



Community Opinion Leader Forum Report

Report prepared for CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of Community Opinion Leaders Forums (three in total) hosted by CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy (CPPCUE) to inform their Energised 2021-2025 program.

Metropolitan opinion leaders attended a forum held in Melbourne's Central Business District while those residing in the Barwon, Great South Coast and Central Highlands regions met in Geelong. A small group of Mallee-based opinion leaders participated in forum discussions hosted in Mildura. Overall, 25 opinion leaders attended the forums, representing the interests of local Councils, regional industries, universities and businesses allied to the energy sector. Wide-ranging feedback was sought and obtained on the following themes:

- Regional changes and trends impacting energy needs
- Current, planned and desired energy projects
- Customer benefits that the distributors propose to deliver
- Energy scenarios for 2025 and their fit with opinion leaders' energy vision
- The future role(s) of energy distributors.

Opinion leader observations across these themes confirmed the importance of:

- **The distributors' untapped leadership potential** - With a performance record that exceeds many others nationally, most felt that distributors could be more proactive, leading the way in preparing their networks for the transition to renewable energy.
- **Faster and simpler connections** - Opinion leaders saw a need to urgently review and streamline connection processes for large customers (for mainstream supply and renewables).
- **Augmentation of network capacity** - The networks should augment capacity to keep up with growing demand. In regional areas, more capacity is needed to help attract business investment.
- **Solar exports without constraint** - Solar customers who want to export electricity should not be constrained. Most believe that constraining solar export is not in keeping with enabling urban and regional growth.
- **Improving reliability in worst performing areas** - This was viewed as a high priority in worst served areas of the Powercor network.
- **Enabling access to energy data to facilitate planning** - Making energy usage data including site-specific data more readily available was strongly advocated at all three forums.

- **Increased communication and transparency** – Further information from distributors about network tariffs, operations and decision-making was seen as vital.
- **Affordability of power for vulnerable customers** – Rising electricity prices and their impact on regional communities was highlighted, in particular by local councils who have a growing interest in generating and distributing energy e.g. to low cost housing projects.
- **Education to increase energy literacy across customers and stakeholders** – There is an urgent need to building basic knowledge about energy bills and a better understanding of the type of energy data that is available to consumers.

Regional trends and projects (current, planned and desired)

In Melbourne, the development of new transport infrastructure e.g. metro train stations, urban development and university expansions dominated the discussion. However, opinion leaders felt that some new infrastructure may be held back based on limited network capacity. University of Melbourne representatives who attended the forum outlined plans to renew their buildings and facilities and expand accommodation precincts (with similar projects in train at Swinburne University). However, electricity infrastructure adjacent to universities was described as a challenge. Network augmentation in the vicinity of expanding universities is becoming a priority.

Commonalities and differences were observed in the regional drivers of change and energy projects discussed. In regions served by the Powercor network, opinion leaders focused on the growth of large scale renewable projects (with many more to come), tourism growth that drives high demand in summer months and, the expansion of agricultural activity and related industries.

Many existing energy projects were identified in urban areas e.g. medium to large renewable energy developments, projects that focus on energy efficiency and those that assist communities to leverage the benefits of renewables. The latter included Solar Bulk Buy Campaigns such as those run by the Yarra Energy Foundation and the Moreland Energy Foundation to educate communities about solar energy, related funding sources and suppliers.

Discussions about desired future projects also focused on the uptake of renewables and finding ways for community, business and education stakeholders to tap into new energy sources, solar installations, technologies and partnerships.

Future Energy Scenarios

Against a backdrop of renewable energy projects (and grassroots campaigns to encourage take-up), most opinion leaders felt the Green Power scenario aligned best with their preferred energy future. Some described the Consumer Power scenario as more of a 'piecemeal approach' to growth not

sufficiently focused on a 'green' future, while the Steady State scenario was seen to be out of kilter with continued economic growth.

Value Propositions for 2025

In today's energy environment, many utilities are struggling to define value propositions that include but go beyond core values of consumers (the 'givens') to deliver the 'value add' that customers want. The deliberative forums enabled CPPCUE to comprehensively test its nine (9) value propositions for the Energised 2021-2025 regulatory reset. Reflecting prior research, energy and affordability led the way in customers' ranking of the five most important propositions. Key observations on the nine statements of customer benefits (or 'value propositions') were that:

- A number of value propositions are viewed as 'business as usual' for an electricity distributor, rather than providing 'added value' (what the participants believed a set of value propositions for the future should deliver).
- The value propositions should be refined or restated to give more emphasis to future-focused value propositions, while still recognising that 'business as usual' benefits are highly valued.

The dual value of 'business as usual' benefits and future-focused benefits was evident when participants ranked the value propositions for their overall importance. The two most important value propositions in the Melbourne and Mildura areas were 'committed to providing a reliable supply of electricity' and 'maintaining affordability'. However, opinion leaders attending the forum in Geelong gave their highest ranking to two of the future-focused value propositions: 'making it easier for you to export solar and charge your battery' and 'making it easier for you to use your data to make informed choices'.

Future distributor roles

In considering the future roles and activities of the electricity distributor, opinion leaders discussed both short and long term horizons. For the short term they suggested that the distributors:

- **Future-proof their networks** – ensuring capacity is adequate for urban and rural development.
- **Enable all customers to export solar** - ensuring that everyone can export their electricity without constraints while solving the quality issues that result from a two-way energy flow.

In the long-term, the opinion leaders felt that distributors must take a leadership role in preparing the network for the future i.e. developing the electricity grid to incorporate more renewables, battery storage and peer to peer trading.

In the Geelong area there was a request for more local representation by CPPCUE to increase transparency, understanding and communication with regional organisations and groups. However, across all forums, opinion leaders saw multiple opportunities for distributors to collaborate. Most saw mutual benefits to be gained from increased liaison (and partnerships) with small to medium enterprises (SME's), retailers, community organisations, universities, local councils, property developers and private companies.

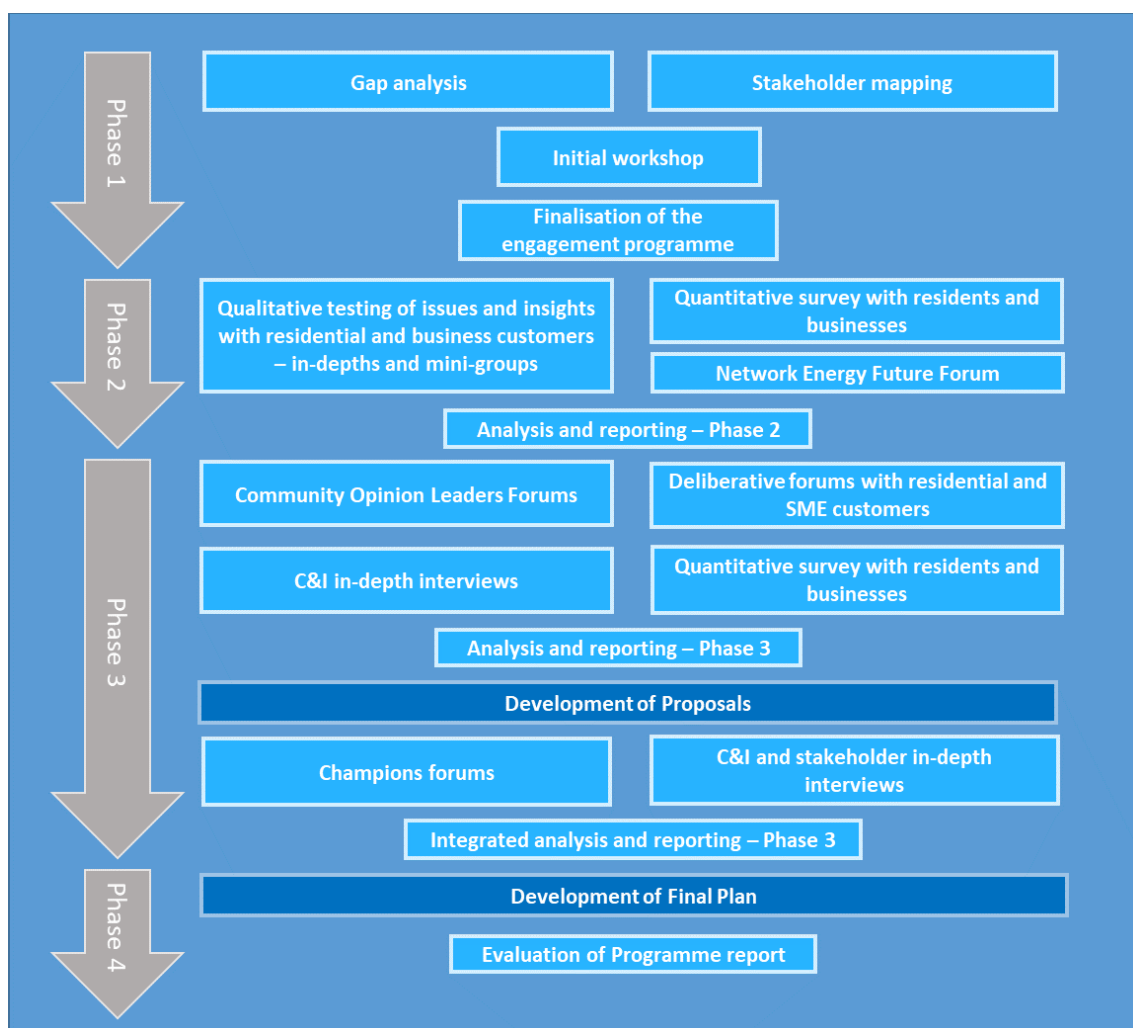
1. Introduction

CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy are required to provide regulatory proposals to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) every five years, detailing their predicted expenditure and revenue requirements over the regulatory period. The businesses are currently developing their proposals for the 2021-2025 regulatory period.

