

JOINT STATEMENT

Mandatory product stewardship
for solar photovoltaic (PV) panels



AUSTRALIA IS AN INTERNATIONAL SOLAR SUCCESS STORY. A nation with the greatest penetration of household solar PV in the world. Yet there remains a fatal flaw that threatens to undermine the principles of this renewable energy revolution, which is ensuring that circular economy principles are embedded.

Of the millions of solar panels being decommissioned each year, less than five per cent are recycled. Not because we don't know how – we can recover more than 95 per cent of the precious resources in modules – but because consecutive governments have failed to act on delivering a sustainable stewardship ecosystem, including design, reuse, recycling, and remanufacture.

There is an escalating solar PV panel waste crisis looming, with serious environmental and social impacts set to follow. Panel decommissionings are set to double, and a recycling industry that has invested heavily on the promise of a national product stewardship scheme will stagnate and decline, with associated job losses, after a decade of policy inaction.

Time is up, and Australia's renewable energy sector stands ready to act. This is a resource solution, rather than a waste problem.

Australia needs a national mandatory product stewardship scheme for solar PV panels now to capitalise on the productivity, economic, and social opportunities.

Through recovery of solar PV panels, Australia has a \$6.5 billion opportunity to bolster the nation's critical mineral resource security, while creating innovation, new domestic industries, manufacturing, and jobs. All fundamental principles to a "Future Made in Australia", and our net zero commitments.

Our broad coalition representing industry, business, unions, local governments, community and environmental groups urges the Australian government to establish a mandatory product stewardship scheme for solar PV within this parliamentary term.

We also call on the Government to roll out a funded pilot program in the interim, which would serve to inform scheme design, attract capacity-building investment, and ensure its success.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS



JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, today's announcement is all about making more solar panels. How will the Government address the growing demand to recycle them at the end of their life?

PRIME MINISTER: That is something that [then Environment Minister] Tanya Plibersek is leading work on the circular economy. We see there again, huge opportunities for Australia in advancing through the circular economy.

PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE, PRESS CONFERENCE, 28 MARCH 2024

FACTS

2016	Solar PV systems are placed on the Minister's Product Stewardship Priority List.
2020	The Federal government announced a partnership to develop and implement an industry-led product stewardship scheme to manage end-of-life PV systems by 2023. This was not actioned.
2021	Then Environment Minister Sussan Ley gives solar industry 12 months to finalise an industry-led nationwide solar panel recycling scheme.
2022	Minister for the Environment and Water, announced Government's intent to develop a regulated product stewardship scheme for e-products including PV systems.
2023	DCCEEW released a discussion paper with a proposal for a regulated product stewardship scheme for PV systems.
2024	DCCEEW released Australia's Circular Economy Framework with a goal to double Australia's circularity rate by 2035 and a target (3) of recovering 80% of Australia's resources for reuse and recycling.
2024	Smart Energy Council (SEC) with support from the QLD Government, launched the largest solar panel collection pilot in the southern hemisphere, creating a recycling ecosystem in Queensland.
2025	The Productivity Commission released an interim report with reform direction 9.4 stating the Productivity Commission supports the Australian Government's intention to establish a co-regulatory product stewardship scheme for solar PVs.
Aug 2025	No scheme has been introduced, and no further announcements have been forthcoming.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

REUSE MARKET COLLAPSE Until October 2024, Australia exported up to 80% of its decommissioned solar panels for reuse due to rapid price deflation of new panels. Australia must now manage this growing domestic waste stream with insufficient capacity.

GROWING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL COSTS Without a coordinated national solution, the consequences are escalating:

- Installers and households are stockpiling panels due to a lack of affordable and accessible disposal options.
- Reports of illegal dumping in regional and rural areas are increasing.
- Crude de-framing for small amounts of aluminium is occurring, leading to pollution and the loss of more valuable materials.

THE RECYCLING INDUSTRY IS ON THE BRINK Australia's recycling industry has invested in world-class technology capable of **95%+ material recovery**, but it is at risk of decline.

- **A Logistics Trap:** The cost of transporting panels to a recycling facility is far greater than the cost of sending them to a local landfill, making the environmentally superior option uneconomic.
- **No Feedstock, No Future:** Without a steady, reliable supply of panels – which this pilot would provide – recyclers cannot achieve economies of scale. They may shut down, risking the permanent loss of jobs, sovereign capability, and investor confidence.

ALIGNMENT WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES A national stewardship scheme for solar PV panels is directly aligned to the Federal Government's core objectives.

- **"Future Made in Australia":** It protects and grows domestic capability in critical minerals recovery, supports local manufacturing with recovered materials, and alone, a pilot would leverage an \$830M resource recovery opportunity.
- **Net Zero & Circular Economy:** It ensures full lifecycle accountability for solar technologies and prevents pollution from improper disposal.
- **Environmental Protection:** It provides an immediate, practical solution to illegal dumping and stockpiling, protecting urban, regional, and rural landscapes.
- **Social License for Renewables:** It restores public trust in rooftop solar by guaranteeing a responsible end-of-life solution for their investment.

RESOURCES

- Partnership Call: Product Stewardship Scheme for Photovoltaic Systems. (2020) DCCEEW. Available at <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/product-stewardship/national-product-stewardship-investment-fund/partnership-call-product-stewardship-photovoltaic-systems>
- Wired for change: Regulation for small electrical products and solar photovoltaic system waste. (2023) DCCEEW. Available at <https://consult.dcceew.gov.au/regulation-small-electrical-products-solar-pv>
- Australia's Circular Economy Framework. (2024) DCCEEW. Available at <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australias-circular-economy-framework.pdf>
- Australia's circular economy: Unlocking the opportunities. (March 2025) Productivity Commission, Australian Government. Accessed Aug 2025. Available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/circular-economy/interim/circular-economy-interim.pdf>
- Future Made in Australia Supporting Paper. (2024) Treasury, Australian Government. Available at <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/p2024-526942-fmia-nif.pdf>
- Retirement age renewables – delivering for Australian communities. (2024) RE-Alliance. Available at https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vicwind/pages/6956/attachments/original/1754903284/Retirement_age_renewables_report.pdf?1754903284
- Reclaimed PV Panels Market Assessment Industry Report (2023) CPVA Available at <https://www.circularpv.com.au/new-industry-report>

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