

# AER REFERENCE GROUP

**Record of meeting – 22 September 2017**

1. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) has convened a customer information and engagement reference group to inform its work on improving the clarity and accessibility of information customers receive about the energy market.
2. The group met for the first time on 22 September 2017 (see member list at **Attachment A**).
3. AER Chair, Paula Conboy (PC), noted a number of the commitments made at the recent meetings between the Prime Minister, Energy Minister and Treasurer and energy retailers (commitments) align with the AER’s strategic focus of placing customers at the heart of a transitioning market. PC:
	* noted many energy customers are not actively engaged with the market, for various reasons, one of which is the complexity of information provided and concern about making a ‘wrong’ decision.
	* advised the process is coming at a good time, as the AER has been increasingly thinking about how information about energy services can be made simpler and more useful to customers
	* welcomed the opportunity to work with energy retailers and consumer representatives to make the information consumers receive about energy more useful.
4. The reference group Chair, Sarah Proudfoot, noted that a number of the commitments made in the Prime Minister’s meetings fell within the AER’s areas of responsibility. These included commitments relating to:
	* retailer hardship obligations
	* market performance monitoring
	* customer price information.
5. She noted the AER had convened the reference group to provide insight and advice on the information and engagement issue. The other issues would be the subject of separate consultative processes.
6. SP discussed the main issues to be covered by the group, noting she envisaged the group’s feedback would inform the AER’s development of a draft Retail Pricing and Information Guideline as well as future redevelopment of Energy Made Easy.
7. SP also highlighted the Government’s direction that the AER work with the Australian Government’s behavioural economics team (BETA) and noted the AER had commenced discussions with BETA about consumer testing of EPFS.
8. Tess Fitzgerald from the Australian Energy Council (AEC) provided the council’s perspective and expectations for the group. She acknowledged a lack of consumer trust, and retailers’ desire to improve transparency and customers’ experiences so that they could take advantage of the competitive market. The AEC will facilitate expert input when needed, and would be a conduit for the views of its membership.
9. The AER’s Simon Kidd provided an overview of the AER’s forthcoming Customer Price Information issues paper. He noted the issues paper would seek feedback on four specific issues related to the PM commitments – fact sheets, comparison rates/prices, using technology to facilitate customer engagement, and engaging non-digitally active customers. He noted the AER had framed the paper broadly, seeking to elicit stakeholder views rather than to promote pre-determined outcomes.
10. Group members raised a number of issues and questions for discussion. These included:
	* How the group would deal with jurisdictions that had not commenced the National Energy Retail Law, or do not have competitive retail energy markets. SP said the AER is alive to those issues, and has had preliminary discussions with the Victorian energy market regulator (ESCV) about the PM commitments and how would work towards consistency as far as possible.
	* Highlighting that many customers lacked the capacity to engage with the energy market, and cautioning that better information should not be seen as the only tool necessary to address affordability.
	* Members suggested the need to clarify: the problems the group was aiming to address; its purpose; the broader context for customer disengagement before thinking about interventions; and set measurable outcomes.
		+ SP noted the AER has framed its issues paper to invite discussion on both the measures to be progressed through the commitments made at Prime Ministerial meetings, as well as any other interventions or approaches that would improve customer experiences
		+ Some members highlighted the need to identify which outcomes could be achieved in the shorter term.
11. Members agreed:
	* + to meet fortnightly for an initial period
		+ that subject matter experts from members’ organisations were welcome to attend
		+ that the AER would produce a summary of each meeting to be made public.



## AER Reference Group Attendees

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| Reference group members |  |
| Australian Energy Regulator | Sarah Proudfoot - General Manager, Retail Markets (Chair) |
| ActewAGL Retail | Kate Goatley - Manager, Business ProjectsRohan Richardson - Pricing and Program Manager |
| Australian Energy Council | Tess Fitzgerald - Retail Policy Manager |
| Brotherhood of St Laurence | Damien Sullivan - Research and Policy Senior Manager |
| Consumer Action Law Centre | Zac Gillam - Senior Policy Officer |
| Consumer Policy Research Centre | Lauren Solomon - CEO |
| COTA Australia | Robyn Robinson |
| EnergyAustralia | Samantha Nunan – Industry Regulatory Lead, Corporate |
| Energy Consumers Australia | Sabiene Heindl – Director, Strategic Engagement |
| Origin Energy | Timothy Wilson - Manager, Regulatory Policy |
| Powershop | Michael Benveniste - Head of Commercial & Strategy |
| Red Energy | Ben Barnes - Regulatory Manager |
| Uniting Communities/Uniting Care | Mark Henley ‎- Manager Advocacy, Uniting Communities and Energy Advocate, Uniting Care |