

Why Solar Quality Assurance Matters More Than Ever

Protecting consumers. Supporting responsible businesses.
Building confidence in New Zealand's solar future.

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Executive summary

Solar is moving from the margins to the mainstream. That is good news for consumers, energy resilience and New Zealand's electricity system. But rapid growth creates a corresponding obligation: the industry must make it easier for customers to identify businesses they can trust.

A solar and battery system can represent a substantial household or business investment and is expected to operate for 15–25 years or longer. Yet the customer's ability to judge the company selling and installing it is limited. A polished website, five-star reviews and a persuasive salesperson do not establish whether the system has been properly designed, whether savings claims are realistic, whether the installation will meet high standards, or whether the company is likely to remain in business when a warranty claim arises.

THE CENTRAL LESSON: CHECKING THE ELECTRICIAN ISN'T ENOUGH.

Credible quality assurance must therefore assess the whole business and the whole customer journey. It should combine technical competence and installation quality with ethical sales practices, realistic performance claims, customer feedback, complaint handling, appropriate insurance and basic financial sustainability. Most importantly, assessment must continue after accreditation is granted.

This is why SEANZ has proactively created Solassure: a quality assurance framework intended to give New Zealand consumers a stronger, more meaningful signal of trust, while rewarding businesses that invest in quality, responsible sales practices and long-term customer support.

Why this matters now

When an industry is small, poor operators primarily damage individual customers. When an industry becomes mainstream, poor operators can damage confidence in the entire market. A cluster of business failures, misleading sales practices or poor-quality installations can quickly become a story about 'problems with solar' rather than problems with particular operators.

That distinction is critical. Solar and batteries are becoming important energy assets. Consumer confidence is therefore not simply a marketing issue; it is part of the infrastructure required for sustained industry growth.

The three risks consumers actually take

1. Will I get a good installation?

Solar and batteries are electrical generating and storage assets attached to a building. Poor design or workmanship can mean lower generation, premature equipment failure, roof problems, unsafe electrical work, poor commissioning or a system that simply does not deliver what the customer was promised.

A credible assurance programme therefore needs mechanisms for checking actual completed installations — not simply checking qualifications when a company joins. That can include installation records, photographic evidence, technical review, customer feedback, risk-based sampling and, where appropriate, physical site inspections.

2. Was I sold the right system in the first place?

An immaculate installation can still be a terrible investment. Overstated savings, unrealistic payback calculations, oversized systems, inappropriate batteries, misleading assumptions about future electricity prices and high-pressure selling can cause just as much consumer harm as poor workmanship.

Technical competence and ethical selling are not the same thing. A credible solar assurance scheme needs both. It should assess advertising, quotations, performance estimates, contracts, sales conduct, finance representations, warranties and after-sales commitments — not just what happens on the roof.

3. Will the company still be there?

A 20-year warranty is worth very little if the company that provided it disappears after two years. Solar businesses can grow quickly, and installation volume alone is not evidence of financial sustainability. Deposits and payments from new customers can disguise weak cash flow, while aggressive discounting can create impressive sales numbers without creating a durable business.

When a company fails, the consequences extend beyond shareholders. Customers can be left with deposits paid, unfinished installations, unresolved faults and workmanship warranties from a company that no longer exists.

That is why financial sustainability should form part of industry accreditation. This does not mean guaranteeing that an accredited company can never fail. No scheme can do that. It means looking for obvious warning signs: appropriate insurance, business structure, solvency indicators, trading history, director history, complaint patterns and other evidence that may signal unacceptable consumer risk.

THE QUESTION IS NOT ONLY:
“CAN THIS COMPANY INSTALL
SOLAR?”

IT IS ALSO: “SHOULD
CONSUMERS ENTRUST THIS
COMPANY WITH THEIR MONEY
AND LONG-TERM WARRANTIES?”

Overseas experience: Australia

Australia provides one of the most relevant comparisons for New Zealand because rooftop solar moved rapidly from niche technology to a mass-market consumer product. That growth exposed weaknesses that could not be addressed by installer licensing alone.

In 2020 the Australian Clean Energy Regulator conducted an integrity review of the rooftop solar PV sector following reports of consumer issues including defective installations, misuse of installer accreditation details, and safety and quality concerns. The review made 13 recommendations covering installer eligibility, product eligibility, retailer obligations, monitoring and enforcement. The Australian Government accepted 12 of the 13 recommendations and committed A\$19.2 million to implementation.

The reforms included stronger compliance and enforcement powers and a clearer ability to make non-compliant participants ineligible. Australia also moved installer and designer accreditation to Solar Accreditation Australia in 2024, while maintaining a separate consumer-protection framework for retailers.

The New Energy Tech Consumer Code

The New Energy Tech Consumer Code (NETCC) recognises that consumer protection has to cover the complete customer journey. Its standards address advertising, sales and marketing, quotations, contracts, installation, warranties, customer service and complaints. This is important because a technically compliant installation does not, by itself, establish that the customer received fair advice or a suitable system.

The broader Australian model therefore separates two important questions: is the person designing and installing the system technically competent, and is the business selling the system behaving responsibly toward the consumer? That separation is highly relevant to New Zealand.

The Clean Energy Regulator has explicitly stated that its reforms are intended both to protect consumers and to safeguard businesses providing quality products and services by focusing enforcement on unscrupulous operators.

Overseas experience: United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has developed a similarly layered model. The Renewable Energy Consumer Code (RECC) covers high standards of consumer protection in marketing, pre-contract information, quotations, deposits, contracts, guarantees and after-sales service. It operates alongside the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS), which sets technical and process standards for installers and systems.

