

Means test puts paid to solar power hopes

THE reality of the Federal government's new means test for solar power rebates has hit home to at least one Taree family, as well as workers employed in the solar industry.

The government which hailed itself as the clean, green future for Australia is missing in action as the Australian solar industry struggles in the aftermath of the Budget and the new \$100,000 means test for grid connected solar systems.

Mid North NSW solar installer, Ged McCarthy of Energy and Space Solutions, tells of the reality of the change to the rebate for a Taree couple who have a disabled son.

In order to pay for his special needs they each work part time for NSW TAFE, earning a gross income of \$102,000 per annum.

Before the budget they had committed to installing a grid connected solar system in order to offset the huge electricity bills

generated by the equipment, constant temperature and electrical gadgetry necessary to keep their son well and happy.

The means test has put paid to that.

"When Minister Garrett met with solar industry leaders recently, his only explanation for the new means test was because the solar rebate scheme was 'overheating'," Mr McCarthy said. "We believe the average Australian is more concerned about the planet overheating."

"If the government is unable to meet funding for solar rebates without introducing a means test - bizarrely lower than \$150,000 income test introduced for the Baby Bonus and Family Tax Benefit - perhaps they might look at reallocating some of the \$9 billion they currently use to subsidise the oil, coal and gas industries each year," Mr McCarthy said.

Former deputy prime minister and member for Lyne, Mark Vaile

was swift to condemn the Rudd Government's decision in a letter to Mr McCarthy.

"This is a broken election promise on the part of Mr Rudd and Mr Garrett... it is simply wrong to scrap the \$8000 rebate for households earning a combined income of over \$100,000. These households are not 'rich' as Mr Rudd has indicated; they are honest Australians who were trying to help the environment," Mr Vaile said.

"Mr Rudd and Mr Garrett promoted solar technology to talk up their environmental credentials."

"Now, even the company in which they launched their solar policy is one of their harshest critics. Within days of the announcement, the small company that had been held up by Labor as an example of environmental entrepreneurship - Solar Tec Renewables - had lost orders worth \$360,000 and had to lay off three hard working staff.

"This bleak story is being repeated around the country as millions of dollars in contracts are cancelled and jobs are lost," Mr Vaile said.

"The Coalition will not allow the Rudd Government to get away with slashing access to this important environmental program."

"The Coalition will work with the solar industry to have the solar rebate restored and give families an incentive to adopt solar panels while protecting small businesses."

"We will not allow Mr Rudd to get away with a clear broken promise which is having such a severe impact on the renewable energy sector and the environment."

The solar industry (installers and manufacturers) are currently pursuing a Private Members Bill to reverse the means test decision as they rally together with the Coalition, the Australian Greens and organisations such as Greenpeace.



Addressing the congress: Barbara Kirkby and Pauline Erby.

Congress rated a huge success

THE Taree Bridge Club's teams congress has been lauded a resounding success.

A total of 27 teams entered the event, players coming from as far as Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle, Tamworth, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour to take part.

A Great Lakes team of Vale McCabe, Eric Pulling, Allison McGregor and Jackie Pullack won the event.

Barbara Drury, Dawn Calvin, Lois Duff, Joyce Waite and Jenni Saunders were the best local team.

New South Wales Bridge Head of State Director Accreditation Tony Hoves commended the standard of play and said that the Taree club owning its own premises will continue to be a huge boost for bridge in the area.

More DVDs needed

A MEMBER of the Manning Health and Advisory Committee has been overwhelmed by the response to a call for DVDs to be donated to the Nita Reed Dialysis Centre in Taree. Council's deputy mayor Cr David West I said a total of 130 DVDs have been donated so far, from which there are 85 different movies for dialysis patients to watch during their treatment. While the response has been great the appeal is not over.

"It will keep going because they need as many as they can get," Cr West said.

Cr West started the appeal after learning at a meeting of the Manning Health and Advisory Committee that the patients (who each attend the centre three times a week for five hours at a time) and the staff had watched all of their own DVDs and had no more to pass the time.

He aimed to motivate people by buying a double pass to Taree Arts Council's Nonsense to anyone who donated DVDs. This was won by Larry Belton. The Nita Reed Dialysis Centre is located in Chatham Avenue, Taree.

