

Submission to Local Government Act Review

My concern is with Section 6.38 of the Act regarding Service Charges and more specifically with Financial Management Regulation 54.

A community solar energy initiative known as 'Solar Savers' see <https://solarsavers.org.au/> that has been very successful in Victoria and replicated, from the originating City of Darebin, to over 20 councils in that state. This initiative provides solar systems to low income homeowners, enabling them to access financial savings on their electricity bills, with the system being paid off through the council rates system over 10 years.

Such an initiative is precluded in WA due to the restrictions of the regulation detailed below.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT) REGULATIONS 1996 - REG 54

54 . *Works etc. prescribed for service charges on land (Act s. 6.38(1))*

For the purposes of section 6.38(1), the following are prescribed as works, services and facilities —

- (a) property surveillance and security;*
- (b) television and radio rebroadcasting;*
- (c) underground electricity;*
- (d) water.*

At the very minimum, I suggest that this regulation be modified to include

e) photovoltaic systems

but that in the interests of future changes in technology and community expectations that this regulation be freed up to allow councils themselves to determine what 'works, services and facilities' may benefit their local communities, with this list of prescribed services forming a set of examples rather than a definitive list. Some other possible works that could become subject to services charges on land could include water recycling systems, solar batteries and biodiversity levies.

The new act is expected to become more smart, agile and inclusive.

The change suggested above would allow individual councils to be smarter in encouraging and supporting socially responsible behaviour. It is becoming more and more urgent to address climate concerns and move to 100% renewable energy. With a dearth of policy vision at both the Federal and WA state level it is at the local government level that communities can address these concerns. The success of the Solar Savers initiative in the City of Darebin, originally in 2013/14, is evident in the uptake of this initiative by over 20 other local government areas in Victoria since then. It is an initiative that is popular in the communities involved and has resulted in many MW of solar being installed by people who would otherwise not have been able to afford it.

This regulation change would give local government in WA the flexibility to consider more creative ways to achieve the community values which they profess to uphold. Many local governments in WA are now adopting carbon emission reduction targets and the Solar Savers model is a low cost way to achieve emission reductions. Allowing local government the flexibility to pursue such initiatives could pave the way for more such innovative programs.

The Solar Savers initiative, although primarily aimed at increasing the uptake of renewable energy, particularly solar, allows support for and inclusion of members of the community who have previously been excluded from certain technological or other developments. By targeting low income homeowners this initiative expands the reach of household solar systems increasing community equity.

It is unfortunate that the WA Local Government Act precludes communities from accessing innovative initiatives such as that detailed above that have been successful and popular in other parts of Australia. I am hopeful that the current review will remedy this situation.

Best Regards
Jenny Currell
5/12/2018

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