

# AER REFERENCE GROUP

**Record of meeting – 4 October 2017**

1. The AER reference group (ARG) met for the second time on 4 October 2017 (see attendee list at **Attachment A**).
2. The AER’s Simon Kidd greeted attendees and provided an update on the work the AER was undertaking in relation to its Customer Price Information Issues paper.
3. The AER’s Charlotte Marshall presented to the ARG on the research the AER commissioned from Bastion Latitude; which provided insights into the consumer experience of Energy Made Easy (EME) and other comparator sites. The presentation touched on the triggers and barriers customers encountered in the switching process as well as customers’ perspectives on EME compared to other price comparison websites.
4. The group discussed aspects of the consumer research including:
* The need to define and identify the target audience using EME
* The term ‘energy literacy’
* Data from the AER and retailers of the actual number of Energy Price Fact Sheets (EPFS) that are being downloaded
* Careful consideration of the needs of non-digitally active customer groups
* The difference between customers reducing high energy bills versus reducing high energy usage patterns
1. Lauren Solomon (LS), CEO of the Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) presented an overview of behavioural insights of the customer experience in the energy market. LS spoke about the various customer segments and their stages of engagement in the energy market. In addition, LS commented on the suite of interventions available to industry and policy makers to address why consumers aren’t engaging in this market.
2. The ARG attendees commented on the following issues:
* The sole focus should not be on customers switching energy retailers
* Consideration should also be given to customers having the tools and ability to identify whether they are on the most appropriate energy plan
* Customers require differing levels of information, and the importance of providing options to the various customer groups (i.e. the simple v the more complex search on EME)
* What tools are needed to help customers see if they are on the most appropriate deal for them
* How does an engaged customer act, and are people better off after switching
* Issues faced by ageing consumers on restricted incomes
1. The reference group Chair, Sarah Proudfoot (SP), led a discussion on the purpose of the group. SP noted that the AER’s work addresses the PM’s commitments and that the role of the ARG was to provide consumer and industry insight and guidance into the work the AER is undertaking.
2. The ARG attendees noted:
* There was some short term work that could be conducted in line with the timeframes set by the PM, and that there was a strong need for the ARG to focus on the key deliverables in the first instance (in particular fact sheets, comparator rate and clearer information for customers)
* The need to distinguish between short term objectives versus long term goals
* SP noted the AER was also interested in looking for ways to reduce time and cost impacts on retailers where possible
* They were interested in learning more about the OFGEM experience with similar interventions
* The importance of evidence based research
1. SP flagged that for future meetings, there would be a theme and an accompanying presentation on that topic to inform discussion.
2. SP committed that the AER would circulate:
* A copy of the Bastion Latitude research commissioned by the AER
* Data of the number of EPFS downloaded from EME (*SP asked retailers to consult with their internal departments and share this information within the ARG*)
* Record of the meeting
* Agenda of the next meeting
* Proposed meeting schedule with themes for each meeting for 2017



## AER Reference Group Attendees

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| Organisation | Name |
| Australian Energy Regulator | Sarah Proudfoot - General Manager, Retail Markets (Chair) |
| ActewAGL Retail | Kate Goatley - Manager, Business Projects |
| Australian Energy Council | Tess Fitzgerald - Retail Policy ManagerFiona Simon |
| 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 - Director |
| EnergyAustralia | Melinda Green – Industry Regulation 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 |