



**Ministry for Regulation
Te Manatū Waeture**

Improving the solar installation process regulatory review

Summary report

July 2026



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Executive summary

Reviewing solar system regulations

Household and business demand for solar systems is increasing, but people looking to get solar installed often find barriers to doing so.

Issues exist across building, planning, electricity network, metering, and inspection processes, rather than one single rule or agency.

We recommend a focused set of changes to make installing solar:



Faster - Reducing delays and speeding up approvals.



Simpler - Removing disproportionate requirements and making the rules clearer and easier to follow.



More innovative and competitive - Supporting innovation and giving consumers greater choice.

Findings

There are notable issues with the current regulation of solar systems.

Across the system, the same issues come up repeatedly:

- It's hard to know what steps to follow – requirements are not always clear and can be interpreted differently in different regions.
- The process doesn't flow well end-to-end – different steps are not well coordinated, leading to duplication and delays.
- Timelines are unpredictable – approval times and processes vary across the country, making it difficult to plan.
- Some parts of the system lack transparency or choice – in areas like metering, consumers can have limited visibility and control.
- Some requirements are unnecessarily onerous – low-risk installations can still face processes that add cost and delay without clear benefit.

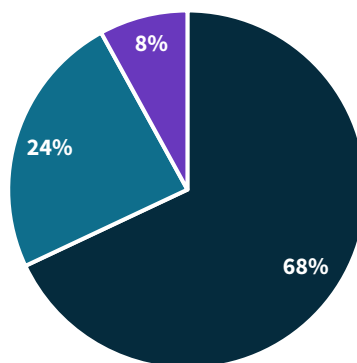
Review methodology

Industry Engagement

The Ministry for Regulation (the Ministry) engaged with a wide range of sector stakeholders through two channels:

- **Online survey** – we ran an online survey to gather perspectives from stakeholders about the solar installation process. The survey received 200 responses from consumers, installers, electricity distributors, electricity retailers, metering providers, local authorities, industry bodies and consumer groups.
- **Targeted interviews** – we ran approximately 20 targeted interviews with stakeholders including installers, electricity distributors, retailers, metering providers and regulators in both New Zealand and Australia.

