



03 JAN, 2020

We're cranky on power but the pain is easing



Adelaide Advertiser, Adelaide

Page 1 of 2

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CHRIS RUSSELL

POWER prices and reliability are among the biggest problems in South Australia – but consumers' worries have eased considerably in the past year, the *Sunday Mail's* Your Say SA 2020 Vision survey has found.

In the biggest change to public sentiment over the past year, 45 per cent of the 4300 people surveyed list "power supply and prices" as among the three biggest issues facing SA, a dramatic fall from 62 per cent in 2018. The other big issues are jobs and cost of living.

After multiple forecasts of electricity price cuts, some people are still grappling with rising power bills. However, the full picture of how much South Australians actually pay for electricity remains unclear.

Various government agencies survey market prices but don't account for how much is being paid by the third of SA homes with rooftop solar.

Hillcrest couple Ilhamjan Sabit and Camilla Tursun installed solar panels through ZEN Energy about six months ago to help lower their bills.

Dr Sabit said the 9.3kW panels had saved them more than \$1000 already. "In 3½ years, I should get my investment back," he said.

While consumers are left confused, most analysis points to power prices trending down.

The Australian Energy Market Commission estimates average SA bills will fall by 2 per cent, or \$27 a year, by 2021-22 – but the estimate

doesn't include all possible cuts.

Independent advocate Energy Consumers Australia has also found an improvement in public views on electricity.

"While South Australians are expected to see some modest price relief in the coming two to three years, according to the latest price trends report by the Australian Energy Market Commission, we need to see the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

recommendations expedited to deliver the more substantial 25 per cent savings that were promised to consumers," Energy Consumers Australia chief executive Rosemary Sinclair said.

Government agencies warn price projections can be undone by government policy shifts, changes in the cost of

fuel or events such as the precipitous closure of power plants.

The Australian Energy Market Operator's report on SA electricity in 2018-19 found generation – or wholesale supply – hit at a record high annual average of \$109.80/MWh, one cent cheaper than in Victoria. "Prices were 12 per cent higher than in 2017-18 due to

high gas prices and higher coal-fired generator offers in other regions", it said.

Since then, gas prices have eased and SA has added cheaper grid-scale solar and more wind power.

Electricity customers are also predicted to save about \$140 a year through cheaper distribution, transmission and

environmental costs. Energy Minister Dan van Holst Pellekaan said the State Government was "determined to further lower electricity prices".

Reliability also has improved with no blackouts because of supply issues in nearly three years.

PAGE 24: EDITORIAL



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WORTH IT: Camilla Tursun and Ilhamjan Sabit say solar panels have saved them \$1000 in six months. Picture: SARAH REED