



Energised 2021-2026 Open House

Engagement findings report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project background

Every five years our business submits proposals to the Australian Energy Regulator (**AER**) for how we will charge for electricity based on our expected costs and the needs of our customers. Energised 2021-2026 is a statement of our approach to planning for this five year period.

Since June 2017 we have been seeking input from our customers and diverse stakeholders to inform the development of Energised 2021-2026. This has included customer engagement such as surveys, pop-ups and forums, meetings with local, state and national stakeholders and the establishment of an Advisory Panel. What we've heard so far is that our customers want:

- a resilient network
- an affordable network
- a flexible network that supports choice.

Through a critical review of the Energised 2021-2026 engagement process it became evident that local government, as well as several other stakeholder groups, had not been adequately engaged. Our proposals include some of the essential services that local government rely on, including public lighting, connections and renewable energy. Local government are also highly motivated, with some councils already seeking avenues to make submissions on our proposals.

To ensure we capture the views of local government and other community opinion leaders we held the Powercor Energised 2021-2026 Open House in September 2019.

1.2 Engagement methodology

1.2.1 Engagement objectives

On Tuesday 25 September 2019, Powercor held an open house session for community opinion leaders. Local government, Members of Parliament, Green House Alliances, the Public Lighting Group, Municipal of Victoria (MAV) and Community Energy groups, were invited to attend the Open House to learn more about the draft proposals and provide their input. The objectives of the Energised 2021-2026 Open House were:

- to provide delegates with information that is relevant to their local communities and could impact the way they receive essential services. This includes vegetation, public lighting, connections, bushfire safety and renewable energy
- to answer delegates questions about community safety, public lighting and renewable energy
- to seek feedback on our 2021-2026 draft proposals and identify any areas where further work is required before submitted out proposals in January 2020
- to gain a level of support and awareness for our 2021-2026 draft proposals.

1.2.2 Open House Format

The Powercor Open House was held in Ballarat, at Mercure Ballarat Hotel and Convention Centre. The Open House commenced at 9am and concluded at 4pm. Participants were able to drop-in at any time during the day to speak with the team.

Three concentrated working sessions were held during the day:

- Upgrading regional supply, 9:30am to 10:30am
- Public lighting, 10:30am to 12:00pm

- Renewable energy and digital network, 1:00pm to 3:00pm.

Each session included presentations delivered by the Powercor subject matter experts and were followed by table discussions. In the week prior to the session, registered participants were sent pre-reading material for public lighting and renewable energy and digital network to help inform their participation on the day.

For the full session agenda's see Appendix A: Upgrading regional supply agenda, Appendix B: Public lighting agenda and Appendix C: Renewable energy and digital network agenda.

Participants who registered for the Open House session and received pre-reading material, but were unable to attend the session, were able to provide feedback via email.

1.3 Participants

In total, 23 people participated in the engagement; 22 people attended the Energised 2021-2026 Open House and one person provided feedback via email. The following organisations and groups were represented:

- Australian Energy Foundation
- Bendigo Sustainability Group
- Breaze
- Buloke Shire Council
- Central Victorian Alliance
- City of Ballarat
- City of Greater Bendigo
- City of Greater Geelong Council
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
- Geelong Sustainability
- Golden Plains Shire Council
- Goulbourne Broken Greenhouse Alliance
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Hepburn Wind
- Melton City Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- Sustainability Victoria.

2 Summary of discussions

This section provides a summary of the discussions according to the three concentrated working sessions:

- Upgrading regional supply
- Public lighting
- Renewable energy and digital network.

The findings are not attributed to individual participants or organisations because of the session format.

2.1 Upgrading regional supply

2.1.1 Key questions

Following the presentation on upgrading regional supply participants were invited to ask questions. Participants were interested to understand the rationale for choosing the locations, questions from participants included:

- Are these four locations the only ones with problems in the Powercor area?
- Were other locations and industries considered?
- How will you communicate your reasons for choosing these locations to the broader community?

Participants were interested to understand how locations and industries would be able to participate in the future.

Participants also asked more specific questions about the modelling including:

- Is this focussing on single-wire earth return (**SWER**) or single phase? Will this be single phase or three phase?
- Have you taken into account farms moving towards renewable energy?
- What information fed into the calculation of \$30 million benefit? Is this analysis publically available?
- How do you quantify 'supporting regional communities'?
- Has there been an environmental assessment?
- Is there state government support for the proposal?

