Update on 44c FiT rule changes

On 28 September 2018, the Queensland Parliament approved changes to the Electricity Act 1994 (Qld). This Bill confirms those arrangements which took effect from 15 February when the Bill was first introduced to Parliament. Those arrangements provide clearer rules about adding PV panels, additional generating systems or energy storage devices (such as batteries) to existing PV systems that already qualify for the 44 cents/kWh Feed-in Tariff (44c FiT).

This notice confirms the new arrangements which have applied since 15 February 2018 when the changes were first introduced into Parliament.

Customers with a PV system that qualifies for the 44c FiT can:

- Add energy storage devices (such as batteries) or a new inverter generating system, as long as:
  - it does not supply electricity to the customer’s electrical installation at the same time the PV system is supplying energy
  - it does not export electricity to the grid
  - a schematic demonstrating connection and operational settings is supplied with their application

- Add additional panels to their qualifying PV system as long as the array capacity is no larger than the rated AC capacity (kW) of the qualifying PV system’s inverter/s.

If a customer adds energy storage, an additional inverter generating system or solar PV panels at any time after 15 February 2018 and does not meet the above conditions, they will forfeit eligibility for the 44c FiT.

More details are available on the Queensland Government’s Solar Bonus Scheme website.
Please note, under energy legislation and our connection contracts, you must obtain (on behalf of customers) our consent before making modifications to a generating system (including, but not limited to, increasing array or inverter capacity and changing export limitation settings). This consent can be requested by lodging a network connection application through our Electrical Partners Portal.

**Array upgrades**

For applications approved from 15 February 2018 onwards, array upgrades on 44c FiT-eligible PV systems that increase the total array capacity beyond the rated AC capacity of the existing inverter/s will result in the customer forfeiting the 44c FiT.

Where a customer entered into a contract to purchase additional panels that take the total array capacity above the inverter’s rated AC capacity prior to 15 February 2018, those panels were able to be installed without forfeiting the 44c FiT. As the installation was required to occur within a reasonable timeframe, you can no longer seek an exemption under this provision.

**Panel replacements**

When replacing panels:

- The installer must make every effort to match the wattage of the new panels with the wattage of the original panels, whether replacing one panel or the entire array.
- Where the wattage can’t be exactly matched, an increase of up to and including 5% across the entire array is allowable without impacting the customer’s eligibility for the 44c FiT or requiring our consent.
- If a high proportion of panels need to be replaced, it may be necessary to reduce the number of panels to keep within the 5% wattage increase allowance.
- Any increase in the total array capacity over 5% will require our consent via a new network connection application and will jeopardise the customer’s eligibility for the 44c FiT.

Please note, even if a system is not eligible for the 44c FiT, if any panel replacement/addition results in a new array capacity exceeding 5% of the original array capacity, our consent will be required via a new network connection application.

**Battery energy storage systems**

The changes are designed to allow customers on the 44c FiT to install a battery system if they wish, without forfeiting the 44c FiT. However, it is important to note that the system must be programmed so that the battery cannot discharge while the PV system is operating and cannot export more electricity than would otherwise be possible.

A schematic diagram including a description of the battery charging/discharging mode and demonstrating compliance with these requirements must be submitted with applications to add
batteries to a 44c FiT-eligible PV system. These applications are being processed on the understanding that the programming will comply with the changed rules.

Please note we use automated meter data filters to identify sudden increases in exported electricity volumes. If we identify a battery system that is not compliant, the 44c FiT will be forfeited.

**Additional generating systems**

The changes clarify that if any type of generating system is added to the same tariff circuit and supplies electricity at the same time as the 44c FiT-eligible PV system (except during a network outage), or is able to export to the grid at any time, the 44c FiT will be forfeited.

**Installation compliance**

Understanding and complying with eligibility requirements is important to ensure customers do not unknowingly forfeit eligibility for the 44c FiT or breach their connection contract. We appreciate the effort the solar PV and battery installation industry makes to meet Queensland connection requirements. Unfortunately, on some occasions we observe installations which are not compliant. Where an installer makes a connection without an approved application or provides false information on a customer’s application, they can be reported to the Electrical Safety Office and/or Clean Energy Council for non-compliance.

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**Contact Details**

420 Finders St,
Townsville, Qld 4810
1300 553 924 (7am - 6.30pm, Mon to Fri)
solarteam@ergon.com.au

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