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CPVA statement on the 2026-27 Federal Budget

Circular PV Alliance welcomes the Budget as a signal that solar circularity is moving from an emerging environmental issue to a national policy, infrastructure and market design priority.

Budget response | Public statement

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Circular PV Alliance
Supporting a safe, practical and commercially credible circular economy for solar PV.

Circular PV Alliance

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What the Budget means for solar circularity, and what comes next

Circular PV Alliance welcomes the 2026-27 Federal Budget as a signal that solar circularity is moving from an emerging environmental issue to a national policy, infrastructure and market design priority.

The Budget confirms $24.7 million over three years for the National Solar Panel Recycling Pilot, including up to 100 collection sites nationwide. The funding pathway was announced by the Australian Government on 16 January 2026, so this Budget confirms an active policy direction rather than a new measure. Its significance, even so, should not be underestimated.

Australia now has one of the highest rates of rooftop solar use in the world, with around one in three households using rooftop panels. According to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), Australia is expected to generate around one million tonnes of solar panel waste by 2035, equivalent to roughly 50 million panels. The underlying analysis traces to the UNSW-led Australian Centre for Advanced Photovoltaics scoping study commissioned by Neoen Australia, which found the volume of end-of-life panels is arriving materially faster than earlier forecasts assumed.

> The energy transition must not end at installation.

The pilot is a public learning exercise, not just a procurement exercise

CPVA's view is that the National Solar Panel Recycling Pilot should be designed and communicated as a public learning exercise. Its value will depend on clear explanation of what is being tested, where the limits are, and how the evidence will inform a durable national stewardship model.

Industry bodies like CPVA have a recognised role to play here as unbiased, independent and public-interest oriented translators of pilot learnings: explaining practical obligations, supporting credible operators, and helping ensure the transition from pilot to product stewardship is transparent, evidence-based and commercially workable.

What the Budget means for the circularity community

Solar PV recyclers. The clearest near-term opportunity. The pilot will test the collection, transport and recycling of end-of-life panels (up to 250,000 panels from around 100 sites) and should create work for credible recyclers, collection operators and downstream processors who can demonstrate safe handling, traceability and responsible material pathways. Worth noting: the pilot is not a whole-of-market funding solution. DCCEEW has made clear it will recycle only a small portion of panels, will not cover decommissioning or panel purchase costs, and will operate only through selected pilot locations. Treat it as a proving ground, not a permanent operating model.

Local government, waste authorities and circular economy proponents. The pilot creates a practical role in collection, public education, site management, regional logistics and data gathering. Local government is likely to be a critical partner, since transport costs, regional access and local collection infrastructure are exactly the barriers the pilot is intended to test. The risk is public expectation: the pilot should not be communicated as if every household, business or solar farm now has a universal free disposal pathway.

Installers, EPCs, O&M providers and decommissioning contractors. End-of-life management is becoming part of the solar value proposition. Removal, testing, documentation, triage for reuse, logistics preparation and responsible handover to recyclers are increasingly important service capabilities. One qualifier:

decommissioning is not a low-skill waste removal task. Solar PV remains electrical infrastructure, and work must be safe, competent, documented and aligned with applicable standards.

Manufacturers, importers, distributors and wholesalers. DCCEEW states that data and feedback from the pilot will help inform a future product stewardship proposal. That is an early warning: responsibility for solar panel waste is likely to move further up the supply chain. The opportunity is to lead rather than wait, differentiating through take-back pathways, recyclability information, repairability, and participation in credible assurance models. The harder reality is that future product stewardship may bring obligations, not just opportunity, including fees, reporting, minimum recovery expectations and chain-of-custody requirements.