2.1.2 Issues and concerns

Participants were asked to discuss in two table groups their issues or concerns raised by the proposal.

For some participants, their questions regarding why certain locations had been chosen over other locations raised the issue of equity. According to participants there are a lot of communities dealing with issues relating to regional supply. Therefore it is important that the proposal clearly shows why these locations were chosen. In addition, a suggestion was made to for the proposal to include criteria for selecting future communities.

Participants suggested that SWER in the North West might be better addressed by going off-grid and being supported by renewable energy, such as solar. Participants also questioned if a comparison has been done between upgrading existing infrastructure and different types of energy. They referenced the perception that Powercor has an incentive to build more infrastructure, and felt it would be important to include the customer benefits in the proposal.

Other issues and concerns raised by participants included:

- The age of infrastructure has created issues for dairy farmers, and therefore the industry has been penalised for Powercor's lack of upgrades.

- The proposal works towards addressing economic framework issues, by shifting the balance between metro and regional areas.

2.1.3 Our proposal

Despite the issues and concerns raised the participants generally supported the proposal for upgrading regional supply, with several participants stating that "it's a step in the right direction". They felt that there was great opportunity if the proposal is accepted by the AER, to extend to other customer types and industry groups. However, the five year process was raised as an issue and one that could hinder benefits for future communities.

Participants were asked what information they would need to change their level of support, they requested the following:

- an assessment of other potential locations for involvement
- more information on how the proposed locations were chosen
- greater balance across the network, not just locations in the South West
- explanation of how the benefits are quantified
- an environmental assessment and consideration of environmental impacts to be included in the proposal.

2.2 Public lighting

2.2.1 Key questions

Participants were invited to ask questions throughout the presentation on public lighting. The following summarises the key questions.

- What are the key costs of capital expenditure?
- Are Cat LED at a regulated charge?
- What is the failure rate for T5? Why is it higher than others?
- What has been the approach for obtaining council forecasts?
- Are decorative lighting council's responsibility?

2.2.2 Luminaires RABs

Following the presentation and Q and A participants were asked to provide their thoughts on having two luminaires RABs, for inefficient and efficient luminaires. Participants generally agreed that having two RABs was reasonable and was likely to encourage councils to change lights to more efficient luminaires to lower costs.

As participants felt that having two RABs would incentivise councils to change their lights, they agreed that the remaining inefficient lights should recover the inefficient light RAB, therefore not combining the RABs. Several participants suggested that at a certain time we should combine the RABs, otherwise there will be few councils 'footing the bill' and this may worsen the council's financial situation, further inhibiting them from changing over their lights. One participant raised the idea of having different RABs for each council, therefore rewarding councils with more efficient lights and initiating a competition between councils, potentially triggering a changeover.

2.2.3 Forecasting

During the presentation several participants asked about forecasting and the impacts that incorrect forecasting would have on the modelling. As forecasting is an important element of determining costs in the public lighting

proposal, we were interested to understand from councils the best way to collect forecast volumes for the 2021-2026 period.

The majority of participants said they could email through their forecasts. One participant said they would not be able to provide forecasts for their council, but that if the council decided to go ahead with bulk replacement it would be towards the end of the period.

Participants were interested to know what would happen if all the bulk replacements didn't go forward.

2.2.4 Our proposal

Participants were asked to indicate their level of support for the public lighting proposal. Generally, participants expressed that they were neutral. Participants reported that they were reluctant to say whether they were supportive or not supportive. They felt that it was difficult to give an opinion on the Operation, Maintenance, Repair (OMR) charges at this stage. Several participants said that the proposal appeared "understandable" and "reasonable".

There was general support to replace failed lights with LED. They were also supportive of the concept of two RABs, as indicated above.

2.3 Renewable energy and digital network

The renewable energy and digital network working session was delivered in two parts. A presentation was given by the subject matter experts followed by Q and A. Participants were then divided into three tables to provide their feedback.

The second part of the session was on community energy. This was an opportunity for participants to provide their ideas on how Powercor can better support community energy projects.

2.3.1 Solar enablement

Following the presentation, participants asked several questions to better understand our proposal, including:

- Will the Jacobs report be made publicly available?
- Is the message that you will only upgrade 25% of transformers?
- Will the list of transformers be made publicly available?
- How do wind farms and other energy sources factor into the proposal?
- Where do mid and large scale fit with this?
- Have you done analysis for mid-scale?

