

Living green

GREEN HOUSE

STEPHEN WILLIAMS



CAN-do approach to energy

They are not front-line activists, but more than a pale shade of green, writes Stephen Williams.

TRACY and Rodney Champness had been thinking about installing solar electric panels on their New Lambton roof for some time when they heard earlier this year about a deal put together by Climate Action Newcastle (CAN).

CAN had asked solar suppliers to tender for a bulk installation program for Newcastle.

The Sydney Energy Cooperative got the nod, offering to install one-kilowatt grid-connected systems for about \$3000, after deducting the \$3000 government rebate.

What appealed to Tracy and Rodney, and to lots of other people, was that CAN had done all the hard work of tracking down a good deal and selecting appropriate companies.

CAN sent out one email earlier this year advising people of the deal and was inundated with replies.



About 140 Hunter households signed up. So keen were the Champnesses that they signed up immediately, even though they didn't qualify for the \$3000 rebate.

What drives people to spend almost \$1000 on solar electric panels that, strictly speaking, they don't need? (Tracy and Rodney were already being 100 per cent accredited green power from Energy Australia.)

I'm discovering that a broad range of people are now interested in generating their own clean energy. The mother lode, among greenies, is becoming mainstream.



LIGHT FOOTPRINT: Rodney and Tracy Champness, of New Lambton, eschew consumerist culture, avoid waste and try to tread lightly on the planet. — Pictures by Ryan O'Sullivan

REPORT CARD

- Solar electric panels
- Roof insulation
- House construction (mostly reused timber)
- Ambience
- Accredited greenpower
- Organic food
- Modest appliances
- Low-emission transport
- Low light levels in some rooms
- Cathedral ceilings make winter heating difficult
- Low thermal mass to store heat

Things wrong with coal-fired electricity generation.

Second, the price of dirty electricity is rising significantly, with a rise of 20 per cent announced recently.

Third, the price of solar electric panels is coming down, albeit a bit slowly for most of us.

Fourth, the NSW Government recently announced it will bring in a floor in tariff next year for home-generated electricity.

This means that either you total clean electricity generation gross (a) or your excess electricity generation (net tariff) will attract a decent refund from your electricity retailer.

Tracy, an accountant, and Rodney, a teacher, realised that, taking these factors into account, their solar panels would easily

out on the government rebate. While not being at the front line of environmental activism, Tracy and Rodney are more than a pale shade of green. Their house, bought off the owner builder about seven years ago, is made almost entirely of reused material, including large bridge timbers from Larrington.

They buy most of their fruit and vegetables from the organic food co-operative 'Bemantik' (see Fast Facts, opposite).

They ride bicycles or scooters when they can.

Having recently installed insulation in the ceiling, their home is quite comfortable without air conditioning and needs gas heating in winter on only the coldest days.

They have gas cooking and gas hot water.

waste and try to tread lightly on the planet.

Rather than making their lives penny-pinching and miserlike, their commitment to making their lives more sustainable gives them great satisfaction and a vibrant social network, and provides a moral and aesthetic compass by which to navigate.

They are thrilled with their new solar panels and the work done by CAN because the installation went without a hitch.

They are now researching rainwater tanks.

CAN has announced a second bulk solar deal. One-kilowatt systems can be fully installed for about \$1000 if your household qualifies for the government rebate. Go to climateaction.org.au then click on Newcastle's Going Solar.

DIARY DATES

December 10: Climate Action Newcastle, coordinated AGM and Xmas party, Belmont Hotel, one Denison and Smeed streets, Hamilton, 6pm.

December 12: Community Mitchen, Fig Tree Community Garden, Crookwell-Wickham Sports Club, Albert Street, Wickham, 5pm. Bring something to cook in the wood-fired oven. Email: momowgarden@yahoo.com.au.

December 20: Fishing, Tide-Optima Jolly parade and party, Newcastle Blues Ecology Centre, 106 Robert St, Harrington. Decorate or fix your lake between 5am and 5pm. Parade begins at 5pm. The Oronka crew can help decorate your and your lake. Or www.wave.com.au.