51237' into the website's search function.
- This is general information only, so you should seek individual advice from your tax accountant about your specific circumstances.

I am a renter / tenant, can I participate?

- Yes, but you will need permission from the owner of the property.

What if I live in a flat/unit/apartment with a shared roof?

- If you live in a semi-detached house that has its own roof space, even if you may share a wall with a neighbor, then these points do not apply to you.
- For many apartment buildings, flats and units, your roof is part of what is called a *common area*. Each property has equal share to the roof space.
- If your roof is a shared space you will need permission from your Owners' Corporation.
- We recommend that you get this permission in writing, and that you forward this to us to keep with your records (however that is not a requirement to participate in the program).
- There may not be enough space for each and every apartment to install solar PV panels.
- Solar power systems cannot be shared across separate apartments because they need to feed into a single smart meter. Individual solar systems are required for each apartment.

We recommend you start a conversation with your neighbours as soon as possible. Some advice on talking to your Owners' Corporation:

- Ask to put solar on the agenda at your next Owners' Corporation meeting.
- Think about how you can communicate with other owners before the meeting – do you have a group Facebook page, an email list, or phone number for your fellow owners? Or could you put up a notice on a noticeboard or drop a note into their letterboxes? If you need help with this, please ask us – we can provide a template or point you to appropriate materials. This FAQ could be a good start.
- If you don't already attend Owners' Corporation meetings, find out how many owners usually take interest and what quorum is (how many people do they need to attend to make a decision)?
- Let your neighbours and/or other owners know that there is an opportunity for them to access solar through our programs – share our website with them www.darebin.vic.gov.au/solar
- If you want to read more about sustainability for multi-residential buildings check out [these resources from the City of Melbourne](#).

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and the Solar Saver Program

Darebin's Solar Saver team is working closely with our supplier to manage safety during home visits during the [Coronavirus outbreak](#). Your safety, and the safety of our contractors, is our top priority.

If your home visit is coming up or yet to be scheduled, the installer will call you in advance to find out:

- Whether there is any need to enter your home during the visit (usually this will only be if your switchboard is located inside your property)
- If so, whether there is anyone at home who is at high risk (i.e. older residents and people with existing medical conditions or immune deficiencies)
- If there is anyone at home who is sick, or who is in isolation because they might have come into contact with an infectious person or have recently been overseas.

If there is someone at home who is at high risk, sick or in isolation, or if you would simply prefer to avoid all contact, the installer will schedule your site visit for a later date.

If your site visit proceeds, the installer will avoid entering your home if possible. If there is a need to enter your home, the installation crew will be taking the following precautions. They will:

- Wear masks
- Clean their hands thoroughly with hand sanitiser before and after entering your home
- Make the visit as quick as possible (under no circumstances more than 10 minutes inside your home)
- Avoid physical contact with you all together – no handshakes or any other physical contact
- Avoid touching any surfaces unnecessarily – and they will bring disinfectant wipes and wipe down anything they do touch
- Keep a safe distance from you and anyone else in the house (at least 1.5 metres).

Please see <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus> for the latest advice and information.

Who do I contact with further questions?

Please get in touch with EnviroGroup directly if you have questions. **Make sure you mention that you are interested in the Darebin Solar Saver Bulk Buy stream.**

Phone: 1300 430 430 – Option 1 for Solar Saver Bulk Buy stream enquiries

Mobile: 0410 023 160

Email: solarsaver@envirogroup.com.au

GLOSSARY

Distributor = the company that is responsible for distributing energy and maintaining the powerlines and poles that carry your electricity. There are three in Darebin: AusNet, Jemena and CitiPower.

FIT = Feed-In Tariff = the money you get paid when you feed excess energy back into the grid. Currently the minimum FIT in Victoria is 11.3 cents per kilowatt hour. This about to change – [see Question 25](#).

Inverter = the machine that converts the energy collected by your panels into energy you can use in your house.

kW(hr) = kilowatt (hour) = unit of measure for electricity consumption (per hour).

NMI = National Meter Identifier = a unique number that identifies your home or business for the purpose of electricity billing. You can find your NMI on any electricity bill.

Pitch = angle (of your roof) – this affects your solar panels because they need to be on a particular angle to the sun to be most efficient (can be adjusted by using special mounts).

PV, Solar PV = (Solar) Photo Voltaic (Panels) = Solar Panels.

Retailer = the company that sells you electricity (eg Origin, AGL, TruEnergy, Powershop, Diamond Energy etc etc).

Smart Meter = the device that records your electricity use. This is how your power company (retailer) knows how much to charge you. It also tells them how much energy you are putting back into the grid.

Special Charge Scheme = a mechanism that allows Council to buy your solar system upfront and you to pay back the cost over time. The way this works is that Council will charge you a small additional payment (a Special Charge) on your quarterly rates notice. You can repay the loan over up to 40 instalments over up to 10 years in this way.