

# CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN ENERGY NETWORKS: INNOVATIONS & CHALLENGES

Report on National Energy Networks Forum

September 2014



The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre Ltd. (CUAC) would like to thank the speakers who shared their knowledge and expertise at the forum. We would also like to thank the Australian Energy Regulator for providing the venue and catering for the forum and the Consumer Advocacy Panel which supported CUAC's application for facilitation and the costs of flying consumer colleagues in from other states.

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# Consumer Engagement in Energy Networks: Innovations & Challenges

## CUAC Report on National Energy Networks Forum

### Introduction

#### About the report

This report brings together the high level learning from the *Consumer Engagement in Energy Networks: Innovations & Challenges* forum on 3 June 2014. The forum aimed to assist energy network businesses in Australia, to develop their consumer engagement strategies as part of their price reset process. The forum brought together experts from regulatory bodies, government departments, industry, and consumer organisations to grapple with various approaches to consumer engagement. This report provides a brief overview of the presentations and comments made by participants. The report is structured on the forum agenda.

#### Background

Recently there has been greater recognition given to the importance of involving consumers in energy and water issues. Within the energy and water policy areas, CUAC and other consumer advocates have seen a marked increase in the number of government, regulatory and business engagement processes calling for input from advocates and the community. Energy network businesses have been developing, implementing or evaluating their various approaches to consumer engagement following the Australian Energy Market Commission's (AEMC) 'Consumer Engagement Blueprint' and the Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) Consumer Engagement Guideline for Network Service Providers.

Given the recent increase in engagement processes, and a recent move by many industry bodies to reform their consumer engagement processes, CUAC released the [\*Meaningful & Genuine Engagement: Perspectives from consumer advocates\*](#) report in November 2013, to add to the body of information available on community and consumer engagement. The report provides a unique perspective from the voices of 28 advocates with a depth of professional knowledge and experience in utilities and other general consumer issues. It focuses on the insights shared by the advocates interviewed and recommends some resources including tool-kits and 'how to' guides to guide best practice engagement.

The forum aimed to build on and share knowledge on consumer engagement.

#### About the forum

On 3 June 2014, CUAC hosted the *Consumer Engagement in Energy Networks: Innovations & Challenges* forum at the Rendezvous Grand Hotel in Melbourne. The forum was well attended by 65 participants from Victoria and inter-state representing regulatory bodies, government departments,

industry, and consumer organisations. (See Appendix 1 for a list of forum participants, and Appendix 2 for a list of speakers and their bios.)

## Session 1: Key expectations from consumer engagement

Andrew Reeves, Chair, Australian Energy Regulator

John Bradley, CEO, Energy Networks Association

Jo De Silva, Senior Policy Officer, South Australian Council of Social Service; Convenor, National Consumer Roundtable on Energy

This session sets the scene for what the regulator, industry and consumer advocates expect from consumer engagement by energy network businesses in the upcoming distribution price review process.

### Andrew Reeves

Andrew Reeves started with an overview of the AER's Consumer Engagement Guideline for Network Service Providers, which was one of the outcomes of the AER's Better Regulation Program in 2013. Andrew explained that while the guideline is not mandatory, it contains a set of principles and expectations. Within the iap2<sup>1</sup> public participation spectrum of 'inform,' 'consult,' 'involve,' 'collaborate,' and 'empower,' consumer engagement under the guideline would fall somewhere between 'consult' and 'collaborate.' Andrew observed that there was real engagement in the process as consumer groups and businesses got involved in the development of the guideline. He emphasised that consumer engagement should not be tagged onto normal business processes, but should form part of or be embedded into the normal behaviour of the business. He believed that such behavioural change can be brought about through the AER's dialogue with network businesses and direct contact with the Consumer Challenge Panel's members in the AER's price reset process. Andrew said that the AER would look to see how engagement with consumers has shaped the businesses' regulatory proposals.

### John Bradley

It was interesting to hear John Bradley speak about how the relationship between network businesses and customers has evolved and is evolving (see Appendix 3). John explained that energy is no longer a utility commodity, but a *service*, and that networks exist to serve customer needs. He emphasised that trust is the foundation of a long-term partnership with consumers and that consumer trust in the network service provider is an essential pre-requisite to journey together. John also provided some examples of 'innovation in engagement channels':

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<sup>1</sup> Iap2 means the International Association of Public Participation

- Some overnight successes have been 10 years in the making; for example, ACTEW AGLs pioneering work in Willingness to Pay and Choice Modelling
- Structured engagement processes in the development of regulatory proposals, pricing, infrastructure planning, and reliability investment
- Interactive customer websites; for example, ‘Connecting with You’ (Energex), ‘Talking Power’ (SA Power Networks), ‘Your Power, Your Say’ (Networks NSW) and ‘Talking Electricity’ (CitiPower and Powercor Australia), ‘Energy Easy’ (United Energy).
- Re-vitalisation of existing network business’ customer advisory groups
- Enhanced websites to provide real time customer information on network performance.