Raising awareness of Fragile X Syndrome

CREATING awareness of the little-known Fragile X Syndrome continues to be a life crusade for Taree grandmother, Margaret Tappert.

Margaret and her family have learned first-hand what it is like to have children diagnosed with Fragile X, the most common cause worldwide of inherited intellectual disability - second to Down syndrome, which is not inherited.

It is found worldwide, in all races, and throughout society. In Australia, it is estimated that one child is born every week with Fragile X, and 12 are born carriers.

With Fragile X, inherited characteristics are carried from one generation to the next by chromosomes. Girls can inherit Fragile X from either parent, boys can inherit it only from their mother.

Intellectual disability is the most significant characteristic with Fragile

X, and the range of learning problems is wide.

Some are affected in fairly small ways while at the other end of the scale, some can be severely affected. This is often accompanied by delays in speech and communication, poor gross and fine motor skills and high anxiety.

Mrs Tappert heads a support group in the Taree area which aims to raise awareness of Fragile X, and support the fundraising efforts of the Fragile X Association of Australia.

The association provides support for sufferers and their families through the provision of specialist clinics including comprehensive medical, genetic and therapeutic diagnoses and support.

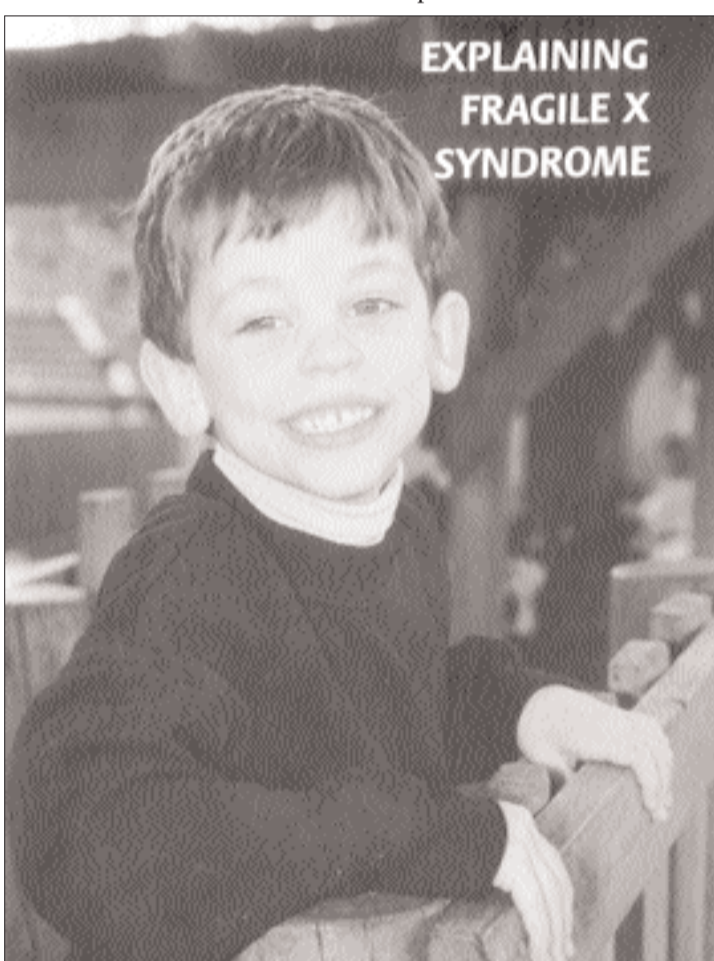
It also promotes community awareness and supports scientific research into Fragile X. The incidence of Fragile X can be significantly reduced through awareness, Mrs Tappert says. For example, in some cases children thought to be suffering autism are discovered to have Fragile X.

"Early intervention assists in providing support and strategies to help improve the quality of life of a Fragile X child," she says.

"Research is continuing at the Gold Institute attached to John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, to come up with a heel-prick test on newborn babies, which may help in detection of Fragile X."

Mrs Tappert hopes that ongoing research may be on the verge of a breakthrough.

For further information Mrs Tappert can be contacted on 6556 3354, or go to the website www.fragilex.org.au, or to support the ongoing projects call 9949 8456 or 1300 394 636 Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.



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