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URA proposes solar feed-in and net-metering scheme

The Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA) has published proposals for a new solar feed-in scheme for UNELCO customers in Port Vila. This scheme will enable domestic and small commercial customers to reduce their electricity bills by generating their own solar energy, replacing energy from the grid. During periods of inadequate self-generation consumers can rely on grid power at the approved retail tariffs. Consumers may also be able to sell any excess generation to the system. Overall, the proposal will provide additional renewable energy to the network. URA's CEO Dr. Hasso Bhatia said "We want to empower customers to manage their energy bills and be energy efficient, while also encouraging renewables as a component of energy use. Overall the proposed plan shall benefit all customers in Vanuatu. The URA team worked in consultation with UNELCO to develop a scheme that balances the benefits between individuals and the overall network."

The URA has planned a public meeting at their office on Wednesday 30th April to explain the proposed scheme and to receive public feedback. Interested persons are encouraged to participate in the meeting, and contact the URA on 23335 to confirm attendance..

As well as benefiting customers, this scheme will help the Government achieve its targets for renewable energy. Dr. Bhatia added "The soon to be launched National Energy Roadmap includes targets for renewable energy that will help Vanuatu reduce its reliance on imported diesel. The proposed feed-in scheme should help increase the amount of renewable energy used in Port Vila." After implementing in Port Vila, the URA will investigate similar schemes for other parts of Vanuatu.

The feed-in proposal includes different provisions for domestic and business customers. URA Chief Economist James Ryan explained, "Domestic customers will be billed according to their net consumption and pay a grid access fee. Business customers will use a bi-directional meter that separately measures the energy in and out of the network." Customers will be able to reduce their electricity bills by using their own solar energy, and also benefit from sending electricity to the grid.

The proposal limits the amount of solar power customers can install. Mr. Ryan continued, "This scheme is not intended for customers to turn into mini power stations. Rather, it is designed so that customers install an optimal amount of solar capacity in order to be more energy efficient. In this proposal we have tried to balance the interests of individual customers and the network as a whole".

The first six months of the scheme shall be an initial trial period. Mr. Ryan said, “First we want to run a test to make sure that it works for everyone, and also to assess the impact on the network. But we will also make sure that customers who sign up during the trial are treated fairly”. The initial proposal is limited to 50 domestic customers and 25 business customers for the trial period.

A detailed description of the proposed scheme is available on the URA website www.ura.gov.vu, or from its offices at the corner of Pierre Lamy and Andre Ballande Streets, behind the VNPF building. The URA can be contacted by phone on 23335 or at infor@ura.gov.vu.

About the Utilities Regulatory Authority

The URA was set up under the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007. The URA is an independent body and its primary purpose is to maximise access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity and water services to homes and businesses, and to protect the long-term interests of consumers throughout Vanuatu. In the electricity sector, the URA monitors the concessions operated by UNELCO in Malekula, Port Vila and Tanna; and Vanuatu Utilities and Infrastructure Ltd (VUI) in Luganville. In addition, the Authority assists to resolve consumer disputes and advises the Government on matters related to electricity, water and energy policies.

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