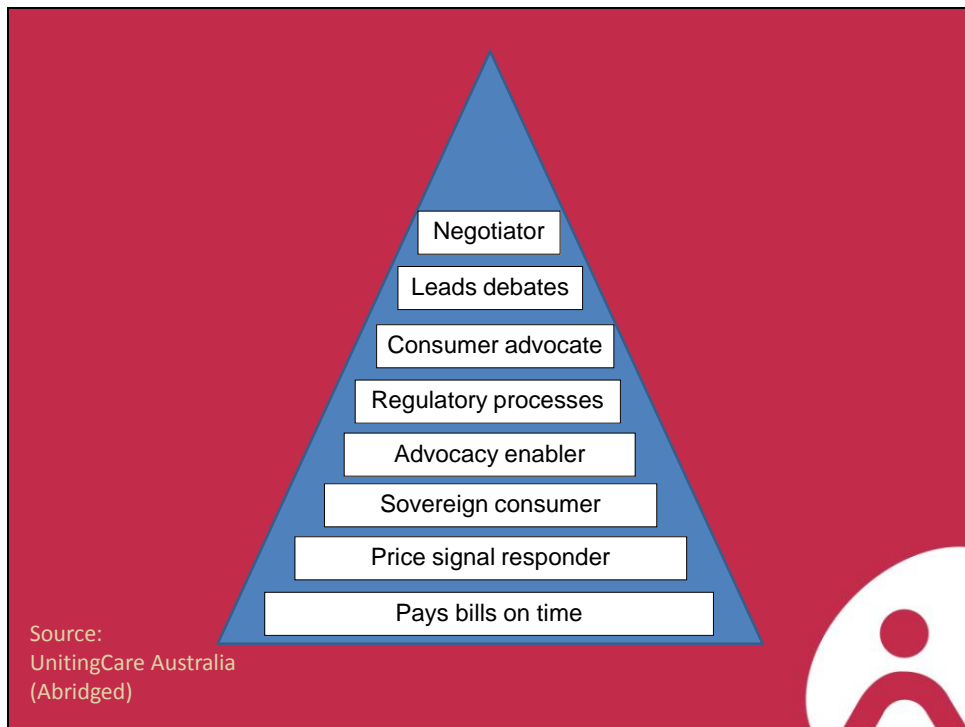
John concluded by summing up ENA’s expectations from consumer engagement:

- Energy network businesses are responsible for their customer relationship, not a regulatory intermediary or retailer
- ENA supports the flexibility of the AER Guideline
  - Principles not prescription.
  - Tailored to recognise differences
  - Building capacity over time
- Engagement should be accessible, meaningful and transparent about what can be influenced, and how views were considered
- Engagement requirements should not be duplicative and should recognise time commitments of consumers
- Regulatory frameworks should not inhibit the ability of networks to meet changing consumer needs

### **Jo De Silva**

Jo De Silva considered the AER’s Consumer Engagement Guideline for Network Service Providers and proposed some minimum criteria for consumer engagement. In Jo’s presentation (see Appendix 4) she covered some of the key points articulated in CUAC’s research *Meaningful & Genuine Engagement: Perspectives from Consumer Advocates* – clarification of the roles and objectives of the engagement, transparency, understanding the diversity of stakeholders and accessing that diversity using a variety of engagement methods. Jo suggested that industry develop KPIs on consumer engagement.

Jo introduced UnitingCare Australia’s pyramid which shows different tiers of consumer types, to illustrate that it is not possible for all consumers to get across all the details of energy issues especially with energy network issues which are complex. Jo explained that customers in each of these tiers are provided with an appropriate level of information. She said that complex information should be broken down and framed in a way which is meaningful to a consumer’s day-to-day life, such as how a particular issue impacts their bills.



Jo ended her presentation by outlining the role of the AER's Consumer Challenge Panel of which she is a member.

## Session 2a: Engagement methodologies

Dr Helen Kimberley, Senior Manager, Brotherhood of St Laurence - Social Analysis Techniques  
 Jo Benvenuti, Executive Officer, CUAC - Consumer research  
 Shaunagh Stevens, Disability advocate - Access issues

Helen Kimberley and Jo Benvenuti shared their perspectives on some of the engagement methodologies they have used in their research. Shaunagh Stevens gave a moving account of the challenges she has experienced as a disability advocate. Speakers also referred participants to links relevant to engagement methodologies.