Snapshot of survey industry participants

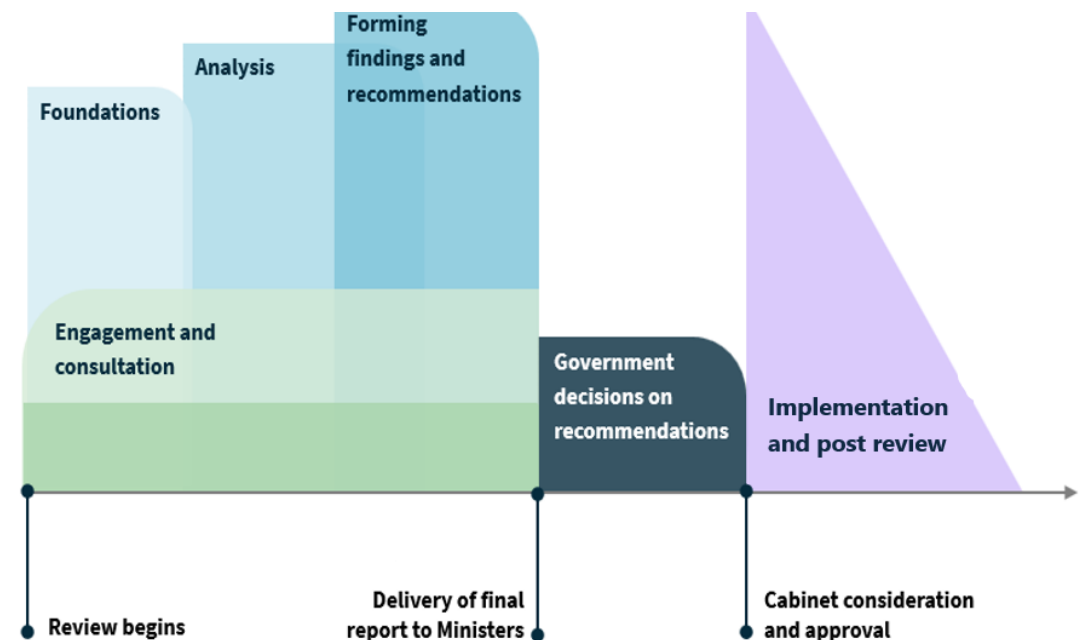


■ Consumers ■ Industry professionals (individuals) ■ Organisations

Interagency consultation

The Ministry consulted with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), the Electricity Authority, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA), WorkSafe New Zealand and the Commerce Commission during the review, aligning with government processes and leveraging regulatory expertise.

The diagram below illustrates the key stages of the review process.



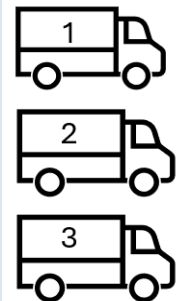
Context

The purpose of the solar review is to make New Zealand the simplest place in the developed world to install solar while continuing to maintain safety and quality.

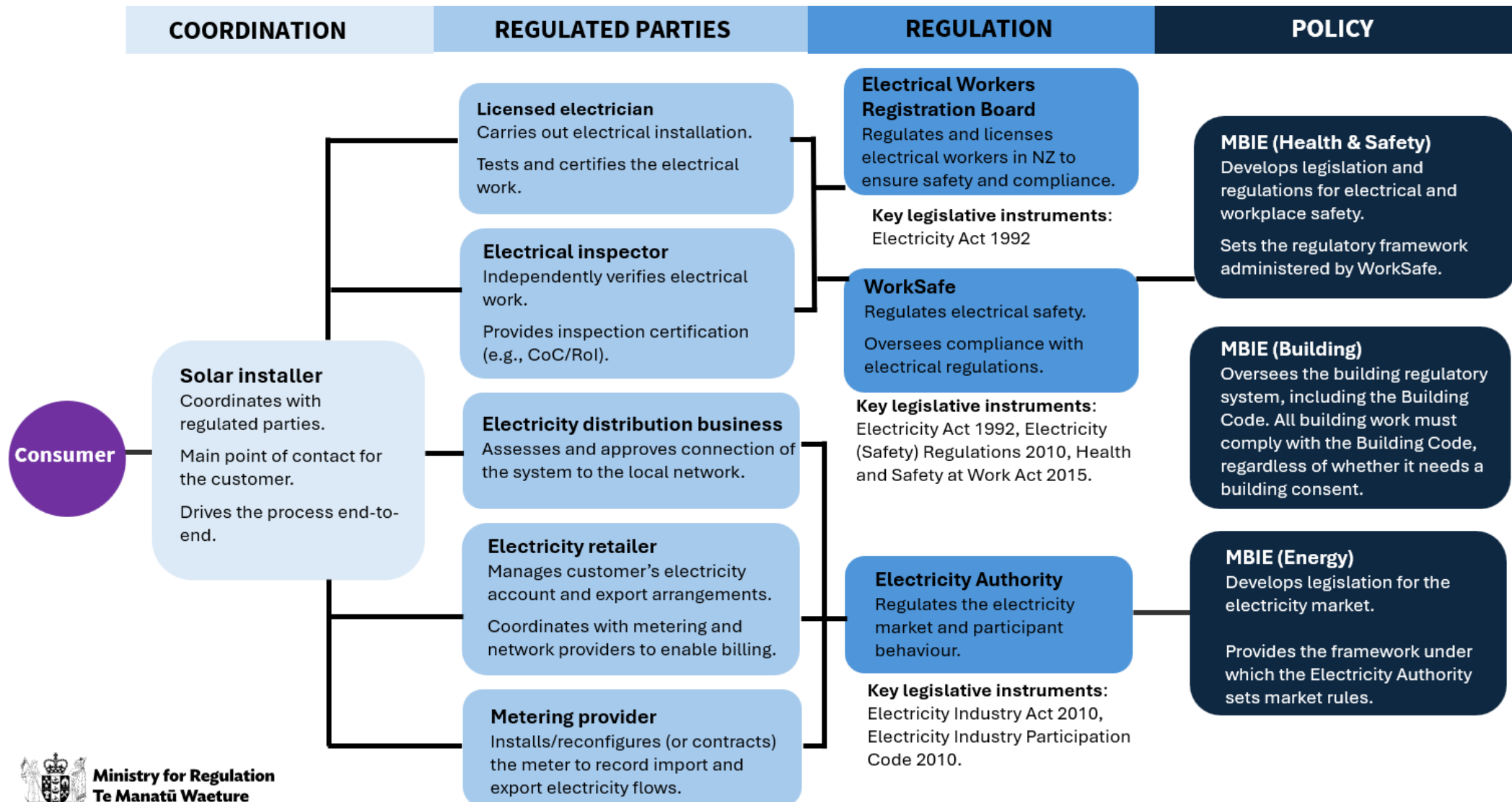
The review focuses on small and medium-scale distributed solar generation, particularly residential and small commercial systems (including farms, schools and marae) that connect to local electricity networks. It covers the key regulatory interfaces that affect the installation process, from system design and approvals through to installation, connection and commissioning.

