

CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Meeting communique - 21 November 2017

A. CCG members meeting

1. The Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Customer Consultative Group (CCG) met on 21 November 2017 (see membership list at p. 3) to discuss with the AER current issues affecting residential and small business energy customers.
2. CCG Chair, Jim Cox, noted some recent key areas of work for the AER, including:
 - The *Annual Report on Compliance and Performance of the Retail Energy Markets* that will be published 22 November 2017.
 - Work on retailer commitments to the Prime Minister including review of customer price information and the Retail Pricing Information Guidelines and the new benefit change rule.
 - Infringement notices paid by Origin Energy for alleged failure to provide hardship assistance to a residential customer and its alleged wrongful disconnection of the customer's premises in NSW in 2015.
 - Collaboration with the Australian New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network to improve exempt customer access to ombudsmen schemes.
 - Electricity high prices and market events in Queensland on 12 February 2017 and reductions in generator availability.
 - The removal of the limited merits review regime and the AERs commitment to promote the long term interests of consumers and provide predictability, transparency, and stability for all stakeholders throughout this process.
3. During Members' time, AER Chair Paula Conboy and members discussed a number of key issues including:
 - The value of reliability in the context of current reviews and the AER's role on the Energy Security Board (ESB)
 - The role of the AER with respect to the National Energy Guarantee (the Guarantee)
 - The impact of metering contestability from 1 December 2017
 - Funding of consumer advocates for participation in consultation processes
 - ACCC Retail Electricity Pricing Inquiry (REPI) insights.

B. Combined CCG – CCC meeting

4. In the afternoon, there was a combined meeting of the CCG and ACCC's Consumer Consultative Committee (CCC) chaired by Jim Cox, ACCC Deputy Chair Delia Richard and CCC Independent Chair Catriona Rowe.
5. The ACCC's REPI team provided an update on the inquiry and next steps for delivery of its final report. Members suggested the team may wish to have regard to:
 - the need to ensure engagement and participation in the market by all types of consumers
 - early termination fees preventing customers from switching
 - the retail margin for vertically integrated businesses
 - the low control renters have over their dwellings, as well the need for carefully messaging around changing usage behaviour for older consumers' who often need to use energy for unavoidable reasons.
6. Staff from the AER's Retail Markets and Wholesale Markets branches presented on the metering contestability rules and how data is dealt with under the rules. As part of the Power of Choice reforms, metering contestability will provide customers with more choice on how they use and manage their electricity usage. The new rules come into effect 1 December 2017.
 - Members raised a number of concerns about perceived complexities under the new rules, the experience of the Victorian government led roll out of smart meters, the cost to consumers, and the opt out arrangements.
7. Staff from the AER's Retail Branch presented on work the AER is doing on making energy plans easier to understand and compare following commitments made by retailers to the Prime Minister.
 - Members provided feedback that the project should take into consideration consumers who are not digitally engaged. Members also said the units of measurements presented should be relatable in the comparison price, such as presenting customers' yearly costs or energy efficiencies.

ATTENDEES

CCG Members

Craig Memery, PIAC
Cynthia Townley, TasCOSS
Damian Sullivan, BSL
Dean Lombard, ATA
Eileen Newmarch, Care FCS
Gavin Dufty, St Vincent de Paul
Iain Maitland, ECC NSW
Mark Henley, Uniting Communities
Rose McGrath, QCOSS

CCC Members

Catriona Lowe, CCC Independent Chair
Deirdre Moor, PIAC
Erin Turner, CHOICE
Fiona Guthrie, FCA
Gerard Brody, CALC
Robert Pask, CHF
Sue McGrath, COTA
Tony Robinson, BSL
Una Lawrence, ACCAN
Unaisi Buli, ICAN

Observers

Janine Young, EWON
Kate Reid, AEMC
Kate Wild, AEMC
Oliver Derum, ECA

Apologies

Dorothy Coombe, CWAA
Ian Winterburn, National Retail Association
Katie Acheson, Youth Action & Policy
Association NSW
Maria Tsopanis, AMES Australia
Robyn Robinson, COTA