FREE GUIDE

How to Compare Solar Quotes Without Getting Burned

A plain-English guide for Queensland homeowners and businesses — covering everything you need to know before signing anything.

✓ How to read a solar quote like a professional
✓ What Tier 1 panels actually means
✓ Which inverter brands to trust in 2026
✓ How to check your installer's CEC accreditation
✓ What a fair price looks like for SEQ in 2026
✓ The 5 red flags that mean walk away
✓ How the STC rebate works and what it's worth right now

Oz Smart Solutions is an independent solar consulting firm. We don't sell panels or earn commissions from installers. Our only job is making sure you get the right system at a fair price.

1. Start with the panels — not the price

When you receive a solar quote, the first thing most people look at is the bottom-line price. That's understandable, but it's also how people end up with a cheap system that underperforms for twenty years. The place to start is the hardware — specifically the panels.

You'll often see quotes refer to **"Tier 1" panels.** This term comes from Bloomberg NEF and refers to the *financial stability of the manufacturer*, not the quality of the panel. A Tier 1 panel from an unknown brand may be mediocre; a panel from a well-regarded manufacturer with a strong Australian warranty presence is what you actually want.

Panel brands worth trusting in 2026 (Australian market)

Brand	Origin	Notes
REC	Norwegian	Strong AU presence, highly regarded
Jinko Solar — Tiger Neo	Chinese	Leading efficiency, widely available in AU
LONGi Solar — Hi-MO	Chinese	World's largest solar manufacturer
Canadian Solar	Canadian/Chinese	Reliable, good warranty support

Suntech	Chinese	One of the longest-established brands
Tindo Solar ★	Australian	**Only panel manufactured in Australia (Adelaide) — genuine local accountability**

★ Tindo Solar is worth a special mention — the only panel manufacturer producing in Australia. If you want to keep your money local and have genuine accountability, Tindo is a legitimate choice.

What to check on the spec sheet

- **Efficiency rating:** Look for 20–23%. Below 19% is older technology.
- **Performance warranty:** At least 80% output guaranteed at year 25. Some budget panels only guarantee 70% — a meaningful difference over a system's lifetime.
- **Product warranty:** 12–15 years minimum for manufacturing defects.

2. The inverter is the engine room

Your solar panels generate DC electricity. Your inverter converts it into AC — the type your home actually uses. The inverter works hard every single day, is exposed to heat and weather, and is the component most likely to need attention over the life of a solar system. Getting this right matters.

Established inverter brands with genuine Australian support in 2026

Brand	Type	Notes
Fronius	String / Hybrid	Austrian. Excellent local support, Solar.web monitoring
SolarEdge	String + Optimisers	Panel-level data, great for complex roofs
Sungrow	String / Hybrid	Most popular in AU, strong local tech support
GoodWe	String / Hybrid	All-in-One range, solid value, SEMS monitoring
Enphase	Microinverters	Best for shaded/complex roofs, per-panel monitoring
Alpha ESS	Hybrid	Strong mid-market, AlphaCloud monitoring

String vs microinverter: String inverters work excellently on simple, unshaded roofs and are cheaper. Microinverters (Enphase) earn their premium on shaded or multi-directional roofs. Don't let a salesperson upsell you on microinverters if your roof is simple and north-facing — you won't recoup the price difference.

3. Check the installer's CEC accreditation

Every solar installer in Australia must hold a Clean Energy Council (CEC) accreditation to legally install grid-connected solar. Any legitimate quote should state the accredited installer's name and CEC number. You can verify this at the CEC website in under a minute.

Important: Be cautious of companies that run a polished sales team and then subcontract the install to the cheapest available trade. Ask directly: *"Who is the accredited electrician who will physically install this system?"* A reputable company won't hesitate.

Workmanship warranty: This covers how the system was installed — cable runs, mounting, roof penetrations, switchboard connections. It's separate from hardware warranties. Look for at least **5 years in writing.**

4. What projected generation should look like in SEQ

A "6.6 kW system" tells you the nameplate capacity of the panels. What it doesn't tell you is how much energy it will actually produce on your specific roof, in your suburb, facing your direction. A quality proposal will show you modelled annual generation based on your actual roof orientation, tilt, and postcode — not a generic average.

Orientation	Estimated annual output (6.6 kW, SEQ)
North-facing (ideal)	9,500 – 10,500 kWh/year
East/West split roof	8,200 – 9,200 kWh/year
East-facing only	7,800 – 8,600 kWh/year
South-facing (poor)	6,500 – 7,500 kWh/year

5. What's a fair price in 2026?

Solar system prices have been relatively stable since the significant cost reductions of the early 2020s. Here's what you should expect to pay for quality supply and installation in Southeast Queensland:

System size	Quality install (Tier 1 panels, reputable inverter)	Budget install
6.6 kW	$5,800 – $7,800	$3,500 – $4,800
10 kW	$7,800 – $10,500	$5,500 – $7,000
13.3 kW	$10,500 – $14,500	$7,500 – $9,500
20 kW (commercial)	$18,000 – $26,000	$12,000 – $16,000

Prices are post-STC rebate, supply and installation in Southeast Queensland. They vary based on roof complexity, inverter type, storey height, and switchboard condition.

6. The STC rebate — what it's actually worth in 2026

The federal solar rebate is delivered through the Small-scale Technology Certificate (STC) scheme. When you install solar, your installer creates certificates that are sold to electricity retailers, and the value is passed to you as an upfront discount on your quote.

The scheme runs until **31 December 2030.** In 2026, with 5 deeming years remaining, a standard 6.6 kW system in Southeast Queensland (Zone 3) generates approximately **46 STCs worth roughly $1,750–$1,930** at current market rates.

Year	Deeming years left	Approx. rebate (6.6 kW, SEQ)
2026 (now)	5	**~$1,750 – $1,930**
2027	4	~$1,400 – $1,545
2028	3	~$1,050 – $1,160
2029	2	~$700 – $775
2030	1	~$350 – $385

7. The 5 red flags — walk away if you see these

Red Flag #1 — Quote doesn't specify panel brand and model

Any installer worth hiring names their hardware. "Tier 1 panels" without a brand name is not acceptable.

Red Flag #2 — No CEC accreditation number on the quote

It's a legal requirement. If it's not there, ask. If they can't provide it, walk.

Red Flag #3 — Projected generation figures seem very high

If someone is claiming 12,000+ kWh/year from a 6.6 kW system in SEQ, ask exactly how that was calculated. Inflated generation figures make payback look better than it is.

Red Flag #4 — No workmanship warranty in writing

Verbal assurances mean nothing. If it's not written into the contract, it doesn't exist.

Red Flag #5 — High-pressure urgency around rebates or "today only" pricing

The STC rebate steps down predictably every January. It doesn't expire this week. Anyone manufacturing urgency around it is using a sales tactic, not giving you facts.

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ight system at the right price.