### Helen Kimberly

Dr Helen Kimberly, who is an expert on participatory and developmental research methodologies, spoke about the 'degrees of separation;' i.e. how close network businesses wanted to be with their consumers determines the type of engagement method they use (see Appendix 5). Helen explained the pros and cons of each method:

- While an online survey is an easy method, it excludes people who do not have Internet access or the necessary skills needed to engage.

- Some people resent emails inviting them to participate in a survey.
- Unsolicited telephone surveys can be annoying to households especially if they happen at an inconvenient time. Telephone surveys are usually made via landlines and will not reach households who do not have fixed lines or households who have blocked their lines from unsolicited calls.
- Interviews and focus groups are good for qualitative data and can help educate participants. However, they are time consuming and it may also be difficult to find a sample and the skills required to undertake this form of research.

Helen provided practical tips on what energy network businesses should consider when undertaking consumer engagement.

- Information has to be clear and in an accessible language (i.e. plain English, non-technical language).
- Integrity and value - People need to believe that consumer engagement is worth their time and that it makes a difference.
- Research ethics – refer to the National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research.
- Minimising risk to consumers - for e.g. psychological harm, devaluation of personal worth if people do not understand what they have been asked to do, relational harm, economic harm, legal harm.
- Privacy and confidentiality – see the Australian Privacy Principles.

Ultimately to gain consumer interest and trust, research undertaken must not only meet the hallmarks of honesty and integrity, but must be seen by consumers as doing so.

### **Jo Benvenuti**

Jo Benvenuti provided a high level summary of CUAC's [Meaningful & Genuine Engagement: Perspectives from Consumer Advocates](#). In particular, Jo spoke about the importance of making complex information accessible and the various ways to engage, including survey and focus exercises, face to face consultation, ongoing methods such as customer consultative committees and social learning and deliberative processes for building stakeholder knowledge. Jo identified as a challenge, the issue of weighing up or measuring the different views of consumers. This would require: (1) significant consideration by network businesses in engagement and decision making design; (2) thereafter, for the Consumer Challenge Panel to advise the AER on network businesses' engagement strategies; and (3) finally, for the AER, to assess the engagement strategies and how these have been accounted for by the network businesses in price reset proposals.

Jo stressed that energy network businesses need to ensure that consumers understand the context and impact of the projects in which businesses are engaging. This will assist consumers weigh the costs and benefits of providing network businesses with their preferences, and in turn better understand the decisions made by network businesses. Jo pointed out that for electricity network

businesses in particular, issues of system reliability, safety, and cross subsidy in underlying network tariffs are live ones and as the broader community is largely unaware of these issues, Jo said that increasing community understanding will be an important component of ensuring that consumers are in a position to engage on these important developments.

### **Shaunagh Stevens**

Shaunagh Stevens spoke about the barriers to engagement she, as well as other people with disabilities, experienced, which led to their underrepresentation in consumer engagement (see Appendix 6). She highlighted the fact that while people with disabilities face physical, education and employment barriers, the most difficult barrier was the general attitudes of people who looked at people with disabilities with pity. Shaunagh offered a few tips on how to engage with people with disabilities: (1) treat people with disabilities like you want to be treated; (2) relax and be yourself; (3) speak to us and not our carers; (4) actively listen and do not assume what people with disabilities can/can't do.

The participants learned how the type of disability people had influences how they would engage with people. Shaunagh explained that amongst people who are hard at hearing, some can hear, while others lip read, or use sign language. Thus, there may be a need to get an interpreter for someone who is deaf in the audience. For those struggling with cognitive disabilities, Shaunagh advised that they need to be given enough time to speak. She also said that when meeting people who are visually impaired: (1) always introduce yourself when entering the room, (2) always let them know when you are leaving; (3) avoid grabbing them.

Shaunagh emphasised that businesses need to consider where they hold their consumer engagement and whether the venue has disabled access. On occasions she had been told that there were facilities for disabled people available, only to be disappointed when she arrived and found out that these facilities were unavailable.

- Shaunagh thought that focus groups are a great way to engage if the venue is accessible and has disabled facilities; i.e.
  - smooth travel to the venue;
  - free from steps, steep inclines and uneven surfaces;
  - wide corridors to accommodate wheelchair;
  - open plan meeting room;
  - accessible toilet much bigger than the average toilet;
  - car park bigger than the average car park.

Shaunagh said that surveys online may not be accessible to people who are unable to push keys; some people get into a spasm when they are moving the cursor to click 'yes' or 'no.'