The current steps for installing solar

1. The installer designs the system and provides a quote to the consumer. Building and/or resource consent may be required depending on the site and design.
2. The installer submits a distributed generation (DG) connection application to the electricity distributor (lines company).
3. Once approved, the installer proceeds with the installation.
4. Once complete, the installer arranges for an electrical inspector to inspect the work.
5. The electricity metering provider replaces or reconfigures the meter to allow solar power to be exported.
6. The distributor receives the relevant paperwork from the installer and electrical inspector and then turns the system on for the consumer.



The different roles in solar installations



Building and resource consent issues

Finding 1

Building consent requirements are not well understood, leading consumers and installers to apply for building consent when alternative pathways exist.

Finding 2

This uncertainty creates unnecessary costs and delays. There is a lack of information about when consent is required and how to demonstrate that installations are compliant.

Finding 3

Councils are inconsistent and often interpret rules differently for large and non-standard installations, and have varying processing times for issuing consents.

Finding 4

Resource consent is required in some situations, especially if the solar is ground-mounted or larger than systems usually used on a typical residential home.

Recommendation 1

Amend Schedule 1 of the Building Act 2004 to clarify the building consent exemption settings for solar installations.

Recommendation 2

Create nationally consistent rules about when resource consents can be required for solar, and exempt systems under 300kW and (if roof-mounted) that fit entirely on the roof.

What does Australia do?

In New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland rooftop solar installations are usually exempt from needing formal approval from authorities, so long as the relevant building code is followed.



Electricity distributors

Finding 5

Distributors can be slow to process applications to connect to the network. This is made worse by the lack of data they have about the network and the lack of incentives to speed up processing.

Recommendation 3

Require distributors to publish clear and detailed information about their application processes on their websites.

Recommendation 4

Create a standardised process for connecting to distributors and support distributors to adopt best practice.

Recommendation 5

Increase the default export limit from 10 kW per connection to 10 kW per phase, as larger properties usually have multiple phases.

Recommendation 6 (dependent on Recommendation 8)

Require distributors to approve streamlined applications by the end of the next working day, and create a streamlined process to approve applications under 100kW within five working days. The access to meter data will help distributors assess capacity faster [see recommendation 8].

Recommendation 7

Require distributors to publish information about hosting capacity on their networks and ensure that fees are fair and reasonable.

Finding 6

Distributors can be overly cautious and provide limited explanations for why they decline applications.

