



CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Meeting Communique – 24 May 2021 teleconference

1. The Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (CCG) met on 24 May 2021 (see membership list at page 3) to discuss current issues affecting residential and small energy customers.
2. The CCG Chair, Jim Cox updated members on key areas of AER work including:
 - the fourth update of the Statement of Expectations to extend retailers' support of customers to 30 June 2021
 - compliance and enforcement activity including the determination of 2021-22 priorities
 - the AER's recent review and approval of 2021-22 electricity distribution tariffs proposed by 9 businesses across NSW, Queensland, the NT, SA and Tasmania
 - the proposed research to inform the Better Bills Guideline
 - the recent release of the third Default Market Offer.
3. AER staff presented an update on the CCG Review – including recruitment of CCG members and Chair:
 - A 2019 internal review included consultation with staff, CCG members and looked at other similar groups. A survey and workshop were also held.
 - A new separate Chair is to be introduced to help raise issues with the AER outside of meeting and shape the agenda.
 - Member representation of the new group to target broader diversity, including small business, Indigenous and disabled consumers.
4. AER staff presented an update on the development of the Consumer Vulnerability Strategy. CCG member feedback included:
 - the importance of understanding that vulnerability is a consumer's experience, not a personal attribute
 - the Strategy should foster a shift in culture across the sector that supports consumers
 - the AER needs to hear from consumers directly about their experiences, as well as through advocates.

5. ACCC staff presented an update on consumer awareness of the ACCC Electricity Retail Code, including:
 - the 2 limbs of the Code (the price cap and reference price)
 - research showing that awareness is low and consumers aren't getting the full benefit of using the reference price as a tool to compare offers.

6. AER staff presented an update on the AER Network Performance Reporting work plan noting that:
 - the AER to publish the 2021 Electricity Network Performance Report in September
 - the written report will include core network measures such as total revenue, capex/opex, RAB movements, reliability and network profitability
 - focus areas include the impacts of COVID-19 on network revenues and returns, seasonal reliability, network safety reporting and the return on regulated equity profitability measure.

7. CCG members reported on their key areas of activity and concern which included:
 - ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - debt accumulation for residential and small business consumers
 - the impact of reduced Job Keeper payments and employment
 - lack of retailer engagement and support for consumers with limited ability to pay bills
 - the reluctance of culturally and linguistically diverse customers to make a payment assistance plan with their retailer
 - changes in gas network policy, which could particularly impact older and culturally and linguistically diverse consumers.

AER Chair and Member Attendees

CCG members

CCG Chair	Jim Cox, AER Board Member
ACT Council of Social Service	Geoff Buchanan
Brotherhood of St Laurence	David Bryant
Council on the Ageing Australia	Robyn Robinson
Ethnic Communities Council of NSW	Iain Maitland
Public Interest Advocacy Centre	Douglas McCloskey
Queensland Council of Social Services	Wendy Miller
Renew	Dean Lombard
St Vincent de Paul Society	Gavin Dufty
Tasmania Council of Social Service	Stephen Durney
Uniting Communities	Mark Henley

Apologies

AER Chair	Clare Savage
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AER Representatives

AER Board member	Catriona Lowe
AER Board member	Eric Groom
EGM Consumers, Policy and Markets	Kathie Standen
GM Consumers	Arek Gulbenkoglu
Director, Consumer Engagement and Insights	Simone Tyson
Consumer Engagement and Insights	Jenny Li
Consumer Engagement and Insights	Rohan Smith
Director, Consumer Policy	Bronwen Jennings
Consumer Policy	Sarah Wilson
Consumer Policy	Anna Tupicoff
Regulatory Information Management & Reporting	Kieran Anglim
ACCC Electricity Markets	Tanja Warre
ACCC Electricity Markets	Katie Nosedo