Asset owners, developers and solar farm operators. Panel end-of-life planning will sit alongside procurement, operations, ESG reporting and asset management. Larger owners should be building decommissioning, reuse and recycling pathways into contracts now, not retrofitting them at project end. CPVA Certified® is CPVA's flagship circularity assurance framework and is designed to help asset owners design, plan and budget for circularity in their projects. Important context: the pilot will not solve utility-scale decommissioning. DCCEEW has said the pilot will include panels from homes and businesses, plus only a few from solar farms. Utility-scale operators should see the pilot as evidence-building, not as their disposal channel.

Battery, inverter and consumer energy resource participants. The Budget's $143.2 million for consumer energy resources matters because rooftop solar, batteries, inverters, EV charging and related devices are increasingly part of one integrated consumer energy system. The $97.2 million continuation of the National Consumer Energy Resources Roadmap, including a National Technical Regulator, is the framing context. The opportunity is to place circularity into that regulatory conversation early; safety, interoperability, data, repairability and end-of-life pathways should not be treated as separate policy silos. Expect closer scrutiny on product performance, installation quality and lifecycle accountability.

Assurance providers, consultants and procurement advisers. A strong role: circular procurement, recycler due diligence, traceability, product stewardship readiness, chain-of-custody verification and credible certification all become more valuable as government moves from principle to implementation. A word of restraint: the Budget does not create a fully mature circular PV system. It creates a pathway toward one. Claims about approved status, compliance or recovered material outcomes must be precise and evidence-based.

Residential consumers and households. With around one in three Australian households on rooftop solar, residential consumers are the largest single segment of the fleet and the most direct beneficiaries (and bearers of cost) of how the national framework develops. The pilot should deliver clarity, fair pricing and accessible local pathways for households facing replacement, damage or storm losses, not leave consumers paying twice (once for the panel, once to dispose of it). Consumer protection, transparent information and credible service quality matter here as much as recycler performance.

Materials recovery innovators, researchers and critical minerals proponents. The Budget provides $173.3 million over five years for Australia's critical minerals industry, including $150 million for stockpiling and $20.4 million for the Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve. Australia's critical minerals strategy should not only focus on what can be extracted from the ground. It should also value what can be recovered from products already deployed across Australian homes, businesses and energy infrastructure. End-of-life solar panels contain valuable materials, including copper, silver and aluminium, and those should be recovered and returned to productive use wherever technically, commercially and environmentally feasible.

Circularity as energy and materials security

Solar circularity should be recognised as part of Australia's energy and materials security agenda. Energy security is not only about generation, storage and grid capacity; it is also about the products, materials and supply chains that make the energy transition possible. The Budget's reprioritisation of uncommitted funding from elements of the Solar Sunshot and Battery Breakthrough programs reinforces the need for clean energy

industry policy to connect manufacturing, reuse, recycling and recovered materials. Circularity is not an afterthought to solar deployment. It is part of building a resilient, sovereign and commercially durable clean energy economy.

A sleeper measure: free public access to standards

CPVA also welcomes the Budget's commitment of $42.7 million over four years to provide free public read-only access to standards referenced in Commonwealth, state and territory legislation. Standards across solar, electrical and battery installation, including AS/NZS 3000, 4777, 5033 and 5139, are referenced through legislated electrical safety frameworks. People should not have to pay substantial fees to read rules that legislation effectively requires them to follow. Better standards access supports safer installations, better procurement, more informed decommissioning and more consistent circularity practice.

CPVA's position

The Budget is a welcome step, but it is not the finished architecture. Australia now needs a nationally consistent, commercially practical and evidence-based circular PV system: one that reduces landfill, recovers valuable materials, supports credible operators, protects consumers, assists local government, provides confidence to asset owners and helps ensure the clean energy transition remains clean across the full product lifecycle.

CPVA is already engaging with local governments across Australia through their 2026/27 budget cycles to embed solar PV circularity at the procurement stage, and works with recyclers, asset owners, manufacturers and standards specialists to translate national policy direction into practical operating disciplines. We stand ready to work with the Australian Government, state and territory partners and the wider circularity community to turn these Budget measures into a durable national framework.

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