Participants were asked for their initial thoughts on our proposal for solar enablement. Overall, participants generally supported our proposal, however several participants were interested to see analysis of mid-scale generators, rather than just residential.

Participants thought the proposal showed good progression, and that the program would be beneficial for customers with solar. Concern was raised that while all customers would be paying for solar enablement, not all customers would reap the benefits, such as renters and social housing tenants. This raised the question of equity, which some participants felt should be further considered.

Participants also expressed support for us to consider the value of carbon as a benefit of the solar enablement program. This was reported as being important to several councils and alliances because of their local emission targets.

2.3.2 Digital network

Following the presentation, participants asked several questions to better understand our proposal, including:

- Where exactly in the network is it going to be digitalised, and is it software or hardware?
- Why can't Powercor currently see what phase customers are in?
- Will the data from smart meters be made more available to customers?
- Will councils and community organisations be able to access data at a postcode or municipality level?
- Will digital network speed up the process for accessing data?

We then asked participants for their initial thoughts on our proposal for digital network. Several participants were surprised that the network does not already get data from larger customers and thought that it was good that digital network would allow Powercor to access more data. Participants also seemed surprised that the network can't currently see what phase customers are in through the AMI meter. While understanding the benefits to Powercor, participants questioned whether customers would see these benefit.

To support our proposal participants said that that the data needed to be made available to customers. Participants expressed their frustration with the current lack of information sharing, saying they experience difficulties when trying to access data from the network. They stressed that access to dynamic data from AMI meters could provide great value to customers, including councils. Participants would like to see SME data, as well as solar, demand and voltage data to be made more available for people and businesses to make decisions dynamically. There were several suggestions for an App that provided customers with data more instantaneously.

2.3.3 Community energy

Community aspirations for energy and how we should transform the network has been important in our engagement, directly with customers and indirectly with stakeholder groups. This engagement helps to understand the drivers for change, especially around distributed energy resources, and how best to plan the network for the future.

Community energy also deepens our understanding of how customers could change the way they use, store and generate electricity as an individual, or as a group. The local government delegates, alliance representatives and community energy groups provided insights into the outcomes of their own engagement with their local communities are underpinning their renewable energy targets.

We asked participants in their table groups to share what they thought are the top three things networks could offer to support community energy projects. Their responses are summarised below.

- **Relationship manager / partnering** - a single contact within Powercor who can provide technical information and answer enquiries. This would provide a clear pathway to connect to Powercor and the potential opportunity to explore mutually beneficial projects.
- **Data sharing** - provision of data including mapping data of the HV network, demand and capacity data, network constraint data and consumption data. Access to postcode and LGA data.
- **A clear decision tree** - Powercor should articulate their decision making process to community energy groups and customers so they can understand how decisions are being made and what steps they need to take. This helps with budget forecasting, planning timeframes and the technical detail they need to prepare.

We then asked participants what might need to change in order for us to deliver on the priorities, it was clear that the network needed more clear processes and touch points for external organisations. There are a lot of community groups wanting to deliver local projects, but don't understand Powercor processes or how connect

to someone within Powercor. Participants asked for clarity on how to connect to Powercor, referencing the loss of past contacts that hadn't been replaced.

One group also suggested that design workshops could be held with Powercor and community energy groups, a more collaborative and formal approach. For several participants this would also provide a space for them to ask the technical Planners questions to help them better understand the information that is already available.

Participants need the following information from networks:

- annual data releases
- more detailed data, as the Distribution Annual Planning Report (DAPR) is not granular enough (i.e. it doesn't not provide post code or community level data)
- dashboard of usage data, capacity and constraints by postcode
- LV and HV network infrastructure data
- data literacy support so that community energy groups can better engage with the data
- where the network can support programs
- where the weaknesses are in the network so projects can be delivered in those location.

It was evident through the group discussions that participants were eager to see the relationship and trust rebuilt between Powercor and organisations and groups. Participants would like us to engage with them earlier, make information more accessible and have a clear pathway for organisations and groups to connect into Powercor, and with the right person who can provide technical information and support. They felt it is important for Powercor to more clearly articulate their processes and how decisions are made.

3 Participant evaluation

At the conclusion of the Open House participants were asked to complete an evaluation form. Of the 22 people who participated in the Open House, 14 provided their feedback. Overall, the feedback was positive, with nine participants rating the day 'good' and five participants rating the day 'excellent'.

According to participants, what went well was the presentations, group discussions and the facilitation. Participants felt that the day could have been improved by providing more time for questions and discussion. They also said they would like more frequent events like the Open House.