RECC requires regular monitoring and uses audits, compliance checks, mystery shopping and consumer satisfaction feedback. Its audit process can include on-site visits by independent auditors or desk-based reviews of documentation, credit and trading history, website claims, complaint history and insurance arrangements. Higher-risk businesses receive more intensive monitoring.

This is particularly significant for the question of financial stability. RECC's own published audit process includes checks on credit and trading history, while its Consumer Code requires businesses to have sufficient money and other resources to meet their responsibilities to consumers.

RECC can escalate non-compliance through further audits, consent orders, formal hearings and termination of membership. In other words, the quality mark is backed by an active compliance system rather than being a one-off membership badge.

Why sales practices deserve the same scrutiny as workmanship

One of the strongest lessons from the UK evidence is that many consumer problems arise before an installer ever reaches the roof.

RECC publishes monitoring results across ten compliance areas, including marketing and selling, estimates and quotations, finance agreements, contracts, deposits, installation, after-sales support and dispute handling. Its published compliance analysis has shown that marketing, selling and performance estimates can be major sources of complaints and audit non-compliance.

This reinforces a crucial point for New Zealand: an industry scheme focused only on technical installation quality is incomplete. Consumers can suffer substantial financial loss from exaggerated savings claims, unsuitable system design, poor finance representations or pressure selling even where every cable and panel is installed correctly.

A PERFECT INSTALLATION OF THE WRONG SYSTEM IS STILL A POOR CONSUMER OUTCOME.

Why ongoing auditing matters

There is little value in an industry badge that simply says a business once completed an application form. A company can be excellent when it joins a scheme and very different three years later.

Modern assurance therefore needs to be continuous. Installation sampling, documentation reviews, customer feedback, complaint monitoring, financial-health indicators and risk-based audits turn accreditation from a static certificate into a living quality system.

This is also fairer to good businesses. Companies that invest in training, employ experienced people, use quality equipment, provide realistic savings estimates, carry appropriate insurance and honour warranties inevitably incur costs that less responsible operators may avoid. Without credible standards, the responsible company can actually be placed at a competitive disadvantage.

The cheapest quote wins — until something goes wrong.

Quality assurance protects the industry as well as the consumer

Consumers rarely distinguish between a bad solar company and solar technology itself. A failed company, an unsafe battery installation or a wave of misleading sales complaints can therefore damage trust in the entire sector.

Quality assurance is not about creating bureaucracy or protecting incumbents from competition. Done properly, it supports competition on the things that should matter: competence, value, service, integrity and long-term performance.

Why SEANZ has proactively created Solassure

SEANZ has created Solassure because New Zealand needs a quality mark that reflects the real risks consumers face when purchasing solar and battery systems.

The objective is not simply to confirm that a business employs or contracts appropriately qualified electrical workers. That is an essential baseline, but it is not sufficient. Solassure is intended to look more broadly at whether a company is operating in a way that deserves consumer confidence.

A broader view of quality

- Installation quality — evidence from completed jobs, technical standards, workmanship and appropriate quality checking.
- Sales integrity — fair, transparent and supportable claims about system performance, savings, payback and product suitability.
- Customer experience — feedback from real customers, complaint handling and evidence of appropriate after-sales support.
- Business sustainability — appropriate insurance, business standing and indicators relevant to the company's ability to meet ongoing obligations.
- Ongoing assurance — continued monitoring rather than a one-off assessment at the point of entry.

Solassure is therefore designed around a simple principle: trust should be earned continuously. A certification mark should give consumers confidence that standards are being actively maintained, not merely that a business satisfied entry criteria at some point in the past.

A positive proposition for good installers

Rigorous assurance should not be viewed as a punishment for installers. For responsible businesses it is a commercial advantage. It provides an independent way to demonstrate that the company has invested in quality, stands behind its work and is willing to be held accountable.

Why SEANZ has proactively created Solassure

It also helps shift competition away from a race to the lowest headline price. When consumers have a credible way to distinguish quality, businesses that invest in training, design, workmanship and service have a better opportunity to compete on value rather than simply on price.

SOLASSURE: QUALITY YOU CAN TRUST.
POWERED BY SEANZ.

What credible solar assurance should contain

Area	What meaningful assurance looks like
Technical competence	Appropriate licensing, solar/battery competency, design capability and supervision.
Installation quality	Completed-job evidence, sampling, technical review and risk-based site inspections.
Sales practices	Truthful advertising, realistic savings estimates, suitable system sizing and no pressure selling.
Contracts & warranties	Clear obligations, transparent exclusions, appropriate deposits and understandable warranty terms.
Customer outcomes	Structured feedback, complaints monitoring and effective resolution processes.
Financial standing	Insurance, trading history and proportionate checks for obvious financial or governance risks.
Ongoing compliance	Periodic reassessment, targeted audits and consequences where standards are not maintained.

Conclusion: trust is infrastructure for growth

As solar and batteries become an increasingly important part of New Zealand's electricity system, the industry's reputation will be determined not only by technology performance but by the quality of the businesses delivering it.

Consumers need confidence that the system has been properly designed and installed, that the sales claims are credible, that warranties mean something, and that there is meaningful accountability if standards are not met.

Australia and the United Kingdom demonstrate why mature markets increasingly combine technical accreditation with consumer codes, active monitoring, audits, complaints processes and enforcement. Their experience shows that quality assurance must follow the whole consumer journey.

For New Zealand, the opportunity is to act before poor practice becomes entrenched. That is the rationale for Solassure. SEANZ is proactively building an assurance framework intended to lift the benchmark, protect consumers, recognise responsible businesses and strengthen confidence in solar and battery technology.

BECAUSE TRUST ISN'T A CHECKBOX. IT IS EARNED — EVERY DAY.

References and overseas examples

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