

Goal

To make New Zealand the simplest place in the developed world to install solar.

Context

Despite growing demand, solar uptake in New Zealand remains low. Only 3–4% of households have solar, compared with over 30% in Australia. This is largely due to a lack of financial incentives and a more complex regulatory system, with requirements spread across multiple regimes and no single, coordinated end-to-end pathway.

Problems

1. Fragmented installation process
2. Multiple approvals required
3. Inconsistent requirements
4. Long delays

Review process

The review looked at the end-to-end solar installation process, focusing on where regulatory settings create unnecessary cost, delay, or uncertainty. Analysis included:

- An online survey of consumers and industry.
- Targeted interviews with installers, electricians, retailers, electricity distributors (EDBs), metering providers, and industry bodies.
- Engagement with relevant agencies and regulators (e.g. Electrical Authority).
- Research into comparative regulatory regimes internationally.

The review applied a first-principles approach, assessing:

- Whether regulation is justified.
- Whether settings are proportionate to risk.
- How effectively the system operates in practice.

Findings by area

Building Act	Solar exemption pathways are not always clearly understood or consistently applied. This can lead to unnecessary consenting, additional costs and delays.
Resource Management	Different rules create unnecessary costs and delays (e.g. \$3,000–\$10,000 for consents).
EDBs	Delays and variability driven by inconsistent processes, data constraints, and weak incentives.
Metering	Limited transparency and competition, often resulting in installation delays.
Retailers	Poor coordination and processes delay system activation.
Inspections	One-size-fits-all model is not proportionate to risk and creates bottlenecks.
Plug-in solar	No legal pathway despite international uptake, limiting access to low-cost solar options and emerging technologies.

Recommendations



Faster – reduce delays and speed up approvals

- Create nationally consistent rules about when resource consents can be required for solar, and exempt systems under 300kW.
- Create a standardised process for connecting to distributors and support distributors to adopt best practice.
- Require distributors to approve applications under the streamlined process within 24 hours and create a process to approve applications under 100kW within 5 working days.
- Make metering data more accessible to consumers and electricity market participants.
- Exempt accredited installers from inspections for installations up to 100kW after a trial.



Simpler – remove disproportionate requirements and make rules easier to follow

- Amend Schedule 1 of the Building Act to clarify the building consent exemption settings for solar installations.
- Require distributors to publish clear and detailed information about their application processes on their websites.
- Increase the default export limit from 10kW per connection to 10kW per phase.
- Require distributors to publish information about hosting capacity on their networks and ensure that fees are fair and reasonable.
- Improve retailer processes and communication.
- Strengthen enforcement of reporting failed inspections to WorkSafe’s database.



Improve innovation + competition

– support innovation, more choice for customers

- Improve competition in metering and give consumers a genuine choice of metering provider.
- Publish consumer-friendly information about electricity meters.
- Introduce enforcement action for unnecessary meter upgrades.
- Legalise plug-in solar.

Benefits

- 1 Reduce installation time by up to 6 months for medium-scale solar
- 2 Reduce costs by up to \$7000 per system for medium-scale solar
- 3 Net benefits of \$28m–\$50m over 10 years for small-scale rooftop solar

Faster: – Earlier access to solar savings due to reduced approval and installation timeframes

Simpler: – Lower upfront costs from fewer and more proportionate requirements
– Clearer, more consistent processes across building, planning, and network approvals

Improve innovation and competition:
– Greater consumer choice in metering and services
– Increased uptake over time as barriers and uncertainty are reduced
– Enables plug-in solar as a low-cost option for households