Woolcott Research and Engagement is contracted to conduct customer research to support the preparation of the regulatory proposals as part of the Energised 2021-2025 program. This program involves four key Phases for engagement from January 2017 to October 2018 and beyond.

Figure 1 presents the overview of the research program that supports engagement as part of Energised 2021-2025. We are currently in Phase 3 of the program

Figure 1: Components of the research program for the regulatory reset



2. Methodology

Residential and SME Forums using deliberative engagement techniques have become an important inclusion in energy distributors customer and stakeholder engagement programs. In line with ‘best practice’ across the energy sector, CPPCUE chose this technique to inform its Energised [2021-25] submissions. For distributors, a key advantage is the ability to share information and educate energy consumers about pivotal issues and questions before they engage in facilitated discussions, feedback from tables and deliberative polling.

Community Opinion Leader Forums focused on the needs and interests of urban and regional stakeholders and were hosted by CPPCUE at the locations and times shown below:

- Melbourne CBD – Wednesday 16th May 2pm-5.30pm
- Geelong) – Friday 18th May 9am-12.30pm
- Mildura – Tuesday 21st May 10.30am-2.00pm

This report discusses key findings from the forums that involved opinion leaders in a meaningful and wide ranging dialogue on their energy values and experiences, their preferred energy future and alternative approaches to network management and investment over 2021-25.

Forums using deliberative methods go considerably further than traditional consultation methods to elicit the depth of insight needed to develop regulatory proposals. The forums consisted of a mix of table discussions, presentations/films/speakers from the front, and participant response and feedback sessions from tables.

The forums included presentations from CPPCUE, table discussions between opinion leaders and group feedback sessions. At the Melbourne and Geelong forums, a lead facilitator chaired the forums and was supported by two table facilitators who guided the deliberations and recorded the main points raised. Spokespeople from each table were chosen by the participants to relay a summary of points from their discussion to the room. In Mildura, the forum was conducted as a smaller round-table forum to optimise discussions between a smaller number of participants.

Sessions within the forums included:

- A welcome and introduction.
- Regional energy issues that should inform distributors’ submissions.
- Energy impacts in the local community.
- Current/planned energy projects in the local community.
- Desired future energy projects in the local community.
- Energy value propositions or key benefits to customers proposed for 2025.

- The future role of distributors and other organisations.
- Evaluation of the session.

The full agenda and materials are provided in Appendices B and C.

2.1 Forum recruitment

A sample list of participants for the forums was jointly created by Woolcott Research and Engagement and CPPCUE. Potential invitees were identified through online research (google searches and use of local area websites) and CPPCUE's stakeholder engagement database. The target audience was defined as stakeholders with a high interest in energy at regional level.

An expression of interest email was provided by CPPCUE to inform the opinion leaders about the forum and invite them to attend. Following the email, Woolcott Research and CPPCUE telephoned each potential attendee to encourage them to participate. A follow up telephone call was also made the day before the forums.

A full list of attendees is included in Appendix A.

Detailed forum findings

3. Melbourne (CBD) findings

3.1 Urban energy issues

The Melbourne Community Opinion Leaders Forum attracted local energy agencies, interest groups and some large customers, e.g. multi-campus universities. Participants were asked what they thought the main issues were in relation to energy, their key priorities for energy distribution and what needs to be taken into account in the next five to seven years.

With several large customers present at the forum, discussions were robust on issues related to network capacity and connections, distributor transparency and data access, renewable energy uptake and energy affordability.

Connections and network capacity

In discussing large customer connections, participants noted that a faster and simpler connection process was needed. Current challenges with the connection process were identified across businesses, large property developers, schools and universities. Illustrative comments were:

“For new developments coming on board, time periods are long. Project teams get frustrated.”

“There should be a pre-approved streamlined process for people doing solar. Let’s make this process fast.”

The capacity of the network was a concern for these opinion leaders. Most felt the network is struggling to keep up with increased demand created by new developments.

“We need bigger feeders to help develop precincts to help universities, big residential developments, etc. We need to be able to handle loads that are going to be placed on the network.”

Communication, data access and education

Melbourne forum participants also talked about their desire for CPPCUE to increase its overall communication and transparency, assist customers with data access and further educate consumers about energy. In particular, they saw a need for greater transparency about network tariffs and charges. A related comment was:

“It is variable what CitiPower charge for their works. Very variable. We can make a guess but we are always wrong. Sometimes we challenge the cost and they halve it so it seems very arbitrary. It is hard to anticipate the costs.”

Access to energy data was also discussed at length. While there was limited clarity about the source of some data, the participants saw value in city planners (councils) and large customers e.g. property developers having more access to energy usage and emissions data.

Alongside data access, the discussion also focused on the need for more consumer education about energy. The public's general lack of understanding about the energy supply chain and the role of distributors was a concern. Participants saw the customer's inability to distinguish between the roles of distributors, retailers and local councils as a significant impediment.

"There is a lack of understanding at residential level and a lack of engagement at business level. People pay bills but don't understand them."

Energy affordability

The vulnerability of energy customers was also in focus at the Melbourne forum. The impact of high energy prices on struggling consumers was viewed as a critical issue. In particular, retail discounts in Victoria were seen as producing an unfair system with vulnerable customers less likely to understand the options presented and obtain these discounts. A related comment was:

"Retailers have any rate they choose and then provide discounts. Vulnerable people fall for this all the time."

Renewable energy uptake

Penetration of new energy technologies was a topic of personal and professional interest to some attendees. Opinion leaders spoke of increased interest in renewables, battery storage, peer to peer trading and microgrids, but recognised that these technologies do have a strong impact on the network. Some expressed an interest in understanding the role that CPPCUE will play in facilitating the grid transition to distributed energy resources (DER). This was seen as a "big unknown". Limited insight to the distributor's role in this transition was viewed as a factor in customers' lack of clarity about technologies they should invest in, particularly solar.

"In the CitiPower region there are restraints on voltage for people with solar panels. They can't manage the influx. It is in the too hard basket. So people can't sell back."

3.2 Energy impacts in the local community

Participants were asked what regional trends or changes were mostly likely to impact energy needs in Melbourne. The following trends and influences were mentioned.

- **Urban development** - There is an increasing population with lots of new medium and high-density housing developments, creating more demand along transit routes. There is growth in

the number of apartments, e.g. in the Brunswick area, and the conversion of many old warehouses to apartments. All major roads have seen the growth of medium density housing with more low-rise apartment blocks (e.g. 6-8 story buildings) replacing single-level homes.

- **University precinct expansions** - There is accelerated development of university precincts in Melbourne. The University of Melbourne has various locational hotspots for precinct development including large scale student accommodation (e.g. two precincts around Fisherman's Bend) and Swinburne University also has significant expansion plans in progress.
- **Environmental change** - The climate is getting hotter resulting in warmer summers with people using air conditioners more. This gives rise to a higher peak demand issue.
- **A shift away from gas** - With shifting price differentials, there is evidence of some movement away from gas. Developers of new urban residential projects and precincts are not connecting to gas anymore and gas is viewed as 'on the way out' in Victoria. This presents additional opportunities for distributors to work with developers on their electricity needs.
- **Uptake of renewable energy and electric vehicles (EVs)** - There is increased interest and uptake of residential solar in some areas with opinion leaders referring to some suburbs as 'green leaders'. Local councils are showing increased interest in managing and distributing solar energy to vulnerable customers. Social housing projects, such as Knox City Council's initiative to install solar and battery storage in social housing and treat the export of energy as a tax-deductible donation.

Although there is a rise in the number of EVs available, opinion leaders see moderate take-up with purchases more likely in 'green' suburbs e.g. in central and eastern Melbourne. Participants noted that the adoption of plug-in vehicles is low.

Lack of energy efficiency

- In urban areas, residential apartments are considered to be inefficient and opinion leaders felt more should be done to improve people's understanding of energy efficiency, and to advocate for improved building standards. Apartment designs are often problematic.
- Opinion leaders felt that some suburbs e.g. Toorak, Hawthorn and Kew or others may be less concerned about energy efficiencies, but may still see an uptake of EVs.