She recommended participants refer to the Office of Disability Access to Building Checklist<sup>2</sup> as a guide on what to look for in a venue which is accessible to people with disabilities. She also explained the concept of ‘universal design’ where diversity is respected by the new building environment.

## Session 2b: Let’s hear from industry: various approaches

Benjy Lee, Manager, Energy & Carbon Policy, Jemena

Tarnya McKenzie, Manager, Marketing & Communications, Yarra Valley Water

Sara Collins, Community Strategy Manager, Ergon Energy

Sean Kelly, GM Corporate Strategy, SA Power Networks

The speakers from the energy network businesses shared how their respective businesses developed their consumer engagement strategies; they spoke about their experiences with consumer engagement including the challenges, and where each of their respective businesses were in engaging with consumers as part of the price reset process. Tarnya McKenzie shared Yarra Valley Water’s (YVW) experience with consumer engagement in the last water price review from. YVW is recognised as an industry leader in consumer engagement.

### Benjy Lee

Benjy Lee drew a fascinating parallel between undertaking consumer engagement for a five year plan and tandem skydiving. He likened Jemena’s Stakeholder Consultative Committee to the sky-diving instructor instrumental in assisting him jump out of the plane (see Appendix 7).

Benjy explained that when Jemena developed their consumer engagement plan, they looked at CUAC’s research report *Meaningful & Genuine Engagement: Perspectives from Consumer Advocates* and attended some of Yarra Valley Water’s (YVW’s) consumer engagement events.

He outlined Jemena’s price review engagement timetable and the various engagement activities along the way. This included discussions with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and people with disabilities; deliberative forums involving longer focus groups with the ‘mums and dads’ category of customers and small business; direct engagement with some customer groups; engagement via Jemena’s website. Benjy also mentioned a few of Jemena’s other engagement activities including, the Electricity Outlook web portal where customers are able to see their actual usage and community newsletters.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-business-and-community/community-involvement/people-with-disability-in-the-community/accessible-goods,-services,-facilities-and-events/accessible-facilities-and-events/accessible-facilities-checklist>

## **Tarnya McKenzie**

Tarnya McKenzie gave an overview of Yarra Valley Water's (YVW) three year engagement roadmap which was used for water plan 3 (see Appendix 8).

She shared some key insights from YVW's experience in consumer engagement, often cited as representing best practice:

- Consumer engagement is very challenging. Despite their efforts engagement is still low (for e.g. less than 50 per cent of their customers are aware that YVW disposes sewage).
- It is critical to breakdown engineering terminology into digestible, relatable components which customers can relate to.
- The customer perspectives altered as a result of participating in the deliberative forum towards a more favourable assessment of YVW and its water plans. However, there are still 1.7 million customers who did not get to participate in the forum, who still need to be engaged.

Tarnya's assessment is that, 'consumer engagement is hard but worthwhile.'

## **Sara Collins**

Sara outlined Ergon Energy's approach to consumer engagement for the price reset process (see Appendix 9) – their engagement methods included customer discussion groups, online surveys, and a deliberative forum. She mentioned the peak bodies Ergon Energy engaged with, which included the Customer Council Working Group, local government engagement (including A&TSI), Developers Reference Group, and the Solar Industry & Electrical Contractors Sessions. Sara provided a brief history about the Customer Council, which was set up in 2011 (following the dismantling of the regional electricity councils). She also spoke about the relationship between the Customer Council and the working group - the Customer Council Working Group sits under the Customer Council and has a smaller number of members who are able to focus on the details of regulatory issues.

## **Sean Kelly**

Sean Kelly began his presentation with a brief history of SA Power Network - as the sole network business for the whole of South Australia, SA Power Network has had a contractual relationship with customers since 1988 and has been involved with customer engagement for many years. Sean spoke about SA Power Network's Talking Power consultation program (see Appendix 10). He explained that SA Power Networks began its research process into consumer engagement in late 2012, and identified four core areas of interest for electricity consumers i.e. customer experience, community safety and reliability, evolving customer, visual amenity. Sean said that SA Power Network's engagement methods included workshops (CBD and regional areas), working groups, bilateral meetings, the Talking Power website, eNewsletters, and an online survey. Sean mentioned that SA Power Networks engaged an independent facilitator to canvass the views of customers – the facilitator developed the online survey; the survey used objective questions; customers had the option

of answering the survey on the phone; the survey was advertised using print, electronic and social media; the independent facilitator presented the findings to management.

