



Sustainable Energy Now Inc.
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Western Power
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Dear Gus,

Rural WA SWIN – Western Power 32A Circuit Breaker Rule

Background

We are writing to you concerning an issue raised by a SEN member about a Western Power requirement for electrical installers to add a 32Amp circuit breaker in place of the existing customer main switch. This ruling came into effect from February 2022 and is triggered by all switchboard upgrades and additions (including rooftop solar PV) in rural WA SWIN.

Feedback from installers to SEN is that when consumers are advised of the new 32A breaker requirement, those consumers are declining new solar installations or upgrades to existing systems as a 32-ampere supply is insufficient for a modern, fully electrified home. This ruling has resulted in a significant downturn for the solar industry in rural WA.

Problem

Our initial thoughts are that the ruling has been applied to solar power systems in a manner designed to address voltage drop regulation on the distribution network, specifically voltage drop downstream of “heavy power users” and voltage rise on feeders with a large amount of solar power systems. This would be localised to certain feeders and not a systematic issue impacting all of rural WA within the SWIN coverage. We consider the policy settings to be overly punitive impacting ALL consumers considering electrical upgrades, including installing rooftop solar PV. If this measure is being used to limit solar PV installs due to them being identified as problematic for the distribution system, this is an unacceptable situation for customers.

Domestic solar power systems cannot add to the loading at an individual property, as they can only reduce the load. The need to retrofit a current limiting circuit breaker ONLY when solar is installed to REDUCE the load seems counter-intuitive, and the claim that this ruling is intended to prevent overload does not appear to be sound.

The consequence is that the core problem lies unaddressed – that is that the emerging inadequacy of the distribution system in certain locations to cope with reasonable power demand during peak times. The requirement for 32A circuit breakers discourages new solar installations which would otherwise reduce distribution system loads.

Solution(s)

We note from Hansard 19th October 2022 the suggestion to run a 63-ampere breaker pilot and we support this pilot – this is further expanded on the Western Power [website](#). However, areas outside of the pilot areas are still affected by this blanket ruling. These include areas that are not impacted by distribution feeders with restrictions that are the root cause of the problem.

It is understood that some distribution feeders have restrictions and until they are upgraded some temporary measures may be necessary - we would be supportive of such actions.

The policy could be set so as to encourage customers to install rooftop solar which would greatly assist in reducing overall energy demand on the distribution network due to self generation and consumption from their own rooftop systems.

The policy needs to allow ALL consumers equal access to rooftop PV – this is in the users' best economic interests and supports the state's decarbonisation objectives.

Conclusion

SEN's interest in this matter is to encourage the transition to renewable energy as quickly and safely as possible – for everyone.

We draw your attention to these issues and urge that further actions are taken to prevent further disruption of the rooftop solar installations in rural WA (SWIN territory).

We look forward to your response,

Yours faithfully,

Fraser Maywood
Chair
Sustainable Energy Now Inc

Ian Porter
Special Advisor - Technical
Sustainable Energy Now Inc