Infrastructure

- The Melbourne Metro Tunnel will expand the City Loop, enabling major improvements in capacity, reliability and efficiency of train lines serving Melbourne's growth areas. However, the

benefits of the tunnel and deployment of new 'maxi trams' will not be felt everywhere in part because the electricity infrastructure isn't there to handle these developments.

3.3 Current and planned energy projects in the local community

Opinion leaders were asked about current and planned local energy related projects in their area. A map was provided and participants were asked to use post-it notes to show where projects are occurring or planned. Details were also recorded on an activity sheet. Current projects included:

- **Community campaigns** - Solar Bulk Buy Campaigns – Yarra Energy Foundation and Moreland Energy Foundation are both running campaigns to reduce the barriers to installing solar for schools, community organisations, businesses and residents. These campaigns provide education on benefits and cost savings, advice on solar suppliers and how to access funding.
- **Rollout of a solar schools precinct in Camberwell** – Camberwell Grammar has recently transitioned to solar with 888 kilowatt (KW) capacity. It is now predicted that more, if not all the private schools in Camberwell are likely to move to solar. There is a social driver of change here with private schools affording the solar transition more easily than public schools.
- **The University of Melbourne 'smart precincts' concept** - The University is undertaking a number of projects to improve the efficiency of its campuses that include:
 - Modernisation of the existing campus in Parkville where a number of university buildings will be finished this year, all designed to be carbon neutral
 - PV installation upgrades which are now occurring across multiple University of Melbourne campuses
 - Energy efficiency projects across all university campuses e.g. LED lighting upgrades, mechanical plant and equipment upgrades.
- **Swinburne University's pursuit of smart, energy efficient precincts:**

"All our new university buildings have to be 5 star green star buildings. By 2020 they have to be 6 star green star buildings."
- **A focus on increased energy efficiency for businesses** - A number of community energy projects run by small groups are planned to optimise efficiencies across the network. These include microgrids, the Hepburn wind model, the Melbourne markets project and others.



3.4 Desired future energy projects in the local community

Participants were asked what they would like to see happening in their region with future energy projects or initiatives. The following activities were mentioned:

- Working with local councils who are making plans to become energy retailers – CPPCUE could seek to better understand these plans and find ways to accelerate local benefits.
- Installing measures or equipment in existing homes in order to increase the energy efficiency of these buildings. Finding ways to incentivise owners to retrofit apartments was also suggested.
- Encouraging developers to install electricity rather than gas and ensure more buildings have double-glazed windows. Ideally, every new development would have solar tiles and batteries.
- Exploring new forms of energy generation at domestic and commercial levels (PV and wind) and battery storage should be encouraged. Going forward, hydro and tidal opportunities should be further explored in coastal areas.

“If you look overseas at the amount of offshore wind, it is more accepted there. Offshore wind should play a massive role down here. Should be large scale in the Bay.”

- Transforming transport hubs including train stations into energy hubs and generators.

- Investigating and further developing the peer-to-peer trading model.
- Accelerating plans for virtual net metering (to enable peer-to-peer trading) e.g. a large rooftop installation could go on top of a building that doesn't necessarily have a lot of consumption, and the excess capacity might be credited to a neighbouring plant which has little roof space for a solar array, but has heavy energy needs.
- Customer education to boost energy literacy and accelerate the use of energy usage data to make saving was advocated. Here, smart phones apps to improve energy literacy were mentioned. Forum participants highlighted a body of data that is available already without widespread knowledge. Key examples were:
 - The Watt 'son app – Providing customers with insights on what energy they are using, how much solar they are generating etc.
 - Apps that tell customers how much each appliance is using
 - A portal to access smart meter electricity usage at 30-minute intervals.

3.5 Future energy scenarios

While the opinion leaders at this forum thought that the Green Power scenario was most aligned with their future vision, they also saw that the transition to renewable energy had so far not lived up to this vision. The Consumer Power scenario was thought to be more of a piecemeal approach to vision achievement.

"It [the Green Power Scenario] has to happen. We are doomed otherwise."

The participants' conclusion that the scenarios should be shaped by what the distributor wants (rather than what the customer wants) did suggest a limited understanding of scenarios as 'pictures of the future' that could unfold, influenced by but not controlled by either party. However, the view that CPPCUE should be more proactive in planning for the future does align generally with the views of participants in all forums held.

3.6 Value Propositions for 2025

CPPCUE's nine value propositions (see Appendix E) were tested at the forum for their overall importance to customers and to determine if any key benefits or outcomes sought were missing. This critique highlighted the importance of understanding the 'must haves' (or 'givens') and service outcomes of electricity distribution that might be referred to as 'added value'.

Most attendees felt that the value propositions were written from a distributor perspective and that there were not enough future-focused outcomes compared to 'business as usual' outcomes.

"[The value propositions list] doesn't really address the importance of carbon emissions and the role of the distributor in the future, e.g. line losses."

"Just thinking about how they [CitiPower] promote themselves, it is all about guys in hardhats, safety and reliability. We would like them to be more future focussed and forward thinking about solving the issues and solutions about two way energy flow."

It was felt that there is no statement of leadership within the value propositions or indication of what roles the distributor can play in driving change. Some attendees felt that CPPCUE should be seen to be innovating. However, some also felt that the distributor was also saying they were not going to innovate because of the regulatory environment (i.e. the regulator won't let them).

"The city revitalisation is moving ahead but the distributor is not moving ahead. What are they doing to lead the development of energy use, for example connecting large scale solar?"

Participants also believed that customer service was missing from the value propositions. Building a more customer focused organisation was seen to be a priority by those attending this forum. The distributor's need to collaborate to explore and solve energy issues that lie ahead was highlighted.

"There is nothing here about collaborating. These guys are the meat in the sandwich in many ways and there is nothing about working together to solve some of these issues."

Despite the conversation being mainly about the futuristic approach the distributor should take, the two most important value propositions were thought to be:

- Committed to providing a reliable supply of electricity.
- Maintaining affordability.

3.7 The future role of distributors

Looking ahead, participants were asked what they thought the role of the electricity distributor in energy supply and service might be in their local area by 2025.

Here, the opinion leaders referred to:

- The need to ensure the network infrastructure is in place to enable customers to export electricity to the grid.

- Maintaining power quality on the grid by minimising the adverse impacts of increased solar panels. An illustration of this challenge in the university context is noted below.

“It is damaging equipment at the university. Everything runs towards the upper end of what it is allowed to. If I put my cynical hat on then you use more which gives them more revenue. We have put voltage optimising on our equipment.”

- Creating more awareness among customers of the energy data that are already on offer to help manage their usage.
- Future-proofing the network to ensure that there is enough capacity for future growth. There is a lot of development occurring around the city and some feeders are working at full capacity already. Urban planners and developers need the tools to be able to drill down to an area on the grid and examine what the impacts on infrastructure are if they add more demand.
- Distributors could further define their social responsibility when it comes to supporting vulnerable energy customers.
- Taking a leadership position and being proactive was frequently mentioned. As CitiPower is the most efficient network in Australia, most saw that it should be seen to lead the way with innovation highlighting their efforts in preparing the network for the transition to renewables.
- Participants thought the distributor could enhance its profile among large customers by providing further guidelines or templates to help people with renewable energy connections (i.e. being prepared to actively help large electricity users find the best way of doing things).

3.8 Working with other organisations in the community

Opportunities to collaborate were raised spontaneously by opinion leaders even before they were asked whether there was a need for the distributor to work with others in the community. The following was recommended by opinion leaders at the forum:

- **Further engagement with subject matter experts.** Examples include the Alternative Technology Association, CSIRO, Moreland and the Yarra Energy Foundations to work on modelling and prediction of future demand. These organisations could also share with the distributor the types of questions they are being commonly asked by the community.

“We all work on the ground and are talking to people all the time.”

- **Finding common ground with retailers to enable partnerships.** Organisations such as Yarra and Moreland Energy Foundations can also help facilitate new partnerships that enable improved information dissemination to the community.
- **Encouraging community engagement.** Outcome driven activities through community organisations such as the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and St Vincent de Paul can help with energy education and literacy building, especially among vulnerable customers where energy affordability is a critical issue.
- **Working more closely with universities.** The University of Melbourne has already collaborated with CPPCUE on smart grids and there is a lot of research conducted by the University that is used by distributors. In collaboration with distributors, the universities could help research what is driving costs up and new technologies impacting network maintenance or renewal.
- **Collaborating with local and State Governments.** Councils in particular would like better cooperation with distributors e.g. on street lighting and solar installation. Their desire to serve as energy retailers to provide relief to vulnerable customers is a further area for discussion.
- **Working with private companies on specific projects.** Examples might include collaborating with Caltex or other companies to work together to provide public charging stations for EVs. Participants felt that CPPCUE needs to have a position on this issue and work with these companies to do a trial.
- **Further liaison with the property development community.** Developers define what type of energy goes into urban projects and housing estates. As a result, they have a powerful impact on energy usage and demand. A closer working relationship and semi-regular discussions would enable CPPCUE to encourage developers to move away from gas to electricity.
- **Finding community leaders to help facilitate education and energy solutions in the regional areas.** Forum attendees felt that CPPCUE will benefit from finding champions across the energy network that can help to facilitate and disseminate information about energy efficiency and boost overall energy literacy.

