

Public DEFENDER

John Rolfe

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# Sun sets on rebate

## Delays mean thousands miss out on solar incentive

John Rolfe and Rosemarie Lentini

MORE than 30,000 NSW homeowners who want to go solar face missing out on the rebate scheme that makes their investment viable.

The repeatedly bungled NSW Solar Bonus Scheme is due to shut once 300 megawatts of capacity is installed.

As of March 25, 236mW was in place. But approved applications were at 341mW and set to reach 367mW when the scheme shuts, likely at the start of June. The average PV system size is 2.1 kilowatts, suggesting 32,000 could miss out.

An O'Farrell Government source said: "We've inherited a grenade with the pin pulled out." But the official line from the Premier's office yesterday was: "We are still seeking briefings on these issues and will be in a better position to comment in the coming days."

Meanwhile, homeowners wait and worry.

In October Andrew and Karli Scott, who live on the outskirts of Tamworth, committed to a \$71,000 photovoltaic system through Coff's Harbour-based Solar & Bamboo Direct. The Scotts paid a \$3000 deposit and had to extend their home loan to cover the total outlay.

Six months on the PV system still hasn't been installed. If the Scotts make it into the bonus scheme — which pays 60c per kilowatt hour of solar electricity generated — their investment will be paid off in four years.

If they don't it will take 15. "I can't afford to do this if I miss out on the 60c," Mr Scott said.

Solar & Bamboo Direct owner Pieter McHeyzer said: "With this artificial deadline,



Dark days: Glenmore Park couple Sharon and Andrew Dearie have waited six months to have solar panels installed Picture: Adam Ward

we are hoping that it won't impact on too many people."

Of the 3mW of capacity Solar & Bamboo Direct signed up in 2010, about 500KW is still to be installed.

A year ago Sharon and Andrew Dearie paid Central Coast-based Sanctuary Energy a 20 per cent deposit on a \$3500 solar panel system. They are still waiting for the system to be installed — as are 75 per cent of Sanctuary's customers.

"I understand supply and demand, but this is a joke," said Mrs Dearie, of Glenmore Park near Penrith. But they had some good news yester-

day after Public Defender's intervention and their system will be installed next week.

But at least 1500 other Sanctuary customers are still waiting — many of them for at least six months.

Sanctuary's director Mark Marjoribanks vowed to Public Defender that all customers will have their panels by the end of June.

That could be too late.

Glenda, who would not give her surname, gave up waiting. She had paid Sanctuary \$3300. Nothing happened for six months, so she demanded a refund. "I've missed out on the 60c/kwh deal.

I'm not a happy customer," Glenda said.

Another customer waited nearly eight months after paying \$3000 in two instalments. "In the end I had to threaten them with legal action," said the customer, who asked to remain anonymous.

Another customer, who deposited \$700, said: "It's absolutely disgraceful."

Most Sanctuary customers haven't paid deposits. But by signing only to get nothing, they miss a chance to get the bonus.

After seven months, Craig Dennes of Taree said: "Is it really that difficult? Provide

the service you promised or let me take my 60c per kWh elsewhere."

A Campbelltown customer has waited 11 months.

John, of Tea Gardens, waiting one year, said: "I'm an ex-businessman myself and if I treated customers like this I never would have any."

Mr Marjoribanks said Sanctuary was put in a "difficult position" with state and federal governments "changing policy every five minutes", as well as a \$2 million loss after alleged embezzlement at a related company. He added that more installation teams were being deployed.

## Plot with a lot to be lost

Val asks: I bought a funeral plot in 1992 for \$1600 to be buried near my mother and father. Since then I have changed my mind and would like to sell my plot but was told it cannot be transferred or sold to anyone else. I can sell it back to [the operator] for the price I paid 20 years ago, which I find totally unacceptable as they would then sell it to someone else at a much higher price. Are they legally able to do this?

Have your legal queries answered on our blog with Maurice Blackburn legal expert Rebecca Gilseman at noon today



Rebecca says: The key issue is the terms that applied to your purchase of the burial plot in 1992. Did you sign a contract? If so, you should check its terms and price conditions relating to ownership transfer.

If you don't have a contract, you could ask the operator for a copy of the terms that apply to your purchase and the basis upon which they say that you cannot transfer or resell it.

You could also establish what the price would be today for purchasing a similar plot — and if the price is significantly higher you could ask the operator to justify the difference.

If you can't sort this problem out with the operator directly you could also seek assistance from the Department of Fair Trading on 13 32 20.

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