

CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Meeting Communiqué – 22 November 2022

1. The Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (CCG) met on 22 November 2022 to discuss current issues affecting residential and small energy customers.
2. The CCG Chair, Elissa Freeman, provided a welcome and overview of the meeting.
3. AER Board member, Jim Cox covered a number of AER updates and issues including:
 - Update on the Federal budget and the energy ministers meeting including:
 - The \$3.3 million in funding over the next four years that will assist the AER to support the Communities Batteries Program implementation.
 - The additional \$26.1 million in New Policy Proposal funding over the next four years to support the AER's work in the Energy Ministers' Post 2025 Reforms.
 - Future energy services regulation.
 - State of the energy market.
 - Default Market Offer (DMO) considerations.

The following topics were discussed during a Q&A response session with the AER Board:

- The AER's resources post-separation from the ACCC.
 - Frustrations from production and manufacturing businesses over the complexities in regulations for gas and renewable energy.
 - The need for greater transparency for costs associated with the NSW road map.
 - Level of market offer price increases.
4. In the Emerging issues session, CCG members discussed the following:
 - Affordability, cost of living and high energy prices.
 - The AER's crisis response (floods, etc.).
 - Tariffs and changes to the structure of offers (e.g. fixed versus variable portion).
 - Transition from gas to electric.
 - Communicating with CALD customers.
 - Cost impacts of the energy transition
 - Learnings from the Better Resets Handbook.
 - Misleading advertising (greenwashing).

5. The AER ran a discussion on early actions from the Towards Energy Equity Strategy, with CCG members, Mark Henley and Vanessa Emery, providing input to help shape the session. CCG members provided observations and feedback in discussions concerning knowledge and implementation gaps relevant to identifying consumers experiencing vulnerability, as well as other opportunities to use the strategy.
6. In the Compliance matters discussion, the AER and CCG members engaged in a discussion regarding issues of concern. The AER's General Manager for Compliance and Enforcement also provided an update on the compliance and enforcement priorities for 2022-23, advised that the public submissions for the AER's draft Network Exemptions Guideline close on 9 December 2022, and noted the amendment to the National Energy Retail Rules which introduced new measures to protect customers experiencing family violence.
7. The AER provided an update about the work underway to develop the AER's Consumer Engagement Strategy. CCG members provided feedback and suggestions on how the AER can integrate their insights into the AER's work.
8. The AER led a discussion on the AER's Default Market Offer. CCG members provided feedback on the questions raised in the discussion, which was used to develop a formal, joint CCG submission on the Default Market Offer determination.
9. During the Items for noting discussion, an additional item was noted:
 - Business NSW are close to publishing a very detailed survey on small to medium enterprises.
10. In Any other business, the AER advised they will be sending out a post-meeting survey to CCG members to gather feedback on the structure and format of CCG meetings, and will confirm meeting dates and locations for 2023.
11. CCG members met for a Members Only discussion, in which they confirmed that the AER/CCG member co-design approach for the early actions from the Towards Energy Equity Strategy discussion worked well, and advised that they would appreciate an opportunity to discuss consumers' diverse needs in the energy transition and future policy direction.