4. Geelong findings

4.1 Regional energy issues

The Geelong Community Opinion Leaders Forum attracted an audience with strong local government representation. The first discussion session involved questions about what the key issues are in relation to energy distribution in the region, what the big questions are for the next seven years and what CPPCUE needs to take into account when planning for the next regulatory submission.

Broad feedback was provided on a diverse suite of issues related to connection times, reliability, affordability, safety, renewables, future planning and collaboration.

Connection times

There was criticism by participants that lead times for connections and new infrastructure were too long. Connection periods for new developments of 13-20 weeks were cited.

Excessive lead times for new electricity infrastructure were also mentioned, for example, some participants said that it can be 9-10 months wait to upgrade transformers.

Availability, reliability, and capacity

Reliability was also viewed as a key issue in this region and an area of focus for the distributor. Currently some of the region was not thought to be well served at all with a lack of electricity infrastructure having an impact on businesses in particular and discouraging some potential new business investors to the region. Illustrative quotes were:

“Dairy farmers need better equipment that requires more energy and more capacity.”

“We can’t get businesses to invest in single line areas. Huge investors have come to the area and said there is no power and gone to Tasmania. We need three phase power.”

Participants stated that the grid needs non-network solutions to address current capacity problems and upgrades i.e. storage and demand response solutions. Opinion leaders suggested that Powercor should “think outside the box” rather than just upgrading transformers. It was thought that switching and back-up systems also need to be upgraded. A related comment was:

“The power went out in Lorne and they couldn’t use the diverter backup line that was put in because it would have knocked out half of Geelong.”

Affordability

Geelong attendees also saw affordability as a key issue – electricity prices are seen to be very high with adverse impacts for vulnerable customer segments residing in urban areas.

Some felt that CPPCUE charges are too high. It was suggested by one attendee that it can cost around \$60,000 to move a pole (reinforcing the negative perception that the distributor's monopoly position could lead to price gouging). A related comment was:

"They charge ridiculous prices for things."

Safety

Safety discussions among attendees focused on the fire start risks across the Powercor network. A key take-out from this discussion was that communities need confidence that investment is being put into to the right areas in high bush fire risk locations.

Renewables and technology

Participants saw energy-related technologies moving quickly and there is a healthy appetite among consumers to leverage emerging opportunities. Opinion leaders wanted assurance that CPPCUE is tracking technological changes in energy and adapting the grid to ensure that consumers are able to harness related benefits. The local government opinion leaders attending the forum thought it was critical that consumers with solar panels are not constrained from exporting electricity back to the grid.

"The grid needs to be adapted to accept distributed generation if we have large numbers of people with microgeneration connecting to the grid."

"It hasn't happened in this region but people are constrained and can't export to the grid. If they can't then why would they be charged a connection fee if the service isn't available."

Other technological developments mentioned were smart lighting, peer to peer trading and related to that, virtual network metering. Opinion leaders wanted to be made aware of what CPPCUE is planning to do regarding these developments.

There was also concern about the proportion of customers who will have microgrids or be self-sufficient and want to leave the grid in the future. Here, opinion leaders were interested in understanding the impact of this off-grid movement for Powercor i.e. what are the impacts of fewer customers paying for the upkeep of the network?

“Powercor is very conservative. They need to start thinking about offering new things in preparation for everyone going off grid.”

“Powercor needs to set up decentralised systems and then if you need supplementary power you bring it in.”

Opinion Leaders want CPPCUE to be proactive and future focussed with regards to what is required for the network to adapt to renewables and how it will respond to the movement off the grid of some energy consumers. A related conclusion of attendees in Geelong was:

“[It] would be good to see Powercor being brave and using technology and innovation.”

Access to data

There was a call by some participants for CPPCUE to make usage data and demand information more readily available. Councils in particular would like to understand how residents and businesses in the region are using electricity to help them plan ahead, in particular to develop and implement green energy initiatives.

Councils also requested a map of what electricity infrastructure is available in their shire. Previously they have only had maps of certain areas within their municipal boundaries available.

Collaboration

It was believed that there is a real opportunity for CPPCUE to collaborate with customers to create future solutions. In particular, the opinion leaders felt that large businesses should be brought to the table for discussions if 70% of power is used by just 1% of customers. In order to understand their needs and manage future demand, CPPCUE needs to work with these large users. One example related to three large businesses in Colac that reportedly use 90% of the electricity. Attendees agreed that a microgrid which included all three businesses would solve a lot of the capacity and reliability issues in the area.

“They are crying out for it. These three CEOs would love to come to the table. They know they have spent too much on power to date.”

Transparency

More insights about operational and capital expenditure were sought by forum attendees. Key questions included: Where is the money spent by the distributors? And can we influence where the network is being upgraded and also negate the ‘them and us’ feeling that exists among some community members. Getting away from the perception of being trapped by a monopolistic

situation was a priority i.e. the feeling that they [CPPCUE] are in the business of making money while the customers are trying to save money.

4.2 Energy impacts in the local community

A range of trends or key drivers of change were seen to impact energy needs in the Geelong region. In response to a key question about what these energy impacts were in their region, the following trends were identified.

Increase in demand

The first impression of both discussion tables was that there is an increase in demand in the region due to the number of large residential developments. Specific areas cited where major developments are occurring were Geelong, Western Geelong (Armstrong area) and Torquay.

Tourists coming to the area were also thought to be increasing and putting extra demands on the system. For example along the Great Ocean Road the population triples over the summer. There is a large number of holiday homes in the region that have a unique profile in terms of electricity usage. The summer occupiers tend not to be the owners but, rather, short let renters who are not paying the electricity bills. This encourages increased use of electricity such as air conditioners being left on all day which causes extra demand on the system.

Industrial expansion in the region has also been strong in recent times, stimulating growth and related energy needs. Although there has been a decline in heavy manufacturing, there has been growth in other sectors with export markets. Outside the city, the region has an agricultural focus with growing farming and winery businesses. These larger customers are often looking to expand their businesses but often find that the energy infrastructure is not yet available to support new technology or their investment in new equipment.

The peaks in demand are putting more pressure on the network leading to more frequent outages.

“Everyone jumps in the shower at the same time and the lights go out.”

There has also been a decrease in energy usage due to more street lights with LEDs.

Increase in large and small scale renewables

In discussing regional changes, the accelerated growth of large scale renewables was highlighted. Golden Plains wind farms were cited as well as 18 planned wind farms in the Polwarth district.

In the context of this renewable energy expansion, there were concerns about how the grid is going to cope. Related comments were:

“Feed lines from the wind farms to the grid need sorting out - at the moment everyone puts in their own lines ‘willy nilly’. The whole countryside will be a grid of poles and wires. As consumers we are paying for it so it needs to be more coordinated.”

It was also felt that there are major transmission constraints in terms of the electricity load that can be carried in the North West of Victoria. An example given was a solar farm in Broken Hill where AEMO has placed maximum constraints on the development because the grid can't handle it. There is also a growth in residential solar that is impacting energy demand. Increased community ownership of local generation in Bendigo was also mentioned.

4.3 Current and planned energy projects in the local community

Participants were asked about current and planned energy projects in their area. A map of the Powercor area was provided with a 'close up' view of Geelong. Participants were asked to use post-it notes on the map where projects are occurring or planned. Details were also recorded on an activity sheet.



Current projects in the Geelong region included:

- **Trial of peer to peer trading** - The Central Victoria Greenhouse Alliance's trial of peer to peer trading with various local government authorities in North West Victoria.

- **A solar bulk buy program** - The Geelong Community Solar Bulk Buy Program that is being run by the Geelong Sustainability Group (a small to medium project aimed at residential and business customers).
- **Installation of solar panels on public buildings** - The Greater City of Geelong Council's installation of solar panels on council buildings resulting in 800KW of installed power.
- **Solar leasing and power purchase agreements** between Bendigo Council and the Bendigo Sustainability Group.
- **Joint initiatives between councils** - A joint initiative between City of Greater Bendigo Council and the Bendigo Sustainability Group that involves putting solar on council buildings resulting in 300KW of power.
- **Plans for wind and solar farms** - Numerous wind farms that are planned in the region e.g. Golden Plains (800-100MW), Berrybank, and solar farms e.g. providing a combined 350MW in the Gannawarra Shire.
- **Environmental Upgrade Agreements (EUAs)** that involve big businesses in the region installing renewables and paying related costs through their rates rather than paying the whole cost up front.
- **Encouraging less energy use amongst residents** - The Surf Coast Shire project which is actively supporting the state's overall energy emissions target by engaging with local residents to encourage less energy use. The council is measuring energy usage with data from CPPCUE.
- **Initiatives to install solar power on chicken farms in the area.**

In terms of planned projects in the area, the following were mentioned:

- **Community owned renewable energy** - Geelong Sustainability Group's initiative to have community owned renewable energy (rooftop solar) installed at MACS nursing home in North Geelong. Installation starts in June this year. It will provide 20% of electricity for the nursing home. It will be leased for 10 years then sold for \$1 to them. Investors get a 5% return and there is a high level of interest in investing in developments of this nature (\$150,000 funding was fully subscribed within 7 days).
- **Using underground mining tunnels to generate power** - Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and City of Greater Bendigo's interest in utilising Bendigo's underground mining tunnels to generate hydro power. A preliminary study shows potential head

pressure of around 750m in particular shafts that could generate 180MW a day. It involves 30MW turbines with 6 hours groundwater storage to generate 180MW per cycle.

