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**'BY INVITATION ONLY' COLUMN
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ENERGY SAVINGS THAT HIT HOME

What's in your roof? Camping gear packed away until next Christmas? A family of possums whose nightly house parties would put Cory Worthington to shame? Batts? Not the furry kind but the kind that can reduce your heating and cooling bills by up to 40 percent?

That's right, insulation batts or other kinds of insulation are one of the simplest and easiest ways we can reduce our environmental footprint, lower electricity bills by up to \$200 and make our houses more comfortable. It's not rocket science, and best of all, it's not expensive.

And, thanks to the insulation plan announced by the Rudd Government earlier this week, those Australian homes that don't have insulation – around four in every ten – can get it installed, most without paying a cent.

As part of our plan to stimulate the economy and support Australian jobs we're going to roll out Australia's largest ever insulation program, putting insulation in around 2.7 million Australian homes, immediately providing a boost to the insulation industry and importantly, helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 50 tonnes of carbon pollution by 2020 – that's like taking one million cars off the road.

If you own the home you live in, you can arrange for the commercial installation of ceiling insulation right now, keep the receipts, and claim up to \$1,600 once the program is fully in place. From 1 July, a simple phone call to a 1800-number will make it even easier, despatching a properly-trained installer to assess your insulation needs and install it for you.

Renters won't miss out, because rebates will be available for around 500,000 landlords to install ceiling insulation. We also understand that many low-income Australians are renters, so we'll be working with welfare groups and the insulation industry to make sure we help those households who need the most assistance with cost-of-living pressures.

Watching the spotlight of attention shine on an industry that spends most of its time crawling through manholes has been a remarkable feature of a remarkable past week. We're already hearing reports of factories ramping up, with new shifts coming on and orders – quite literally – going through the roof.

The Government has also announced a boost to the solar hot water rebate, now increased to \$1,600 for the replacement of inefficient electric hot water systems with solar units. We've removed the means test, and made the rebate available to qualifying households who don't take up the insulation plan. Many families will save over \$300 by installing solar systems.

Protecting our environment can be as simple as making these small, practical changes in the way we live our lives. Energy experts often call this the 'low-hanging fruit' – energy efficiency improvements that produce energy savings and economic benefits that far outweigh their up-front cost. I am delighted that we are now underway in helping Australians make those changes pick that fruit.

In many cases, it's as simple as changing to energy efficient light-bulbs, sealing draughty rooms and purchasing appliances with more stars on the label. In the bigger picture, it's about 'building-in' smart design features from the ground up, making sure new homes and commercial buildings have the most efficient building materials, heating and cooling systems, insulation and glazing.

The question is often asked if energy efficiency makes so much economic sense, why haven't we been doing it for years? In short, it's because there have been barriers to uptake, for example a lack of decent information, high up-front costs, and cases where the property owner – the person responsible for major energy efficiency improvements – doesn't benefit from energy savings.

The good news is, there may be barriers, but there's also a tonne of political will from the Government to overcome them. This week's \$4 billion investment in solar hot water and insulation is the front-end of a comprehensive agenda to grow green jobs and help all Australians save energy.

What's next? Shortly we'll roll out Green Loans, with trained energy assessors providing tailored advice to around 200,000 households, backed with low-interest loans for those energy and water saving measures that can be put into place immediately. It's about setting Australian houses up for a low pollution future. We're also setting up an online portal so everyone can learn about Government

programs for sustainability at home, including those announced last week. Watch this space as the National Strategy for Energy Efficiency gains traction.

In protecting our environment and supporting jobs, what better place to start than by making our homes better for the environment, making sure when our kids look back in 10 or 20 years they can't remember a time when there weren't batts in the roof.

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