Participant expectations for the day were to hear from Powercor what was being proposed and the opportunity to provide input into Powercor's plans. Participants were asked, 'How much did the forum live up to your expectations'; nine participants selected 'quite a bit', two participants selected 'fully' and two participants selected 'a fair amount'.

The following quotes a representative of participant responses:

- *What went well today? "Presentations and having great discussion."*
- *What went well today? "Clear presentations and willingness of Powercor representatives to answer and listen."*
- *What could be improved? "More time for conversation."*
- *What could be improved? "Do this sort of thing annually."*
- *What were your expectations for this forum? "Opportunity to hear what's proposed."*
- *What were your expectations for this forum? "Understand plans and input into it."*

Participants were also asked to read a series of statements about the Open House and select the response with which they most agreed, from 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. Participant responses are illustrated in Figure 1.

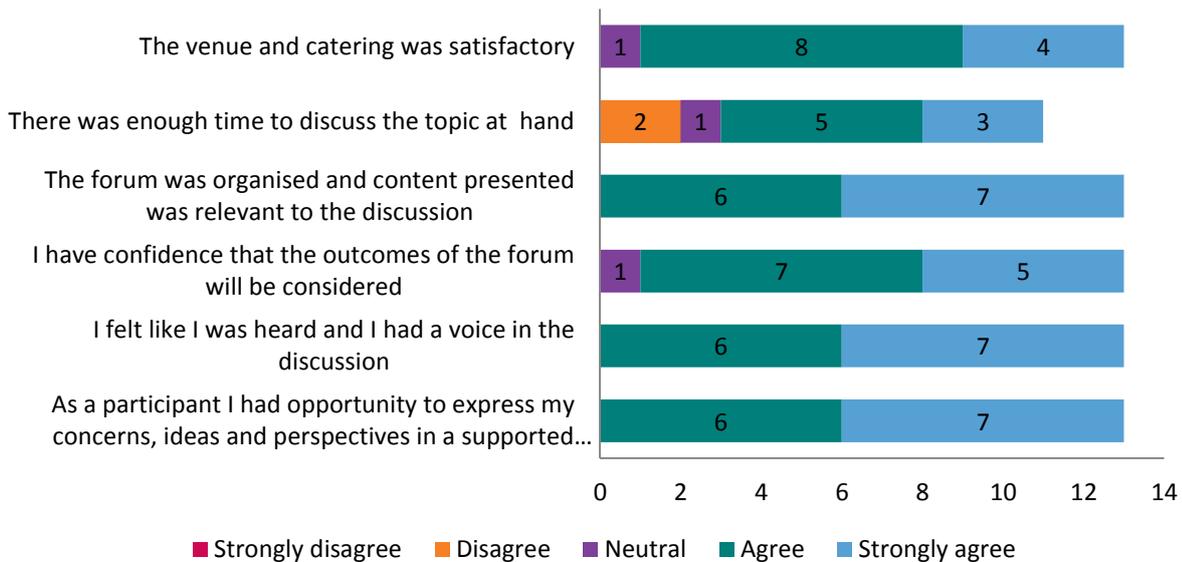


Figure 1. Participant evaluation of the Open House

4 Recommendations

The following are our recommendations based on participant feedback provided during the Open House working sessions, as summarised in section 2 of this report.

- Clearly demonstrate rationale for choosing locations for upgrading regional supply and include criteria for choosing future communities in the modelling.
- Better demonstrate the direct customer benefits of Digital Network, and how the data will be made available to them.
- Improve data sharing and information on network capacity, generation and constraints (now and into the future) to support communities in the distributed energy transformation.
- Provide clearer processes for organisations and groups to plan and deliver community energy projects, including how they connect with Powercor.

Appendices

Appendix A: Upgrading regional supply agenda



Agenda: Energised 2021-2026 Open House Regional supply round table

Session	
Date	Wednesday 25 September 2019
Time	9.30am-10.30am
Location	Mercure Ballarat, 613 Main Rd, Golden Point
Facilitator	Jana Dore, Stakeholder Engagement Manager

Agenda			
Time	Item	Topic	Who
9.30am	1	Welcome	Jana Dore
9.35am	2	Objectives 1. Outline our proposal for upgrading regional supply 2. Collect feedback about our proposal	Jana Dore
9.45am	4	Presentation: Regional supply Presentation by Regulatory Project Manager about our proposal for upgrading regional supply	Frans Jungerth
10am	5	Table discussion 1. Do you have any questions about our proposal? 2. Are there issues or concerns raised by the proposal? 3. What are your initial thoughts on our proposals? 4. What information would you need in order to change your level of support? 5. Do you need any further information about the proposals?	Jana Dore
10.30am	10	Close and next steps	Jana Dore