- **Pre-heating of water from sewerage lines for use in aquatic centres** (with related conversations with Barn Water in progress).

Other examples included:

- A metered smart lighting system/ numerous small scale systems.
- A tidal energy supply that is mooted in Port Phillip Bay.
- A community power hub under discussion in Bendigo and a 2MW solar farm at Heathcote.
- An energy efficient lighting bulk change - 2,000 lights are going to be changed over to energy efficient lighting.
- A microgrid investigation in one of the 'High Energy' precinct areas in Bendigo.
- A major new wind farm with battery storage in Western Victoria that will power the expansion of Stawell's Nectar Farms. This project will make the advanced agriculture facility the world's first ever crop farm to be completely powered by renewable energy.

4.4 Desired future energy projects in the local community

Participants were also asked about which future energy projects they would like to see happen in the region in the next 7 years.

- Both discussion tables mentioned that there should be active encouragement of alternative generation options like tidal power. However, it was thought that this might require a lot of maintenance compared to solar (which doesn't move so is easier to maintain). Some noted that a desalination plant powered by tidal generation would be ideal.
- Programs to ensure that housing is energy efficient were recommended so that all renovations or new builds are required to reflect green star (8 standard minimum) ratings e.g. triple glazed windows/doors.
- Consumers' provision of their annual energy usage figures with penalties if they exceed a threshold were suggested together with rewards for those who fell below the threshold.
- Projects that integrate the smart meter and provide more in-home control over demand – examples given included an app or other in-home tool that would give consumers insights to

their usage/consumption and control over their appliances. It was noted that, *“Consumers aren’t using smart meters properly” and this needs to change to “take the peaks and troughs out of the market”*.

- The installation of EV charge points across the region in the future plus incentives for people to own an EV (for example, a rebate for charging their EV, money off their bill or, their registration). If customers invest their capital to reduce energy consumption then forum attendees felt that there should be related benefits or incentives.
- New school campaigns to engage and empower schools to boost their energy efficiency.
- An investigation into the benefits of block chain as an energy management or trading tool.
- Offshore wind turbines similar to those used overseas should be further investigated in Victoria.
- Converting waste to energy (bio-waste) should also be considered at regional level (although this can be very expensive according to attendees).
- Partnership projects between Powercor, all levels of government and industry were also viewed as desirable (mirroring similar successes in the water sector).
- A flexible investment in renewables to respond to increasingly mobile energy consumers – the bulk of the population moves to another residence every two years with many people renting their home or apartment. Currently they can’t get renewables so we need a system to deal with this phenomenon. Forum attendees suggested that community energy projects in which people invest dollars versus personal investments in renewable energy may be more desirable to accommodate this trend.
- Projects that enable local communities near wind farms to derive benefits – while there is a lot of additional power generation emerging, there is a need for greater insights on how the local community can benefit from it. At the moment they can’t access the power. Golden Plains wind farm wants to benefit the local residents and businesses and here, virtual net metering and peer to peer trading may provide part of the answer as to how this power could be harnessed.
- Projects that benefit local businesses were of interest e.g. opportunities for local businesses to manufacture and supply renewable energy parts or components. At the forum, attendees saw these energy developments creating more opportunities for businesses that can be leveraged to stimulate growth.
- Projects that enable mass energy storage and related investment in the region. Currently, Mortlake is the only project of this nature in the vicinity of Geelong.

- Projects that provide more local energy capacity. At the moment the area is turning investors away because there is not enough electricity capacity to be distributed to enable growth. Here, it was noted that the whole western end of Golden Plains lacks power as well as Colac to the border.

4.5 Future energy scenarios

The majority of participants felt that the 'Green Power' scenario fits best with the energy future projects they would like to see in their area. This was because they believed:

- It would be good to see more investment in renewable energy projects, including a greater uptake by business and industry of green technologies.
- The science is fairly clear that we must make the transition to renewable energy faster.
- A 'Green Power' scenario was seen to be ambitious but still achievable.

4.6 Value Propositions for 2025

CPPCUE's nine proposed value propositions (see Appendix E) were tested at the forum for their overall importance and to determine if any important benefits were missing.

Similar to observations made at the Melbourne forum, some attendees at this event viewed the value propositions as 'givens' i.e. customers would assume that CPPCUE were doing these already, whereas others were more aspirational. The 'givens' were identified as being 'committed to providing a reliable network', 'providing a safe environment for customers and workers' and 'keeping your data and our network secure'.

"There a lot of BAU value propositions. There is no moving outside the box."

"I want to see them pushing the envelope; they are too complacent because they are a monopoly."

"There are only three things they are doing outside of their regulatory obligations."

However, some distributor benefits or key priorities were seen as omissions. These included:

- **Having a future focus.** Opinion leaders felt that the community needs to know that someone is doing the planning – matching where the growth in demand is and where the power therefore needs to go. Here, it was thought that the focus needs to be on improving rather than maintaining the network to facilitate growth.

- **Embracing new technology** – the value propositions need to show that CPPCUE is in touch with what new technology is available.
- **Customer engagement and customer service** – various attendees felt that the distributor should have a stated intent to become more customer focused, improving its services and engagement with energy consumers and stakeholders.
- **Making smart meters more accessible and useful** – while this was suggested, some felt this may or may not be appropriate for customers in rural locations. Nevertheless, feedback at the forum was that smart meters do have further potential i.e. to monitor the efficiency and energy usage linked to in-home appliances.

To complete the discussion on the value propositions, forum participants were asked to choose the top five value propositions and rank them one to five. In Geelong, they were a little more ‘future focussed’ and the two most important value propositions were:

- Making it easier for you to export solar and charge your battery.
- Making it easier for you to use your data to make informed choices.

4.7 The future role of distributors

With the rising use of renewables including battery storage and interest in microgrids and peer to peer trading, there was no doubt in the minds of participants that CPPCUE’s role is going to change. Most felt that the company is going to have to plan for and adapt to change, taking a proactive role in leading and facilitating change, not a reactive one. Illustrative comments were:

“Powercor need to have a role in the up-front planning and discussions.”

It was imperative to participants that CPPCUE should show leadership, particularly in the area of social responsibility - they need to be a “king pin” in the community and a good corporate citizen.

“There is an opportunity to lead, they understand and have the knowledge. They have the ability to innovate.”

Forum attendees also believed that CPPCUE has a role to engage and communicate with customers and stakeholders such as local councils and other organisations.

Stronger local representation and more transparency from Power were seen to be desirable along with an improved understanding of local issues and an ongoing dialogue with local organisations. Appointment of regional representatives from CPPCUE were preferred so that the distributor would be more proactive, solving local issues at the grass roots level (such as the example of three large

businesses each talking about a renewable energy initiative when there are clear benefits of business collaboration).

Forum attendees felt that CPPCUE's role at the local level could be to facilitate discussions about electricity projects and provide information and guidance tailored to regional customers' needs. The distributor could also be more involved in monitoring the network capacity and infrastructure's readiness for renewable energy – at the moment the local council has to investigate but they are not as knowledgeable as CPPCUE.

4.8 Working with other organisations in the community

In line with the above comments, opinion leaders in Geelong did see the electricity distributor nurturing many more local level partnerships. A related comment was:

"They [Powercor] need to facilitate renewable energy connection, export and trading. They need to sit down with renewable energy organisations and work it out. It is complicated."

It was suggested that CPPCUE needs to collaborate with:

- Customers.
- Other distributors and utilities.
- Local community groups.
- Large developers.
- The G21 agribusiness forum.
- Peak industry groups e.g. the Chamber of Commerce.
- Local and state authorities e.g. local councils and Victorian government agencies.

More workshops or forums similar to this Community Opinion Leaders Forum were also suggested as an avenue to stimulate further dialogue and collaboration.

"Today has been good to sit down and find out what is needed in the area and how to deliver it."

5. Mildura findings

The Mildura Community Opinion Leaders Forum was attended by local government representatives from Mildura and Swan Hill Rural City Councils and local businesses. Participants were asked what they thought the main issues were in their region in relation to energy, what the big questions were and what CPPCUE needs to take into account when planning its next regulatory submission.

5.1 Rural energy issues

Issues raised at the Mildura forum focused on the region's commercial and industrial interests as well as energy cost pressures impacting residents.

