I respond to the strategy paper as a household consumer who installed PV panels some time ago, and, with some chagrin, failed to take note of changes in tariffs introduced by the previous government. That experience did not promote confidence in me that governments actually operate in the broad state, national or global interests. So I read the strategy paper with a disquiet that was not alleviated by the contents page. From the chapter headings alone it is hard to evade the impression that the working group has decided on a policy in advance. I list as an example the term 'Sustainable Electricity Prices'. Since “sustainable prices” is not defined, let alone 'sustainable', I could infer that this is an idealogical construction.

That said, and on the assumption that my impression is misplaced, I with to make some points relevant to households such as my own. We invested in a PV installation five years ago on purely altruistic grounds, which had to do with climate change adaptation. Since then I have have noted the increase of various installer businesses. I wish them well, though I have no connection with any.

First, an entity that provides energy exists to that end, but not as an end in itself. The raison d'être for the energy producer is to provide energy to consumers; the reverse would be absurd: consumers do not exist to justify the existence of the producer! While this is obvious, it is worth stating in case the onus is put on the consumer to meet the needs of an energy producer that finds itself in difficulties.

Second, the relationship between an energy producer and the consumer should be a fair one. To this end, if I buy energy from a producer it seems only fair that the producer should buy from me at the same price. The producer may incur network costs that need to be offset, but then again, so do I when I had to pay to install rooftop solar infrastructure.

Third, difficulties arising from a lack of foresight on the part of the energy provider (and governments) should not be imposed upon consumers. Here I refer to the investment in recent times in the national network infrastructure. This investment has been based on the erroneous assumption that energy consumption must always grow, in contradiction to clear evidence of a stalling, or even a decline, in energy consumption! How is it possible that governments could encourage energy efficiencies, or even mandate particular cases such as an more efficient light bulbs, but then appear confounded and bemused when such strategies actually work! It is this point that illuminates the slant displayed by the issues paper. A more rational approach would have been to ask how the state's energy infrastructure should be adapted to likely future developments, rather than assume that load will always grow in some simple-minded fashion. Here it is worth noting that about one in ten Tasmania households have PV installations (https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/solarcitizens/pages/446/attachments/original/1407920441/State_of_Solar_Electorate_Comparison.xlsx?1407920441), which will probably increase.

Fourth, the notion of fairness is cited within the paper, also without definition. Given that the rise in power prices actually has been due to an increase in infrastructure (in stark contradiction to the reality that consumption has stalled or reduced) it is unjust to blame PV households for the rise! Here I note that within the issues paper the proportion of energy flow attributed to PV installations is minuscule (figure 1).

Fifth, a sensible energy strategy should take into account the likelihood that PV installations will likely increase in number. This will introduce network adaptation issues and this is where a strategy would be useful: how can the network be designed to cope with widespread microgeneration?

Sixth, a positive attitude towards PV installations could conceivably result in an increase in commercially successful installation businesses; it would be quite something if a Tasmania installer could achieve prominence at a national level thanks to a forward thinking state government policy!

Seventh, a failure in government policy will accelerate not only PV installations but also stand-alone systems. Stand-alone systems would not impact adversely on the network, but the load which then would be shared by the remaining customers.

My suggestion for a strategy is that the Tasmanian government enter into a partnership with the University of Tasmania to develop technologies that would enhance the network to better handle increasing PV penetration. Such technologies would not only benefit the state but also Australia.

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