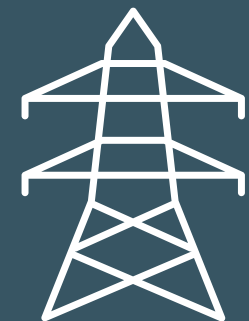
Finding 7

Distributors vary in the fees they charge for applications, with some being quite high.

What did submitters say about distribution companies?

Submitters mentioned that some distributors were slow to approve connection applications, and that the process to get connected was complex and expensive.

Some submissions from installers mentioned the confusion caused by having different rules between different distributors, and the high prices charged by distributors in some cases.



Metering

Finding 8

Meter data can be inaccessible to consumers and distributors, making it harder for distributors to promptly assess network capacity and respond to connection requests.

Recommendation 8

Make metering data more accessible to both consumers and to electricity market participants. Metering data could be anonymously shared with distributors in a similar model to Australia and the UK.

Finding 9

Many households need to upgrade or replace their meter when installing solar. Metering companies are often linked to a certain electricity retailer, limiting competition.

Recommendation 9

Improve competition in metering and give consumers a genuine choice of metering provider.

Finding 10

Necessary meter upgrades are often delayed because the lack of competition means a lack of technician availability.

Recommendation 10

Publish consumer-friendly information about electricity meters, including how to tell if they can support solar or need upgrading.

Finding 11

There are reports of suppliers upgrading meters when the existing one met the requirements, adding unnecessary cost to consumers.

Recommendation 11

Introduce enforcement action for unnecessary meter upgrades and expectations for meter companies and retailers if errors occur.

Finding 12

Metering issues are often poorly handled by the retailer, and the customer may not be notified that their export capacity has not been turned on.

Electricity retailers

Finding 13

Retailers can be slow to respond to requests to replace or upgrade an electricity meter and require a lot of following up.

Finding 14

Retailers often coordinate poorly with installers and distributors which further increases delays and duplication.

Finding 15

There are inconsistencies in processes for meter changes between different retailers, creating issues for installers.

Recommendation 12

The Electricity Authority should use its market facilitation role to improve retailer processes and communication, including identifying best practice and encouraging retailers to adopt this.

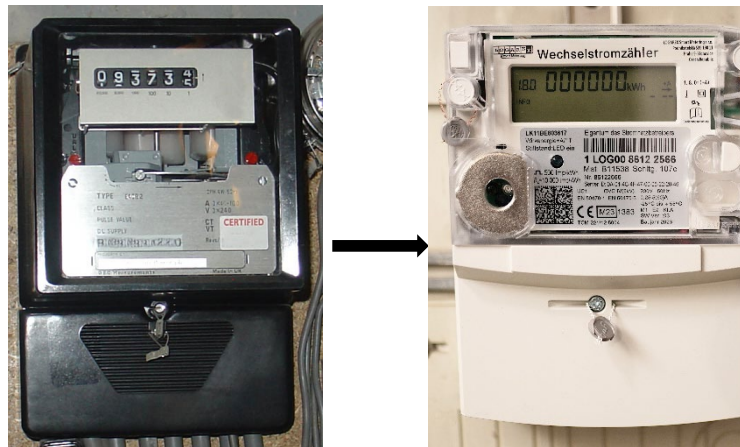
What did submitters say?

“Slow meter installation and inspection and commissioning. We were making power go back to the grid for 2 to 3 weeks before [being paid].”

“Import export meter change process with energy retailers [is] the most painful part of installing a solar system. Every retailer has a different process.”

“Electricity retailer frequently being non-responsive including not communicating directly with us when system was ready to go.”

“Retailers are taking a very lengthy time to process meter changes again asking for fees and not processing anything.”



Electricity meters need to be upgraded to have import/export capacity before solar can be exported to the grid.

Photos: Ali@gwc.org.uk at en.wikipedia, CC BY-SA 2.5 and RobbielanMorrison, CC BY 4.0

Inspections

Finding 16

All solar installations are required to be checked by an independent inspector, regardless of the complexity and risk. Some inspectors do not have strong knowledge of solar and there can be inconsistencies between inspectors.