Industry expansion

Agricultural activities are seen to be fast expanding. Agricultural exports have risen and this has brought a massive increase in electricity consumption i.e. to run irrigation pumps, production machinery and cool rooms for fresh food storage. There has been a lot of rural real estate investment by Chinese businesses seeking to capitalise on the region's agribusiness growth. The almond industry was seen to be very strong in Swan Hill and this requires a lot of energy use. Similarly, avocados have become a major industry and many farms have had large fans installed on their farms to help the growth of their crops.

The energy needs of agricultural producers were given a very high priority in forum discussions:

"We need to run cool rooms with hundreds of thousands of dollars of fruit in them ready for export."

"Some of the crops use so much power – it costs \$4,000 to turn on the pumps."

"Water is crucial; a day without water is disastrous."

Usage of electricity in some agricultural businesses is very seasonal, and some complained that their power bills were going 'through the roof', particularly due to customers having to pay a demand charge. Many had started to look into energy alternatives, but were finding the cost prohibitive, particularly the alternative of switching to gas.

"The demand charge kills us, we spike a couple of times a year and we have to pay for the rest of the year."

"I can't load shed one kilowatt – my biggest fear is the juice in the network – I can't afford to be out for an hour!"

Energy affordability

In residential areas in and around Mildura, the cost of electricity was viewed as a major issue for some consumers, particularly those on lower incomes. The area was described as having a number of low socio-economic pockets, many of whom were struggling with the cost of living. This has been exacerbated by the increase in the number of over 35 degree days in a climate that already suffers extremes in temperature.

“People are turning electricity off in order to survive – they can’t afford it.”

The councils of Mildura and Swan Hill reported that they are both looking into large scale solar projects given the region’s sun exposure.

5.2 Energy impacts in the local community

Within the Mildura community, a number of specific developments were mentioned that are expected to impact energy consumption in the medium term. These included:

- A company in Thurla that has been further developing its business to grow industrial hemp (and building a related processing facility).
- An abattoir development in Koorlong.
- Mallee Hay’s development of a hay compressing processing plant/compost facility.
- A growing almond industry in the Robinvale area.
- A warehouse and storage facility being built in Benetook Ave and 14th Street.
- A waste to energy plant which was described by forum participants as a massive site.
- An expanding Chinese owned winery (Weilong Winery) at Karadoc.
- A large processing and packing shed for stone fruit.
- The building of two industrial estates.
- Irymple Rail Spur.

5.3 Current and planned energy projects in the local community

In responding to discussions about current and planned energy projects in adjacent regions, Mildura participants identified a number of interesting projects initiated by private investors or businesses and local councils.

Mildura Rural City Council representatives mentioned that there was a current application for a large scale solar facility and battery storage at Carwarp with an estimated cost of \$640,000, and nine solar farm applications ranging from smaller personal level use through to a site in Ouyen which would generate 780MWh annually.

The Swan Hill area has seen investment in a number of solar farms, with more than forty (40) project proposals already in discussion or at varying stages in the planning permit process. The estimation was that these proposals would amount to over 2544MW of new generation and more than 200MW of battery storage.

5.4 Desired future energy projects in the local community

With the expected increase in energy consumption and production linked to renewable energy facilities and agriculture, there was an understandable concern about the network's future capacity to cope. Many participants felt that network augmentation was needed to achieve the capacity needed for these projects. Mildura Council suggested that they received a lot of requests for solar farms on prime agricultural land that they had to refuse.

Forum participants discussed the merits of putting in another line that would enable new tracts of land to open up that have never had power before (bringing new benefits to the Mildura region). Microgrids were also seen to be desirable to facilitate the take-up of solar power and in this regard, local council representatives signalled their interest in generating electricity for regional use. One participant also raised the future possibility of nuclear power although this was not explored in any depth.

5.5 Future scenarios

Three out of five participants felt that the 'Green Power' scenario provided the best fit with the energy future and projects that the forum participants wanted to see in their area. The remaining two participants selected the 'Consumer Power' scenario. The main reasons why Mildura forum attendees chose the 'Green Power' scenario were:

- The need (and likelihood) that the region will transition to renewable energy power sources.
- The Victorian Government's desire to encourage renewable energy projects and use.

- The aspiration of Mildura and surrounding regions to be green and clean.
- The natural fit of solar with the regional climate and geography.

There was a feeling that the 'Steady State' scenario was not sustainable if economic growth was to continue (although it was acknowledged that the socio-economic fabric could remain relatively unchanged as the scenario shifts retaining a high proportion of financially vulnerable residents).

For those selecting 'Consumer Power', it was felt that 'Green Power' was a long term aspiration and that 'Consumer Power' was more realistic by 2025.

One participant in particular saw the future as a combination of 'Steady State' and 'Green Power' that would involve the network staying as it is now with a central base load power generation and distribution to the main centres for residential and industrial use, with green technology supplying remote power nodes.

5.6 Value Propositions for 2025

In Mildura the two most important value propositions were thought to be:

- Committed to providing a reliable supply of electricity.
- Maintaining affordability.

No specific suggestions were made about the issues or commitments that might be missing from the current set of value propositions list.

5.7 The future role of distributors

Attendees at the Mildura forum felt that the role of the distributor would change in the future. Some suggested that CPPCUE might have a role to play in managing or monitoring in energy storage, enabling the distributor to better manage peak days i.e. becoming more efficient in responding to peak demand while managing reliability. Some felt that CPPCUE may not have any choice in the future and that Government regulations and legislation is likely to shape what lies ahead and in turn, determine CPPCUE's future role for them.

5.8 Working with other organisations in the community

With the drive by consumers for greater use of renewables, there was a feeling that CPPCUE must be ready to adapt to these changes and be more involved with developers and industry to be abreast of what the future electricity demand is most likely to be.

6. Community Opinion Leader Forums - Summary points

Across the three forums held in Melbourne, Geelong and Mildura, opinion leaders who participated expressed a very high level of interest in the future of energy, the projects and approaches that will accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

Regional Energy Futures: The majority of forum participants believed that the 'Green Power' scenario had the best fit with their regional energy vision. However, there was general recognition that there is a way to go to fulfil that vision. It was thought that the 'Consumer Power' scenario is somewhat piecemeal and the 'Steady State' scenario was unlikely if economic growth continues. In Mildura, even as the energy landscape and scenarios shift, some felt that a large group of financially vulnerable consumers could remain.

Value Propositions for 2025: A common observation across the three forums was that the value propositions seem to be written from the distributors' perspective and some are 'business as usual' (e.g. maintaining reliability) versus genuine 'value adds'. The value propositions ranked in the top two at the Melbourne and Mildura forums were those focused on reliability and affordability (both of which were viewed as 'givens'). In Geelong, the two highest ranked value propositions were (1) making it easier to export solar and charge batteries and (2) using energy data to make informed choices.

In all three forums, the value propositions or commitments thought to be missing from the list were: having a future focus, taking leadership, pursuing innovation, tracking and responding to benefits of new technology, making smart meters more accessible and usable, customer service and increased distributor engagement and collaboration.

Urban, regional and rural, issues and impacts: There were some commonalities in issues and impacts on energy but also marked variations in line with different geographies, industries, communities and also climate. The Melbourne forum talked about accelerated transport infrastructure, urban development e.g. higher density housing along transit routes, university precinct growth and 'green leader' belts or suburbs where renewable energy uptake will be higher. Related issues were the need for faster and easier connections to solar, limited network capacity in the vicinity of expanding universities, the shift from gas to electricity, the 'apartment challenge' for energy efficiencies, more tariff transparency and more energy education and data access.

Geelong attendees similarly focused on many of the same issues, but here, the network capacity, the level of energy reliability and safety were key issues. In general, they felt that demand and capacity were impacted by large residential developments, industrial expansion, seasonal tourists

and the high growth of small and large renewables. In contrast, the focus in Mildura was on new agribusiness growth and industry expansion that is impacted by network capacity issues and reliability, renewable energy uptake and the ability of large customers to connect. Consumer vulnerability is extreme in some pockets.

Current, planned and desired projects: In urban Melbourne, current and planned projects highlighted were the solar transition of private schools, solar buy-back campaigns, the renewable energy transformation of universities, energy efficiency programs for businesses and community energy projects. Desired future initiatives were: more local government involvement in energy retail (alongside social housing), residential energy retrofits, more energy-efficient building and precinct designs, hydro and tidal energy explorations, peer to peer trading and virtual net metering plus increased customer education.

Geelong forum participants discussed wide-ranging projects that are currently in train. These included: solar buyback programs, local government participation in solar leasing and purchase agreements, peer to peer trading trials (involving local councils), wind farms, environmental upgrade agreements involving big businesses, community power hubs plus hydro and tidal energy projects. Looking ahead, ideas included: more energy efficiency in housing, more efficient in-home energy management, alternative generation options e.g. tidal and hydro and EV charge points region-wide. Some felt the region needed to kick start projects that enable communities and businesses to leverage their proximity to large renewable energy plants.

