

## CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE GROUP

### Meeting Communiqué – 26 March 2025

- The Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (CCG) met on 26 March 2025 to discuss current issues affecting residential and small energy consumers.
- The CCG members met at the outset for a members-only discussion where they discussed emerging issues they had pre-selected and prioritised for the March meeting.
- The AER CEO, Anthea Harris, chaired the meeting.
- The AER Deputy Chair, Justin Oliver, led a discussion with CCG members on:
  - The AER's Default Market Offer (DMO) 2025-26 draft determination
  - The AER's package of consumer advocacy work, including the current major policy review into payment difficulty report and the recently released *Review of the exemptions framework for embedded networks Draft Decision*.
- In *Emerging issues*, CCG members discussed 4 emerging issues:
  - Cost of living for households and businesses, with an additional focus on NSW cost of doing business and impact of the *NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap* on this in the future. CCG members advocated for information and a clear and consistent narrative for stakeholders (including advocates, government, and industry) to identify and address challenges associated with cost of living and supporting the development of a sustainable and affordable energy system.
  - Retailer hardship programs, particularly definitions of hardship and eligibility criteria. The AER will identify opportunities to improve the payment difficulty framework in its upcoming findings report for the Review of payment difficulty protections in the NECF. This will include opportunities such as simplifying the current eligibility criteria and introducing minimum standards of assistance. The AER will work with the relevant agencies to advocate for reforms requiring legislative changes, rule change and instrument updates.
  - The AER's approach to consumer engagement and topics chosen for CCG member consultation. CCG members discussed offering expertise in broader areas. The AER is reviewing its consumer panels, including the CCG, and will take on board CCG member feedback on areas for engagement.
  - Disconnections and the practice and policy of disconnections, including mention of the AER's payment difficulty review.
- In *Compliance matters*, the AER responded to compliance issues raised by CCG members. These focussed on concerns about an energy retail offer and retail behaviour that may be disadvantaging customers experiencing payment difficulty.
- During the in-depth discussions:
  - the AER sought to understand the impact of increasing complexity in the retail sector by examining the potential impacts of recent rule changes on customer plans, offers and billing information.
  - the AER consulted on the AER's annual compliance and enforcement priorities for 2025-26 financial year.
- The next meeting will be held in June 2025.