Finding 17

There can be delays of up to six weeks to get an inspection done due to the availability of inspectors, and additional costs if the inspector needs to travel far to the site.

Finding 18

Inspectors are selected by installers, which creates an incentive for inspectors to approve installations and for installers to select inspectors they believe will give their work a pass. Inspectors are also unlikely to report failed inspections to WorkSafe because it could damage their relationship with installers.

Recommendation 13

Exempt accredited installers from inspections for solar installations of up to 100kW. This is the limit used in Australia. 'Spot check' inspections will be carried out by independent installers selected by the regulator.

Recommendation 14

Strengthen enforcement of existing requirements for inspectors to report failed inspections to WorkSafe's high-risk database.

12-month trial

We recommend running a 12-month trial of exempting accredited installers from needing an in-person inspection and instead have them upload photos and videos of their work to a database to be checked remotely by an independent inspector. In-person spot checks would be done on at least 15 percent of installers. The trial would allow the model to be checked for safety and efficiency.

What's an accredited installer?

Accreditation schemes are often industry-led. EECA has developed criteria required for accreditation schemes to receive government-endorsement. We propose that installers who are currently accredited by EECA-endorsed schemes will be exempt from in-person inspections.

The criteria for accreditation will likely include:

1. **Competency:** having qualified staff, sufficient safety measures, and relevant insurance
2. **Design:** correct materials and equipment, compatible with distributors, relevant warranty.
3. **Installation:** compliant with Building Code, customer informed, no rubbish left on site.

Plug-in solar

Finding 19

Plug-in solar systems are transportable and simple to use panels which can be set up on balconies or backyards to cover some daytime power use.

Finding 20

Plug-in solar is currently not allowed in New Zealand as the inverters that are used for plug-in solar are banned due to concerns about electricity risks and starting house fires.

Finding 21

Other regulations, such as the Electricity (Safety) Regulations, create barriers to plug-in solar because they do not currently provide a recognised pathway for its safe and compliant use in New Zealand.

Recommendation 15

Legalise plug-in solar in New Zealand.

Where is plug-in solar used?

Plug-in solar is permitted in Germany, and is currently being introduced in the UK, with product certification, output limits and other safety features. Households must notify their network operator if using plug-in solar, but there is not a full approval process required before using. Plug-in systems are particularly popular with renters and people living in apartments who cannot access traditional rooftop solar.



Examples of plug-in solar panels in Germany and the UK

Photos: Yuma Solar, RobbielanMorrison, CC BY 4.0

Implementation plan

The 15 recommendations can be implemented over the next 18 months.

One major recommendation, the trial of exempting accredited installers from needing in-person inspections, could begin within three months. Six recommendations could be fully implemented within 12 months, while the remaining eight recommendations which involve amending the Electricity Industry Participation Code are estimated to take 9-18 months based on feedback from the Electricity Authority. In the table on the following pages we have mapped out the:

- expected timeframes to introduce each of the recommendations,
- vehicle for doing so, and
- responsible agencies.

The following benefits key applies:



Faster



Simpler



More innovative and competitive

Timelines are subject to the resource constraints of other agencies, which have their own existing work programmes and have given an indication of how long the changes would take to make if incorporated into their work pipeline. The agencies involved are MBIE, Electricity Authority, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA), and WorkSafe.

Recommendation	Agency responsible	Ministerial portfolio	Timeframe	Benefit	Vehicle
1 Amend Schedule 1 of the Building Act 2004 to clarify the building consent exemption settings for solar installations.	MBIE	Building and Construction	6 months		Secondary legislation Schedule 1 can be amended by Order in Council.
2 Create nationally consistent rules about when resource consents can be required for solar, and exempt systems under 300kW and (if roof-mounted) that fit entirely on the roof.	MCERT	RMA Reform	12-14 months		Transitional National Rule under the proposed resource management reforms, following enactment. These are intended to be temporary national standards until the wider suite of reforms come into force.
3 Require distributors to publish clear and detailed information about their application processes on their websites.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9-12 months		The Code The Electricity Authority is responsible for administering the Code. There are a number of statutory pre-requisites in respect of consultation which must be satisfied under the Electricity Industry Act 2010 prior to making any legislative amendments to the Code.

