# Sandy Point Community Power Inc. Submission:

# AusNet Services - Determination 2026–31

## Executive Summary

While not fully reflecting the needs and expectations of regional customers, Sandy Point Community Power Inc. (SPCP) broadly supports the revised AusNet Services EDPR 2026-31 proposal.

As evidenced by a local community survey, Sandy Point customers were strongly supportive of the Reliability and Resilience Improvement Programs outlined in AusNet's draft 2026-31 EDPR proposal. These programs would have seen a noticeable improvement in supply reliability for those customers who experience the most frequent outages (i.e. 'worst-served customers'), and begun a program of work to prepare the network to withstand more extreme and frequent major weather events, that is, to invest in communities' ability to withstand long-duration outages if/as they unfortunately occur.

We were very disappointed that in its draft decision, the AER found that much of the resilience program, and the entire reliability program were deemed to be either not yet sufficiently justified, or not 'prudent' or 'efficient'. In our view, this strict interpretation of current regulations perpetuates discrimination against lower-population density regions.

As 'end of a long rural feeder' customers, we argue that provision of energy is an essential service, thereby worthy of minimum supply reliability standards irrespective of economic 'efficiency'.

We applaud AusNet Services commitment to support rural customers through the inclusion of both a Resilience ($166.2m) and reliability ($42.2m) program in their final proposal.

We strongly support this inclusion and urge the AER to approve these programs.

## Introduction

Sandy Point Community Power Inc. appreciate the opportunity to make submission to the Australian Energy Regulator in response to the revised AusNet Electricity Distribution Price Reset 2026-20431 proposal.

Sandy Point is a small, regional hamlet with a permanent population of around 350 people. This swells to around 3000 across the summer school holidays and long weekends. The town comprises approximately 650 residences, a small commercial centre, and four community-owned buildings.

The townships of Sandy Point and Waratah Bay are serviced by a single electricity feeder line (FRT21) which is 'at risk' of catastrophic line failure during major weather events, and susceptible to 'brown-outs' during the peak summer season. Typical of many coastal towns, feeder utilisation

is relatively low during winter months but reaches capacity on sunny summer days when solar feed-in exceeds local consumption demand. With coastal reserves on its west and eastern flanks, Sandy Point sits in a bushfire risk zone.

Sandy Point Community Power Inc. (SPCP) was formed in early 2020 with an initial mission to identify and lead community-owned renewable energy projects in the Sandy Point area.

In October of 2024, SPCP made a submission to AusNet Services in relation to their draft EDPR. In preparation for that submission, we undertook a local community survey. The data collected the survey is now cited in support for this submission to the AER.

**Community Survey Methodology**

A short summary information pack was developed covering the following topics and their potential impact on Sandy Point residents;

- Reliability program
- Resilience program
- Tariffs
- Affordability
- Impact of Properties with Solar/Batteries/EV

A short 9-question on-line survey was created to solicit and collate community opinions and preferences.

An explanatory email was sent to all Sandy Point Community Power supporters and posted on Sandy Point Community Group social media platforms. The email and posts included a copy of the information pack and included links to the AusNet Services webpage.

53 community members completed the survey (n=53).

**Reliability Program**

Sandy Point Community Power recognise and fully support the findings of Ausnet's customer preferences research which emphasises both the importance of supply reliability and our 'willingness to pay' for improved reliability. As an 'end-of-feeder' township, we suffer regular episodes of unplanned power loss and 'brown-outs'. These events significantly impact on our residents because, in addition to household appliances, we need power to run water pumps and waste-water systems in our homes.

Our view is supported by community members. 92% of respondents to a community survey supported the inclusion of the reliability program in AusNet's draft EDPR proposal, and 87% indicted that they would be willing to pay more for a larger program if more customers experienced improved reliability as a result.

**Resilience Program**

The recently released report from the Victorian Government Outage Review made a set of direct and unambiguous recommendations relating to improving the resilience of our electricity supply system. Sandy Point Community Power strongly supports these recommendations and urges the Victorian Government to enact them as a high priority.

The AusNet proposal sits in alignment with the Expert Panel report. As such, we strongly support this program of work to build preparedness and response capability.

Our local community agrees. 68% of respondents supported the draft proposal even though they know that there is a chance that a major weather event may occur in a location that has not been included in the 'preparedness' part of the program. 81% were willing to pay a small amount more on their power bill to expand the program to more locations.

We noted and accepted that the localities selected for the preparedness portion of the program will be risk-based, however agree that the cost should be socialised across all users.

**Tariffs**

We strongly agree with the proposal to introduce a 'solar-soak' and EV tariffs, as they will offer benefits to both individual customers who make use of the offer, and all users through the potential to defer or mitigate network capacity augmentation costs. 84% of our survey respondents support the introduction of the 'solar soak' tariff. Encouragingly, 65% report that they would be able to switch some electricity use from peak to off-peak times.

We understand the potential for some customers to be somewhat disadvantaged by this change, but see that an orchestrated public awareness campaign would mitigate this concern. To us, it is illogical that we express concerns about "affordability" then ignore the opportunity to make small changes in our behaviour to reduce our power bills.

We understand the rationale and benefits for the 'Two-way' solar export tariff and suggest that the benefit received for evening export needs to 'pass the pub test' as being of equal or more value than the cost of exporting in the middle of the day.

**Affordability**

87% of respondents to our survey believe that AusNet's draft EDPR 2026-31 proposal represented the right balance between service improvements and affordability.

Given a choice of either service improvements at a small increase in tariff, or affordability without improvements in services, 80% of community respondents selected service improvements.

**Conclusion**

Consistent with AusNet Services own customer surveys, Sandy Point respondents strongly support the inclusion of a program to improve both supply reliability and resilience in AusNet's 2026-31 regulated workplan. Further, respondents indicated a 'willingness to pay' more in return for improved service.

Chris Harvey
President & on behalf of

SANDY POINT
COMMUNITY POWER