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**Energy Minister Mike Nahan has pledged to outline major changes to electricity pricing in next year's State Budget as he vowed any shake-up would be phased in.**

Amid a furious backlash to plans to charge solar panel owners and power gazelles more during peak times, Mr Nahan yesterday tried to allay concerns the Budget Government was punishing solar homes.



Energy Minister pledges to outline major changes to electricity pricing in next year's Budget.

**Solar, power gazelles targeted in pricing plan**

As revealed in *The West Australian* yesterday, Synergy chairman Lyndon Rowe wants to overhaul the way people are charged for electricity to make the system fairer and more sustainable.



Synergy chief Lyndon Rowe. Picture: Ben Crabtree/The West Australian.

Mr Rowe wants to charge households with solar panels much more to be connected to the grid, arguing the existing consumption-based electricity bill does not reflect Synergy's total costs to service these customers.

Under the shake-up, owners of big air-conditioning systems, pool pumps and holiday homes could be expected to pay significantly more for electricity.

But customers who use relatively little power will be shielded from the biggest rises.

The solar lobby yesterday called the proposed changes a "solar tax" and urged people with the system to sign a petition to pressure Premier Colin Barnett to abandon the push.

Mr Nahan, who identified the need to reform electricity pricing two years ago only to shelve action this year, said the issue was particularly difficult and complex and there needed to be a proper case made for it.



He said the changes would be "phased in" as part of next year's Budget, though he declined to say whether that would involve bringing forward specific measures. Asked whether the Government was sending the wrong message to solar panel owners, he stressed the shake-up was not aimed at penalising these customers but ensuring the system was fairer.

He said this was because solar panel owners, along with the biggest power users at peak periods, used the grid the most but paid the least for its upkeep, meaning households which could often not afford installations were left to pick up the tab.

"It's about fairness," Mr Nahan said.

"I've repeatedly indicated and stated, as has the Premier, a reform in this direction is needed. Exactly how you do it is the big question, not whether you do, and when it starts coming in."

According to Mr Nahan, any changes would "necessarily" be phased in to ensure households with solar panels were not unfairly disadvantaged.



VIDEO Solar panels not so cheap

Shadow energy minister Bill Johnston said the Government had seven years to fix electricity prices but had failed to do so.

Mr Johnston said the inaction was a symptom of the Government's "confused" approach to the energy industry.

"There's no question the Government needs to decide what it wants to do in electricity but...they clearly haven't made the reforms that are needed to put the industry on a sustainable footing," he said.

Mr Johnston said Labor would set out detailed plans for reforming electricity pricing before the 2017 State election, though he insisted it would not accept changes that hurt the poor.



Jenma Green from the Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute. Picture: Magasa Johnson/The West Australian

Curtin University sustainability expert Jenma Green said if the shake-up was about fairness, the Government needed to ensure power from batteries, which reduced pressure on the grid during peak times, was paid more than it was now.

Ms Green also argued that with parts of Synergy's business becoming redundant – such as some power stations – consumers should not have to pay for them. And she disputed suggestions that households with solar panels tended to be wealthy, saying the suburbs with the highest uptake of the systems were mainly lower to middle class.

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