Recommendation	Agency responsible	Ministerial portfolio	Timeframe	Benefit	Vehicle
4 Create a standardised process for connecting to distributors and support distributors to adopt best practice.	Electricity Authority	Energy	12-14 months		The Code As above
5 Increase the default export limit from 10 kW per connection to 10 kW per phase.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above
6 Require distributors to approve applications, under 10kW, made under the streamlined process by the end of the next working day, and create a streamlined process to approve applications under 100kW within 5 working days (dependent on Recommendation 8).	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above
7 Require distributors to publish information about hosting capacity on their networks and ensure that fees are fair and reasonable.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above
8 Make metering data more accessible to both consumers and to electricity market participants.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above

Recommendation	Agency responsible	Ministerial portfolio	Timeframe	Benefit	Vehicle
9 Improve competition in metering and give consumers a genuine choice of metering provider.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above
10 Publish consumer-friendly information about electricity meters.	EECA	Energy	9 – 18 months		Guidance
11 Introduce enforcement action for unnecessary meter upgrades and expectations for meter companies and retailers if errors occur.	Electricity Authority	Energy	9 – 18 months		The Code As above
12 The Electricity Authority should use its market facilitation role to improve retailer processes and communication.	Electricity Authority	Energy	12-14 months		Guidance
13 Exempt accredited installers from inspections for solar installations of up to 100kW.	EECA	Energy	Begin trial within 6 months		Secondary legislation The Electricity (Safety) Regulations 2010 will likely need to be amended to enable implementation of further policy proposals designed as part of the accreditation scheme. Further policy and drafting approvals will

Recommendation	Agency responsible	Ministerial portfolio	Timeframe	Benefit	Vehicle
					need to be sought from Cabinet following completion of the trial.
14 Strengthen enforcement of existing requirements for inspectors to report failed inspections to WorkSafe's high-risk database.	WorkSafe	Energy	10-12 months		Regulatory practice Operational changes to improve regulatory stewardship.
15 Legalise plug-in solar.	MBIE, WorkSafe, Electricity Authority	Energy	9-12 months		Secondary legislation Amendments would be required to the Electricity Regulations (Prohibited Electrical Fittings – Inverters) Notice 2012 and the Electricity (Safety) Regulations 2010.

Common regulatory steps to install small-scale solar



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Regulatory steps commonly required to install small-scale solar – for a homeowner

Note this is a composite persona that represents regulatory steps that a small-scale solar installation may encounter. It does not include time for the physical installation of the solar panels. The new process assumes all review recommendations are adopted.



Ariana is a homeowner in a suburban town who wants to install rooftop solar which will cover approximately 40m².

“I want to install solar to reduce the cost of my electricity bills and to sell some solar power back to the electricity network.”



~~\$640~~ > \$200



~~3 months~~ > 6 days

Solar installer designs the system for Ariana

Solar installer contacts Electricity Distributor (EDB)

- Solar installer applies to the local EDB, which costs \$140.
- The EDB doesn't have access to the low-voltage network data for Ariana's area so there is a delay in processing the application.
- Approval is granted to connect to the network after 10 days.

NEW PROCESS:

1. The installer applies to the EDB.
2. The EDB has access to the network data and the process is largely automated so the application is approved within one day.



~~\$140~~



~~10 days~~ > 1 day

Installer installs the solar panels on Ariana's house

Independent electrical inspection

- Due to limited availability of inspectors, an inspector is not available for 20 days.
- The inspector arrives, inspects the solar installation, and approves the installation. This costs \$300.
- The inspector provides the Record of Inspection (ROI) to the EDB after an additional 15 days.

