Renewable Energy Assurance Ltd (REAL) has become the first trade body within the energy sector to secure OFT approval for its code of practice under the OFT's Consumer Codes Approval Scheme (CCAS).

REAL's Consumer Code covers the sale, contracting, installation and servicing of small-scale energy generating systems including solar electricity, solar water heating, small-scale wind electricity and ground and air source heat pumps.

The OFT only approves codes that have proved effective in safeguarding and promoting consumers' interests, going further than the basic requirements of the law. Key features and benefits of REAL's Consumer Code are:

• members cannot employ high pressure selling/inducement to force quick buying decisions
• all purchases have a seven working day cooling off period, even when the law does not provide cancellation rights
• customer prepayments or deposits are fully protected in the event that a member is unable to fulfill the order
• members are clear and realistic when providing estimates of the likely savings customers might make from the product
• a low cost independent redress scheme is available if complaints need to be resolved.

The OFT raised concerns surrounding the potential for mis-selling of solar panels last month when it published the findings from its off-grid market study. The approval of the REAL Consumer Code reflects the OFT's commitment to encouraging high standards among firms in the energy sector. The OFT will continue to work with REAL as it monitors complaints against its members and enforces its code. Within the wider energy sector, the OFT is committed to taking steps to address unfair commercial practices where it uncovers them.

Cavendish Elithorn, Senior Director of the OFT's Goods and Consumer Group, said: 'The renewable energy sector is a relatively new market and is growing rapidly as people look for more cost effective and environmentally friendly energy sources.

'It is important that people making such an important purchase can do so confidently and the approval of the REAL Code is part of the OFT's commitment to help people investing in renewable energy technologies. People who buy goods or services from a business with an OFT approved code can expect a higher standard of protection than that required by law.'Virginia Graham, Chief Executive of the REAL, said: 'We work hard to ensure all our members comply with our Code. Gaining OFT Code approval will help us enormously to drive the highest professional standards in our sector. We act on the complaints and tip-offs we

receive to inform the monitoring and enforcement we do. This year we have audited, compliance checked and mystery shopped 1,000 companies. If companies do not meet our standards, we will investigate promptly and will impose sanctions.'