

## From little changes, big money grows

By Melissa Marino

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Stuart McQuire hasn't had to pay an electricity bill since 1996, when he had solar panels fitted to his West Brunswick home.

Picture: Andrew De La Rue

Stuart McQuire's home in West Brunswick was the first in Victoria to feed energy it created into the state's power grid.

It was eight years ago that he installed solar panels on the roof. Today the benefits are obvious.

After an outlay of \$5000, he hasn't paid an electricity bill since 1996. These days it costs around \$14,000 to fit out a house for solar power.

In summer he generates more electricity than he can use, storing it in credits for when the household of two adults and two children uses more electricity than it makes.

Mr McQuire, who runs an office from home, said his family decided to invest in the technology to live environmentally sustainably and cut greenhouse emissions while reducing the amount of energy it used.

"We know that we've made a huge difference," he said. "We've cut our greenhouse emissions by over 90 per cent, we generate more electricity than we use, we don't pay electricity bills any more."

And while he is keen to support initiatives encouraging renewable energy, Mr McQuire said the Government should concentrate on cutting the use of energy in the first place.

He was backed by Going Solar general manager Steve Ingrouille, a finalist in the Prime Minister's recent Environmentalist of the Year awards, who said people needed to use less energy to help solve immediate problems with greenhouse gases.

People needed to simply turn off lights, use efficient appliances, natural daylight and passive heating, he said. Solar hot water and air heating systems should be installed before people were rewarded for generating solar electricity to feed back into the grid, he said.

Mr Ingrouille said that solar technology was well understood and advanced - so advanced that there was no need to trial the program, as the Government proposes.

Mr McQuire said solar power was abundant, non-polluting and renewable and should be made more attractive - and cheaper - to use than other forms of electricity. This could be done by introducing a greenhouse tax or carbon levy, he said.

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