Appendix B: Public lighting agenda



Agenda: Energised 2021-2026 Open House Public Lighting

Session	
Date	Wednesday 25 September 2019
Time	10.30am-12pm
Location	Mercure Ballarat, 613 Main Rd, Golden Point
Facilitator	Jana Dore, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
Pre-reading	Powercor Public Lighting Pre-read

Agenda			
Time	Item	Topic	Who
10.30am	1	Welcome	Jana Dore
10.35am	2	Introduction Opening by Head of Regulation for Powercor <i>Welcome to local government and alliance delegates for their participation in our Energised 2021-2026 consultation</i>	Brent Cleeve
10.40am	3	Objectives <i>Discuss Powercor proposal for public lighting in 2021-2026</i> <i>Collect feedback on lighting categories, tariffs and our approach to modelling for public lighting in 2021-2026</i>	Jana Dore
10.45am	4	Presentation Presentation by Regulatory Project Manager, Sonja Lekovic, discussing proposal and changes to public lighting in 2021-2026	Sonja Lekovic
11am	5	Q&A Question and answer time with our team to discuss the proposal	Sonja Lekovic
11.30am	7	Group discussion: Our proposal <i>What are your thoughts on having two luminaires RABs—for inefficient and efficient luminaires?</i> <i>Should the few remaining inefficient lights recover the inefficient light RAB, or should the RABs be combined?</i> <i>Related to this, if we combine the RABs, how do we treat the difference between councils that have replaced the inefficient lights to those that have not yet replaced them?</i> <i>What's the best way to collect your forecast volumes for the 2021-2026 period?</i> <i>What is your level of support for our proposal?</i> <i>What information would you need in order to change your level of support?</i>	Jana Dore
12pm	8	Close and next steps	Jana Dore



Appendix C: Renewable energy and digital network agenda



Agenda: Energised 2021-2026 Open House Renewables

Session	
Date	Wednesday 25 September 2019
Time	1pm-3pm
Location	Mercure Ballarat, 613 Main Rd, Golden Point
Facilitator	Jana Dore, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
Pre-reading	Renewable Energy Pre-read

Agenda			
Time	Item	Topic	Who
1pm	1	Welcome	Jana Dore
1.05pm	2	Objectives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the future of energy on our networks 2. Collect feedback on our 2021-2026 proposals for solar enablement, digital network and demand response 3. Collect feedback on what State Government, Councils and alliances are seeking from Powercor 	Jana Dore
1.15pm	3	Introduction Opening by Head of Regulation for Powercor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome local government and alliance delegates to Energised 2021-2026 • The future of our networks from a renewables perspective and how we're responding in 2021-2026 	Brent Cleeve
1.20pm	4	Presentation: Solar enablement Presentation by Regulatory Project Manager about the new model for solar enablement in 2021-2026	Frans Jungerth
1.35pm	5	Presentation: Digital network Presentation by Head of Regulation about the 2021-2026 proposal for digital network	Brent Cleeve
1.45pm	6	Panel discussion: Solar enablement and digital networks Group discussion and Q&A on delegates' initial thoughts about our proposal for 2021-2026	Jana Dore



2pm	7	Table discussion: Solar enablement and digital network 1. <i>What are your initial thoughts on our proposals for solar enablement and digital network?</i> 2. <i>What information would you need in order to change your level of support?</i> 3. <i>What are the key elements of our proposals that you support, or do not support?</i> 4. <i>Do you need any further information about the proposals?</i>	Jana Dore
2.30pm	8	Presentation: Demand response Presentation by Stakeholder Engagement Manager, about Powercor's Energy Partner program	Jana Dore
2.40pm	9	Table discussion: Participating in community energy Table discussion led by Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Jana Dore, on engaging the community about energy. Key questions to be covered: 1. <i>What do you think are the top three things networks could offer to support community energy projects?</i> 2. <i>What might need to change in order for us to deliver on the priorities?</i> 3. <i>What information does your organisation or group need from networks?</i> 4. <i>Provide your suggestions on how we could engage better when it comes to community energy?</i>	Jana Dore
3pm	10	Close and next steps	Jana Dore