In Mildura, there was much discussion about the proliferation of solar farms with even more project proposals in discussion. There are expected to markedly boost the region's energy capacity. However most believe the network has to be augmented to provide sufficient capacity for industrial and agricultural growth. Putting in another line to enable new tracts of land to be opened up was seen a priority alongside solar power generation to assist vulnerable customers.

Overall, most participants gained value from the discussions as evidenced by forum evaluation outcomes. Across the regions, there is a strong focus on the transition to renewable energy (a 'green' future) and CPPCUE's ability to provide further leadership, innovation, education, collaboration and partnerships to address the opportunities that lie ahead.

7. Evaluation of the forums

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire following the forums. Twenty three responses were obtained (seven in Melbourne, nine in Geelong and seven in Mildura). The charts in this section show the number of participants who gave the responses rather than percentages, due to the small sample size.

Overall, the evaluation of the forums was very positive with all 23 rating the forum they attended as excellent or good. In the open text comments particular praise was given to the level of discussion and sharing of information and ideas at tables.

“Great forum, thank you for the opportunity to participate.”

“Very interactive, good discussion and info sharing.”

“A positive format, well structured.”

Figure 2: Overall rating of the forum (# raw scores)

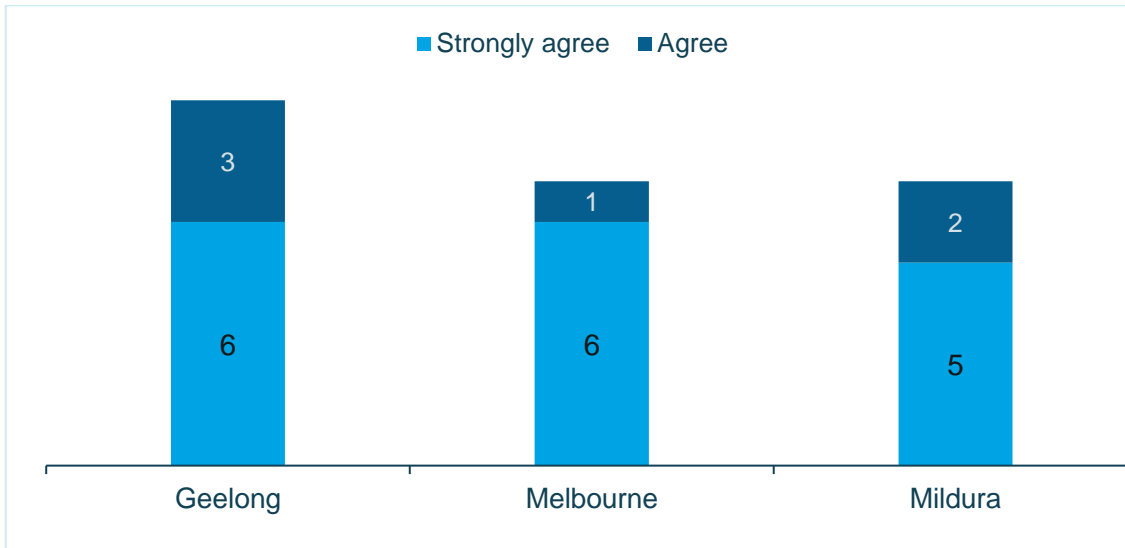


Base: n=23

Q1. Overall, how would you rate the forum?

Most participants strongly agreed that they had an opportunity to express their concerns, ideas and perspectives in a supported way (17 out of 23) with the remaining agreeing with this statement.

Figure 3: Opportunity to express concerns, ideas and perspectives in a supported way (#raw scores)

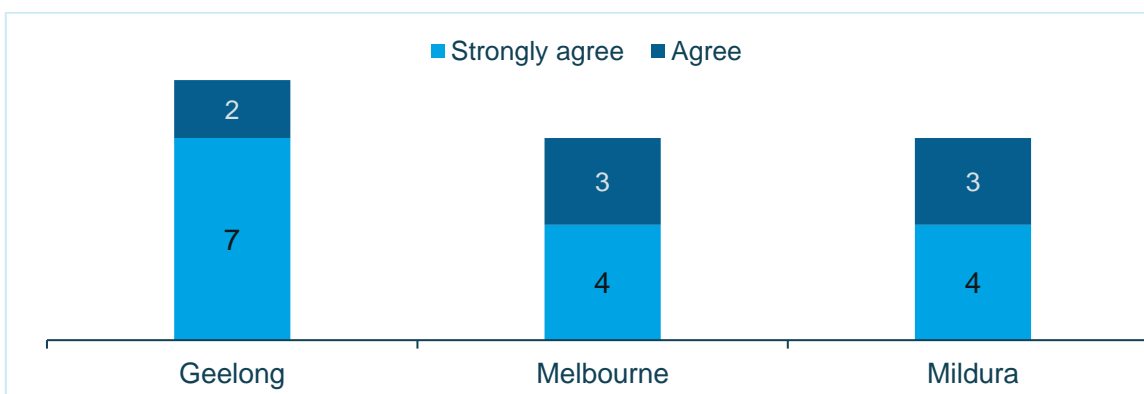


Base: n=23

Q3. As a participant I had the opportunity to express my concerns ideas and perspectives in a supported way.

Participants believed that they were listened to at the forum with most also strongly agreeing that they were heard and had a voice in the discussion (15 out of 23) with the remaining agreeing with this statement.

Figure 4: Being heard and having a voice in the discussion (# raw scores)

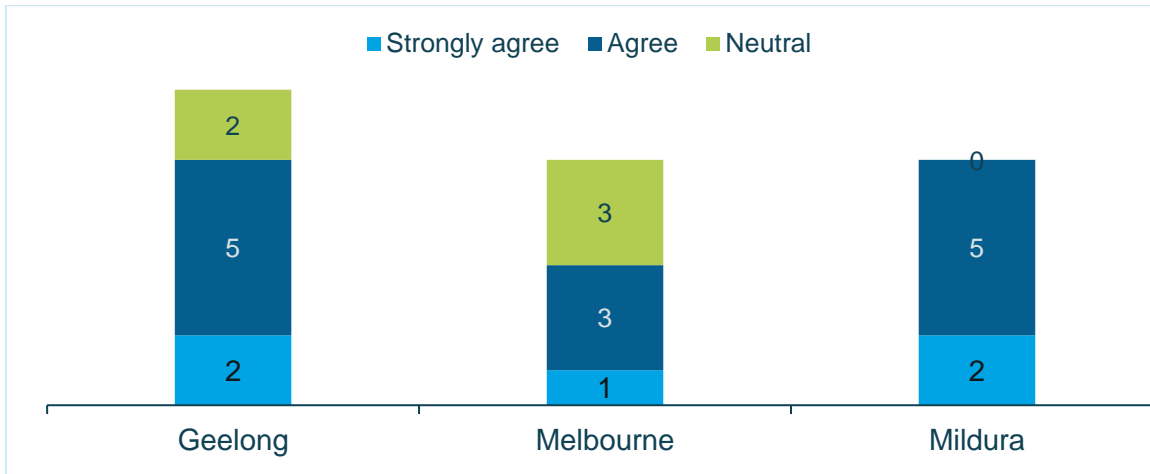


Base: n=23

Q4. I felt like I was heard and I had a voice in the discussion

There was slightly less agreement that the outcomes of the forums would be considered by CPPCUE, with most agreeing with this sentiment with the remaining participants being neutral or strongly agreeing.

Figure 5: The outcomes of the forum being considered (# raw scores)

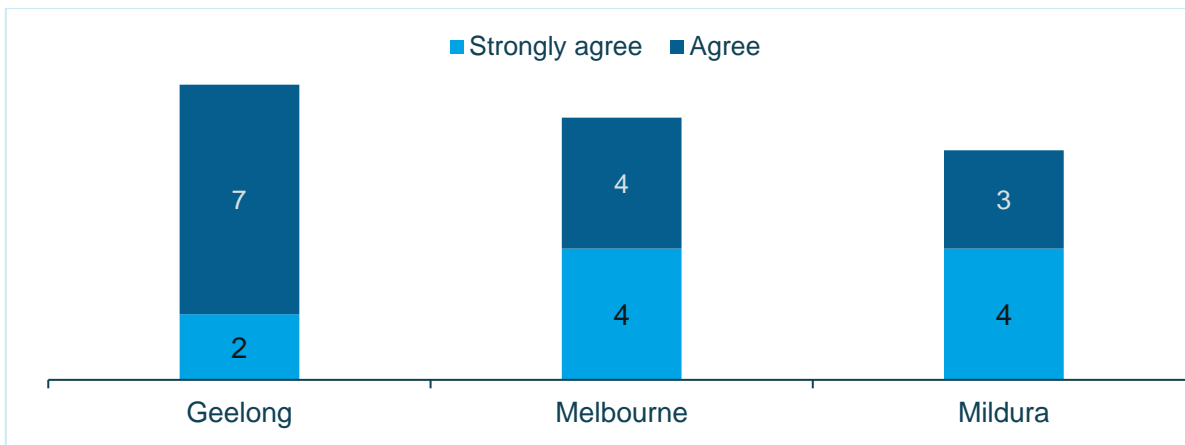


Base: n=23

Q5. I have confidence that the outcomes of the forum will be considered

The forum was believed to be well organised and the content relevant to the majority of participants. Nine of the participants strongly agreed with this with a further 14 agreeing.

