



CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Combined Communique – 17 March and 6 April 2020 teleconferences

The Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (CCG) meeting was conducted over two teleconferences held on 17 March 2020 and 6 April 2020. The CCG (see membership list on page 3) discussed current issues affecting residential and small energy customers. This Communique combines the key discussion points and themes from both teleconferences.

17 March teleconference (Chaired by AER Board member Jim Cox)

1. The AER and members discussed early impacts on energy consumers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. CCG Chair, Jim Cox, noted key areas of work for the AER since November 2019 and provided updates on:
 - the review of the CCG
 - recent enforcement work and current court proceedings
 - VCR figures released and WALDO modelling
 - Integrated System Plan (ISP) consumer engagement.
3. Members met for a Members Only discussion, after which they provided a list of issues for the AER to respond to at the 6 April teleconference.

6 April teleconference (Chaired by AER Board member Catriona Lowe)

4. Ms Lowe opened by noting the visible impacts of COVID-19 on the community.
5. Ms Lowe also responded to a list of issues provided by members, including:
 - the difficulty of submissions due over the Christmas holiday period (and the general volume and tight timeframes of submissions)
 - coordination between energy market bodies
 - the funding for consumer engagement in the energy sector and changes in approaches to consumer engagement during the COVID-19 crisis
 - the future of gas as a transitional source of energy; and
 - distribution businesses' response to disasters, particularly bushfires.

6. The AER provided an overview of the AER's recently released Statement of Expectations, followed by member feedback on how COVID-19 is impacting consumers and potential future impacts for the AER to consider.
7. The AER provided CCG members an update on recent research on regulatory responses to consumer vulnerability research and led a discussion on how to incorporate COVID-19 impacts on consumers as a priority in the AER's consumer policy work program.
8. Lynne Gallagher, Interim CEO of Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) gave an update on ECA funding for organisations needing to adjust their engagement strategies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
9. The AER led a discussion on the implications of COVID-19 on the development of the 2020-21 Default Market Offer (DMO). Members provided verbal feedback that was formally documented as a submission to the AER's consultation on this matter.



ATTENDEES

(date in brackets indicates when attended)

CCG members

CCG Chair 17 March	Jim Cox, AER Board member (17/3)
CCG Chair 6 April	Catriona Lowe, AER Board member
ACT Council of Social Service	Geoff Buchanan
Brotherhood of St Laurence	David Bryant
Country Women's Association Australia	Ruth Cargill (17/3); Tanya Cameron OAM (6/4)
Council on the Ageing Australia	Robyn Robinson
Ethic Communities' Council of NSW	Iain Maitland
National Retail Association	Ian Winterburn (17/3)
Public Interest Advocacy Centre	Craig Memery
Queensland Council of Social Service	Rose McGrath, Luke Reade (6/4)
Renew	Dean Lombard
St Vincent de Paul Society	Gavin Dufty
Uniting Communities	Mark Henley

Observers

Energy Consumers Australia (ECA)	Jacqueline Crawshaw, Lynne Gallagher (6/4)
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AER Representatives

AER Board member	Catriona Lowe
General Manager, Consumers and Markets	Sarah Proudfoot
Consumer Engagement and Insights team	Simone Tyson, Pablo Albornoz, Carly Weate (17/3), Charlotte Marshall (6/4), Jenny Li (6/4)

Apologies for 6 April session

AER Board Member	Jim Cox
National Retail Association	Ian Winterburn
Tasmania Council of Social Service	Stephen Durney