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New free AI tool reveals what your air conditioner really costs to run — and whether a rebate could cover an upgrade

Australians can now photograph the rating plate on their air conditioner and let AI estimate its running cost in seconds — then check whether state energy rebates could offset the cost of a more efficient replacement.

With household electricity bills under pressure heading into summer, a free [AI-powered running-cost calculator](#) is giving Australians a faster way to answer a question most have never been able to: what does the air conditioner in the living room actually cost every time it's switched on?

Until now, finding that number meant digging through a manual, squinting at small print on the outdoor unit, or trying to make sense of a spec sheet. The new tool removes that friction. Instead of asking people to hunt for model numbers or guess the size of their unit, it works from a single photo of the rating plate. The AI reads the key figures off the plate, combines them with the household's usage and electricity rate, and estimates weekly, monthly and projected yearly running costs.

Crucially, it then flags whether an older system may be running inefficiently — and points households to energy-savings schemes that, in some states, can reduce the upfront cost of a qualifying upgrade.

"Most people have never looked at the plate on their air conditioner, let alone worked out what it costs them," says Joshua Liptak, Managing Director of [Efficient Energy Group](#), an accredited energy-scheme provider. "Putting that behind a photo instead of a spreadsheet means people can finally see the number — and once they can see it, they can make a sensible decision about whether to keep running an old unit, service it or replace it."

The number that drives the bill isn't the one most people remember

The headline capacity of an air conditioner — often shown as 2.5kW, 5kW or 7kW — is the heating or cooling the unit can deliver. The figure that actually affects electricity use is the *power input*: how much electricity the unit draws while running. A modern reverse-cycle system

delivers several units of cooling for every unit of electricity it consumes, which is why a newer unit can cost noticeably less to run than an older one of the same size — especially when the older system is fixed-speed, poorly maintained, or running for long periods.

Three details on the rating plate are worth checking:

- **Power input** — the electrical draw with the most direct impact on running cost.
- **Capacity** — the heating or cooling output, useful for sizing but not a measure of electricity use.
- **Refrigerant type** — a clue to the age and generation of the system. R22 usually signals an older unit; R410A can indicate an earlier generation; many newer residential split systems now use R32.

What it looks like in practice

A 5kW split system drawing around 1.2kW of power and running for eight hours uses up to 9.6kWh on a full-load day. At an electricity rate of 30c to 45c per kWh, that's roughly **\$20 to \$30 a week** if it runs continuously at that input. Inverter units that cycle down can cost less; systems that run longer, work hard in extreme heat or are poorly maintained can cost more.

For an older fixed-speed unit, the calculator can compare current running costs against an efficient replacement at the same usage. The difference is often enough to justify a service, a change in habits, or a full replacement.

Where rebates come in

This is where the upgrade question becomes practical. In several states, energy-savings schemes may reduce the upfront cost of a qualifying replacement, depending on the household, property, installer and system selected. Programs in **New South Wales (ESS)**, **Victoria (VEU)** and **South Australia (REPS)** are worth checking. Rebate settings and eligibility rules change, so households should confirm current requirements before making a decision — but for an inefficient older system, a rebate can meaningfully close the gap on the cost of upgrading.

The estimate should be treated as a guide, not a bill. Actual running costs vary with weather, thermostat settings, insulation, room size, maintenance, tariff structure and how often the compressor cycles. The yearly figure is best understood as a projection of what the unit would cost if the same usage pattern continued.

How to use it

The running-cost calculator works on a phone: **snap the plate, let the AI check the photo, review the estimate, and see whether an efficient upgrade — potentially rebate-assisted — stacks up.**

Try the free calculator at airconditioningrebate.com.au/running-cost-calculator.