NEW PROCESS

1. The installer that Ariana uses is an accredited installer recognised by EECA, so inspections are not required for all installations.
2. Ariana's installation is not selected for a 'spot check' inspection.
3. The installer can sign off on the installation without an inspection.



~~\$300~~



~~35 days~~

Meter upgrade

- Ariana contacts her electricity retailer about exporting energy generated from her solar installation.
- The retailer informs Ariana that she needs a meter upgrade.
- Ariana enters the queue (40 days) for a meter upgrade.
- Two weeks into the wait Ariana finds a retailer offering her a better rate for selling her surplus solar energy back to the grid so decides to swap retailers.
- The new retailer uses a different metering company. Ariana is placed at the back of the queue for a meter upgrade with this new metering company and has to wait 40 days. The upgrade costs \$200.



\$200



~~20 days~~ > 5 days

NEW PROCESS:

- Ariana contacts her electricity retailer about exporting energy generated from her solar installation.
- The retailer informs Ariana that she needs a meter upgrade.
- Ariana chooses a meter company that can install the meter within a week.

Solar system goes live

Common regulatory steps to install medium-scale solar



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Regulatory steps commonly required to install medium-scale solar – for a farmer

Note this is a composite persona that represents regulatory steps that a medium-scale solar installation may encounter. It does not include time for the physical installation of the solar panels. The new process assumes all review recommendations are adopted.



James is a rural dairy farmer who wants to install solar panels on the roof of his milking sheds, with a capacity of 100kW which will be larger than 40m².

“I want solar panels to help power my 400-cow dairy farm”



~~\$11,000~~ > \$1,300



~~6 months~~ > 1 month

Solar installer designs the system for James

Solar installer contacts Electricity Distributor (EDB)

- The solar installer applies to the local EDB, which costs \$1540.
- The EDB checks the limited low-voltage network data it has and visits James' farm to check the connection point at a cost of \$1850.
- Application is approved.

NEW PROCESS:

- Solar installer applies to the EDB (\$770), they have visibility of the data so can design the installation accordingly.
- EDB has full access to the data so can quickly process the application.
- The EDB approves it within five days.



~~\$3,390~~ > \$770



~~30 days~~ > 5 days

Building consent

- James applies for building consent. He does not need a building consent if it is reviewed by a chartered professional engineer, but this information is not clear to James, so he applies for a building consent to be safe.
- Council requests more information.
- James provides more information.
- Building consent is approved.



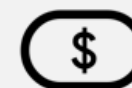
~~\$1,500~~



~~16 days~~

Solar installer applies for resource consent

- James hires consultants to help with the resource consent application.
- James applies for resource consent in parallel with the application for building consent.
- Council requests more information.
- James provides more information.
- Resource consent is approved.



~~30 days~~



Can be done in parallel to building consent

Installer installs the solar panels on James' milking shed

Independent electrical inspection

- Due to limited availability of inspectors and the rural location, an inspector is not available for 30 days.
- The inspection costs \$300 but as James lives in a rural area the inspector charges an additional \$300 to cover travel expenses.
- Inspector inspects and approves the installation.
- Inspector provides the Record of Inspection (ROI) to the EDB after an additional 15 days.

NEW PROCESS:

- The installer that James used is an accredited installer recognised by EECA, so inspections are not required for all installations.
- The installation is not selected for a 'spot check' inspection.
- The installer is able to sign off on the installation without an inspection.



~~\$600~~



~~45 days~~

Independent building consent inspection

BCA inspects for building consent and issues a certificate of compliance



~~\$0~~



~~3 days~~

Meter upgrade

- James contacts his electricity retailer about exporting energy generated from his solar installation.
- The retailer informs James that he needs a meter upgrade. There is a delay of 40 days for a meter upgrade.



~~\$500~~



~~30 days~~ > 5 days

NEW PROCESS:

- James contacts his electricity retailer about exporting energy generated from his solar installation.
- The retailer informs James that he needs a meter upgrade.
- James chooses a meter company that can install the meter within a week.

Solar system goes live