

Sunlight-bulb moment

TONY RAGGATT

THE power of the sun is blasting steel at a Townsville business after the installation of the region's largest privately owned rooftop solar panel system.

The \$250,000 100 kilowatt system is among the last to receive federal funding after the Abbott Government allowed a dollar for dollar grant, established under the previous Labor government, to proceed, provided the system could be installed before June 30.

The system is in the process of being approved by State Government power distributor Ergon Energy and was commissioned last Thursday.

It provided about 35 per cent of the business's electricity during the day and is expected to reduce the business's overall need for grid power by between 30 and 50 per cent.

Business owner Michael Waters of Waters Abrasive Blasting Services at Shaw said he needed "a lot of convincing" to make the investment.

But he said once the company's options and the government support were considered, as well as the savings, the decision was "a no-brainer".

"We use hundreds of kilowatts to run our high-capacity compressors and our electricity costs have become a real burden after years of big tariff increases," Mr Waters said.

"We knew we had to do something to make our manufacturing business viable compared with international competitors who pay a lot less for power."



NO-BRAINER: Mick Waters has installed a rooftop full of solar panels at his business Waters Abrasive Blasting Services in the Bohle to help with costs. Picture: EVAN MORGAN

The move has avoided the need for upgrades by Waters Abrasive Blasting and Ergon although the company was required to install an \$11,000 control system to ensure solar power was not fed back into the grid.

An Ergon spokesman said the solar system at Waters Abrasive Blasting Services was part of Ergon's network demand project and had contributed to reduced peak demand for power in the area by

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about 80 kilowatts per day.

The company was guided by consultant Queensland Energy Alliance Group, while project manager Tropical En-

ergy Solutions, which won a tender for the work, drew on

seven Townsville-based suppliers to complete the project. QEA Group's Renato Sasso

Tropical Energy Solutions's Frank Dallmeyer said the system showed solar power could be a good match for industrial loads.

The investment is expected to be paid off within three years although further increases in power costs mean the amount of the company's electricity bill will remain much the same.

Mr Waters said the "sad thing" was our electricity costs continue to rise.