

How does the Smart Energy Council help me?

I've spent the majority of my solar career in the solar industry; designing, manufacturing, developing and selling solar and storage. I was often a decision maker in how and where we marketing products and services

A common question I had and many solar companies ask is "How does the Smart Energy Council help me?"

It's a very reasonable question and after joining the organisation I can now reveal what really goes on inside, much of which was a surprise to me.

The short version is, everything we do is based on what our members tell us they need to help keep rules and regulations practical, grow the industry and provide opportunities to learn.

We offer membership levels and events to suit all types of businesses and your particular needs and have an incredibly talented team.

The final thing I've learned that really sets us apart is how hard the team works on making access to our team easy. We are obsessive about listening to you.

Industry associations

The ACCC describes how "Industry associations provide a collective voice for individual businesses within an industry", which sums up the purpose of organisations like the Smart Energy Council pretty well.

Over the decades many different associations have formed and changed, aiming to serve different parts of the industry in different ways. The Smart Energy Council's history traces back to 1954 as an organization founded by Australian photovoltaic pioneers. Its modern form was created in 2017 when the Australian Solar Council and the Energy Storage Council merged, combining decades of experience into one peak industry body for solar, storage, and smart energy.

In its current form, the SEC could be described as having industry advocacy as the core, and delivering a wide variety of support, training and event services for its members. Their members are predominately small and medium sized solar businesses, equipment manufacturers and a rapidly growing cohort of emerging sector members such as large scale, electric vehicle and decarbonisation focused companies.

A significant difference between the Smart Energy Council and other industry associations is that our constitution specifically prevents large members from taking control.

Crisis support

Anyone in solar can attest to the critical need for a strong and collective voice driven by the fact that our technology is highly disruptive to many large and powerful incumbent competitors.

The battles that have occurred over the years have literally destroyed businesses and cost millions. The SEC has developed a huge reputation for taking on these battles when the outcomes are bad for industry and has a track record for winning.

Since joining, I've realised that we actually have a team of staff perpetually talking to members, regulators and friends - the SEC is easy to talk to. Since I joined a month ago we have already prevented three major issues from becoming disasters for industry by investing time and energy.

We sprang into action on ludicrous proposed battery standards, have had teams in the field assessing the two installs per day rule and are helping to fine tune CSIP rules across the country.

The thing I learned since joining is that the entire organisation is poised and ready to mobilise all our expertise and capabilities at incredible speed when required.

Advocacy and policy

I was staggered to learn that our advocacy team is working on around fifty different projects at any given time.

Some are near term, some are changes that we know are coming soon and some are bigger longer term issues that we need to get in front of to help shape the future. Be under no illusions - the solar industry is not a niche retail sport - renewables increasingly *are* the energy market.

Most businesses are (rightly) focused on the day to day challenges and not on the potentially major implications of things like the NEM review, a swag of rule changes and the winding down of targets that drive the STC market. That's where we come in.

Our advocacy priorities are guided by our members' needs, who we continuously survey and work with to ensure we are working on what matters most to them. I had no idea how much work is involved in co-ordinating needs, formulating strategies and then working with State and Federal departments, advisors, staff and other like minded organisations - it's truly epic.

Recently, for example our stewardship team arranged and led a delegation to visit several members of parliament to talk about the urgent need for a recycling and stewardship program. Our pilot program already helped recycle around 25,000 old modules and our team has developed the next phase which we are discussing with key decision makers. You can imagine the investment to get five SEC staff, three recyclers and our media team in front of the right advisors and staff in Canberra, with policy documents, technical evaluations and market feedback ready to share.

For our members, it may be hard to understand how this impacts them - but a recycling program has real world implications for installers and wholesalers if it's going to work well and we feel strongly that we need to tackle this issue head on.

Another example is the Cheaper Home Battery Program of course, which benefits every single company in smart energy. The SEC helped develop the policy, ensured industry feedback was fed directly to decision makers and we are already working on an evaluation of the program to date and how it might be improved.

Advocacy might not seem like it matters but it shapes the market - which directly affects your business. Memberships and events fund our advocacy work.

Training

As products and rules change, accessible and affordable training has become essential and the SEC has a long history of delivering.

It conducts regular roadshows across the country and has installer and retailer focused training at its major conferences and has built out a digital learning centre too. Our training services are typically free for installers.

Our training work also extends internationally, with customised courses developed in collaboration with in-country partners. I was lucky to visit India earlier this year with the SEC on a scoping mission which showed how much is involved. We visited Universities, NGOs and toured training institutions that were under construction learning about their needs and existing capabilities which are vast.

Networking & Information sharing

Quality networking events are also an essential part of what the SEC does.

Our goal is to blend a wide variety of topics suitable for everyone in smart energy and deliver the latest intelligence, technical know how and policy developments.

We also have a rolling series of working groups where the people who truly understand the issues (you!) get to directly participate in the development of solutions and policy.

There are also a never ending series of VIP opportunities, typically reserved for our highest level members. Since I've started I've sat in on meetings with the UN, the Prime Ministers office and in recent weeks our CEO John Grimes has been in China, the US, Brazil and India at high level meetings. In the coming weeks we'll host more meetings with the CER and AEMO, the schedule just keeps rolling.

I've also learned that being part of a peak industry organisation means that we need to collaborate with literally hundreds of like minded organisations from Australia and around the

world. It's really time consuming but vital work just keeping track of all the great work other organisations are doing to ensure we are all working on complimentary tasks.

Brand building

You only have to pick up the newspaper and you'll see that there is still a lot to do to build the credibility and credentials of our industry.

We work closely with our members to demonstrate and highlight new technologies, projects, success stories and facts. This may take the form of helping politicians show the success of a program, program launches or simply fantastic examples of what's possible.

We also help our members to find, educate and launch their products to the market, which can be through our large events, Roadshows, Webinars, EDMs and Newsletters to name a few. Due to our long history we can reach more than 50,000 industry stakeholders fast tracking access and accelerating uptake.

Special projects

Another activity the SEC undertakes that I didn't know about is our special projects team. We are constantly on the look out for larger problems that need our expertise and regularly pull in experts to assist us.

We currently have a Stewardship team, an India training team, an end user energy saving team and a decarbonisation team all dedicated to delivering specific outcomes. In the background we are testing the water on several other sector specific challenges and when the time is right can build new project teams quickly to accelerate progress.

People

Last but not least, I have also learned what an amazing team of talented staff we have.

We have technical and subject matter experts, industry veterans and youthful energy from some of our newer recruits. We have a Government, public relations and media experts and a marketing and events team with decades of experience.

And of course, driving the direction we have our long standing CEO John Grimes, backed by a Board of Directors who are profoundly experienced. John's reputation for tuning in to the right issues, persistence and speed is legendary.

Join us!

As a not for profit organization, we rely on income from our memberships and events to help fund our work.

If you like what we've done or believe that influencing policy, rules and our industry reputation is important, please consider supporting us.