Figure 6: Organisation and relevance of content (# raw scores)

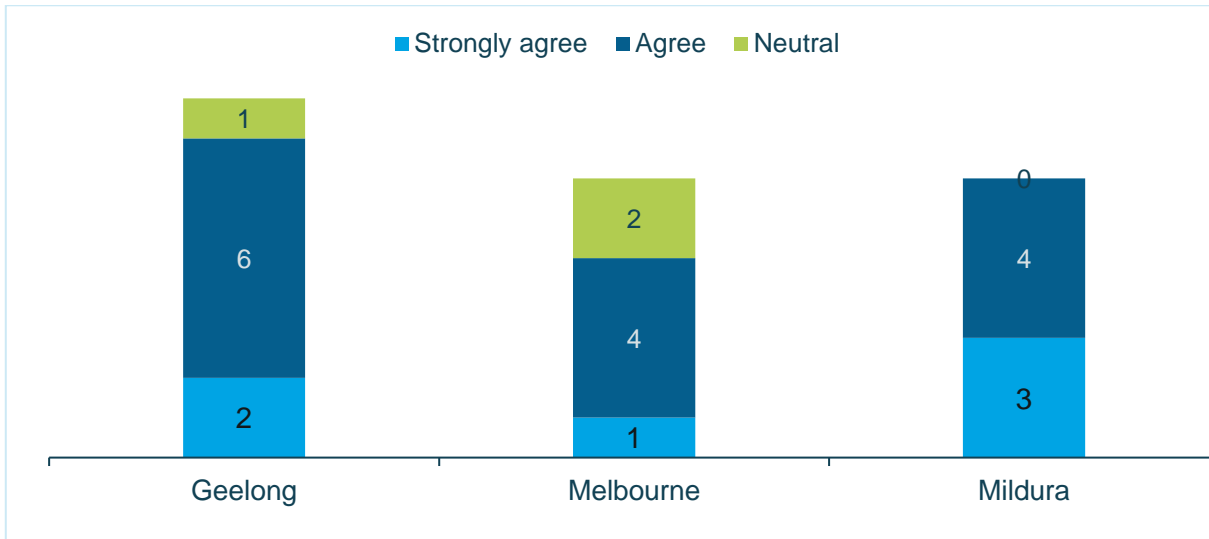


Base: n=23

Q6. The forum was organised and content presented was relevant to the discussion

Most agreed that there was enough time to discuss the topic at hand – 14 agreed and a further six strongly agreed.

Figure 7: Enough time to discuss the topic at hand (# raw scores)



Base: n=23

Q7. There was enough time to discuss the topic at hand

Twenty of the participants agreed that the venue and catering were satisfactory, with three being neutral on this issue.

Comments about improvements to the forum were mainly around having more participants. When asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell us, there were only three comments and all were encouraging and positive.

Appendix A: List of attendees

The following opinion leaders attended the Community Opinion Leaders Forums (more than one representative attended for some organisations):

Melbourne
1Circle
Melbourne Energy Institute
University of Melbourne
Yarra Energy Foundation
Northern Alliance of Greenhouse Action
Moreland Energy Foundation

Geelong
Borough of Queenscliffe
City of Greater Geelong
Geelong Sustainability Group
Golden Plains Shire Council
Surf Coast Shire
Bellarine Community Council Inc.
Local MP
City of Greater Bendigo
Great South Coast Food and Fibre Council
Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action

Mildura
Mildura Regional Development
Mildura Rural City Council
Swan Hill Rural City Council
Nu-Edge Solutions Australia
Qualia Wine

Appendix B: Agenda

Energy Active Regional Communities Opinion Leader Forum Agenda

Time	Session details
2.00pm	Welcome and introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context, overview and objectives of session Outline of CPPCUE i.e. role and services provided
2.25pm	Table discussion: Regional energy issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the big energy distribution issues and questions for your region?
2.45pm	Table feedback: Regional energy issues
2.50pm	Presentation: What CPPCUE have heard so far <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of findings from previous engagement
3.00pm	Table discussion: Energy impacts in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is happening in your community that impacts energy needs?
3.15pm	Table discussion: Current/planned projects in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What current and planned energy projects are happening in your community?
3.40pm	AFTERNOON TEA
4.00pm	Plenary: Summary of forum map Lead facilitator summarises impacts and current/planned energy projects.
4.05pm	Table discussion: Desired local future projects (up until 2025) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What other community energy projects would you like to see by 2025 in this region?
4.20pm	Table discussion: Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does your community value most with regard to energy? How do your local community values align with the broader community values?
4.25pm	Presentation: Energy 'value propositions' for 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the benefits that the network would like to deliver by 2025
4.35pm	Table discussion: Your views on the 2021-25 'Value Propositions' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reactions to the Value Propositions and prioritisation
4.50pm	Presentation: The future role of distributors and organisations in the community
4.55pm	Table discussion: The role of distributors and organisations in the community

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What should the role be of the electricity distributor in your local area in 2025?• Is there potential for distributors to partner with/collaborate with organisations in the community?
5.15pm	Table feedback: The role of distributors and organisations in the community
5.30pm	CLOSE

Appendix C: Activity Sheet 1



ACTIVITY SHEET 1 Current and Planned Energy Projects in the Region

Project name:	
Is it a current or planned project?	<div>Current</div> <div>Planned</div>
What type of project is this?	
What size/scale is this project?	
Who is the project leader (individual or organisation)?	
Where is the project located?	
Any further details?	

Appendix D: Activity Sheet 2



ACTIVITY SHEET 2

Which of the following scenarios aligns best with the energy future and projects you would like to see in your area by 2025?

(please tick the box next to the scenario)

Steady State

Electricity is managed and supplied in much the same way as it is today, considered as business-as-usual. There is a strong driver to reduce costs while maintaining network performance and ensuring security of supply.



Scenario 1

☐

Consumer Power

Electricity supply and demand is markedly impacted by consumers' uptake of new energy efficient appliances, electric vehicles and individuals' investment in renewable energy sources.



Scenario 2

☐

Green Power

The electricity network (and market) adapts to a greener future quickly, backed by more investment in alternative energy sources and policies that encourage more ambitious renewable energy targets.



Scenario 3

☐

Please explain your answer:

Appendix E: Value Propositions



Value Propositions

Please choose the top 5 value propositions that you think are most important for CitiPower to focus on, and rank them 1 to 5 (1 being the most important, 5 the least).

Value Proposition	Ranking
Making it easier for you to export solar and charge your battery Removing network constraints; allowing you to export the solar power you generate	
Making it easier for you to use your data to make informed choices Providing wider access to data (for customers who allow it) will allow you to participate in new markets, including demand response and market trading Real time data should be easily accessible	
Making it easier for you to connect Streamline connections processes. Accommodate more renewable generator connections	
Committed to providing a reliable supply of electricity Our commitment is to maintain a reliable (and safe) electricity supply Explore how we can manage reliability with the update of renewables	
Committed to providing a safe network that mitigates bushfire risks We will continue to meet our bushfire mitigation obligations	
Committed to providing a safe environment for customers and workers Safety is our first priority. We continue to adopt best practices on managing safety, including the update of data and analytical tools as they become available, to manage safety risks.	
Keeping your data and our network secure As data availability increases, data security and managing privacy becomes of utmost importance Continue to evolve our practices to meet our obligations to securely store data	
Use electricity when you want or receive savings for reducing use Different pricing options to allow you to reduce your electricity costs Demand response programs that provide rebates or other incentives for reducing usage at certain times	
Maintaining affordability Affordability remains a priority. Initiatives that allow us to reduce costs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using data analytics to minimise waste and better understand the condition of our network • embracing technology to make smarter network decisions • finding the best value contractors • use a mix of employees and business partners to ensure our resourcing levels are flexible 	

Appendix F: Information Sheet

What residents and businesses value most about their electricity supply:



Residents	Total %	CP %	PC %	UE %	Businesses	Total %	CP %	PC %	UE %
Reliability/consistent supply	73	77	75	70	Reliability/consistent supply	88	91	89	84
Price/low cost/value	67	71	64	69	Price/low cost/value	74	76	71	77
Customer service	15	14	14	18	Fast response to supply issues/probs	18	19	18	18
Fast response to supply issues/probs	11	11	13	10	Customer service	17	19	16	17
Sustainability/eco friendly	10	13	9	9	Communication (about outages)	8	8	10	4
Good maintenance	6	3	7	6	Safety	7	8	8	7
No spikes/surges	6	5	6	5	No spikes/surges	7	4	8	9
Other	31	32	28	32	Sustainability/eco friendly	6	8	6	4
Reliability was also the number one priority for large business customers – uninterrupted high quality supply. Cost was also key.					Other	27	20	27	31

Base: All respondents (residents n=1843, businesses n=601)

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