### **Session 3: From planning to practice**

Session 3 was a breakout session where small groups, most with representatives from industry, regulatory bodies, government departments and consumer organisations, workshopped on how to engage, improve existing consumer engagement models, and overcome challenges to engagement using case scenarios (see Appendix 11). The case scenarios described typical issues which energy network businesses encounter in their business operations. These case scenarios can be used by energy network businesses when they are educating their staff about consumer engagement.

It was great to see participants draw from their own experience of consumer engagement and apply some of the information presenters had shared in the earlier sessions to the case scenarios. Each group reported back to the forum what their suggested solutions to the case scenarios were. Feedback from participants indicated that they enjoyed the interactive nature of this session.

### **Session 4: Take home messages**

Michelle Groves, CEO, Australian Energy Regulator  
Richard Owens, Director, Australian Energy Market Commission  
John Bradley, CEO, Energy Networks Association  
Jo De Silva, Senior Policy Officer, South Australian Council of Social Service; Convenor,  
National Consumer Roundtable on Energy

The speakers shared what their key observations from the forum were.

#### **John Bradley**

John Bradley noted that there was a strong consistency amongst consumer advocates on what represented good practice; there was also a lot of alignment with the AER consumer engagement guideline and what energy network businesses were undertaking in their engagement. John stressed that it was important to build capacity within the network business, with consumer advocates as well as with the community, and to be realistic and pragmatic about where the business was going to engage on the engagement spectrum. He thought that 'playing back' research findings back to the business can lead to cultural change and activate the business.

John identified as a challenge, how businesses handle the tradeoffs between groups of consumers. While forums can improve the value from the dollar perspective for the group of consumers who are participating, there is still a need for the business to translate the outcomes from the forum to the

larger community. He said that the consumer engagement process needs to provide value for money on the part of consumer representatives as well as consumers who are passed on the network charges.

### **Michelle Groves**

Michelle Groves emphasised that it was important for the Energy Networks Association to share best practice - the good and the bad – and create an atmosphere where we can have the discussion. This would allow us to learn from the mistakes as well as from what businesses did well. Michelle's view was that consumer engagement should move from being seen as an 'add on' to something which is embedded within the business as usual. She suggested that businesses engage the community with drafting the regulatory proposal at the start. This means that a business should incorporate consumer engagement as part of their business as usual process, bring the customer experience back to the business, and have that reflected by engineers, planners etc. Michelle also suggested that local government, which has good insight into issues of service delivery, become a more natural part of the process for distribution businesses.

### **Richard Owens**

Richard Owens highlighted the need for the purpose of consumer engagement to be clearly stated. He noted that in the case scenario on the substation (See Appendix 11, Case study 2: Regional Network), the business had already made its decision. Richard stressed that a network business needs to consult early on, consult widely, and identify the issues which are important to consumers. He agreed with what Tarnya McKenzie had said in her presentation (session 2b), that consumer engagement is hard but worth it. In Richard's experience, customers better appreciate what an energy network business does where consultation is meaningful and rigorous and not a 'sales' job where the business sells the regulatory proposal it has developed. There needs to be a dialogue between the customer and the business.

### **Jo De Silva**

Jo De Silva noted that as consumer engagement is long term, the resourcing of consumers is an issue. She emphasised that it was important to consider the purpose of consumer engagement – define the task, enable transparency and accountability – and the means of addressing the purpose. In Jo's view, KPIs were critical to the process, and businesses need to have a long term consumer engagement strategy so that they can see the results over the long term. She cited the AER Customer Consultative Group and the Consumer Challenge Panel as examples of long term consumer engagement. Jo referred to what John Bradley mentioned earlier in his presentation (session 1); that the network exists to serve customer needs. That being so customers need to be at the centre of the engagement. She said that consumer engagement is not all fear and anxiety as risks could be reframed as opportunities. Jo recommended having a 'brains trust' for consumer engagement with network businesses where we can learn lessons and keep all the information in one place. She also suggested that CUAC work with the Energy Networks Association on how to resource

the brains trust and include consumer participation within that body.

## **Q & A – The forum participants speak**

We had a vibrant Q & A session following the presentations, where participants shared what they had learned from the forum and what their take home message was. The following comments/ideas were captured:

1. Flowing from Jo De Silva's idea of a 'brains trust' (session 4), a number of participants expressed interest in having more detailed discussions, to consolidate learning, and to share what's working well and not working in consultation with consumer organisations. It was suggested that the Energy Networks Association (ENA) play a role in this.
2. A few participants noted that there were good examples on consumer engagement outside the energy and water space.
3. It was noted that as consumer groups have limited resources to participate in consultations, they need to focus on issues that give the largest return; for e.g. it may not make sense to have an extensive consultation process where the consumer impact is small
4. A few participants asked the AER to clarify what their approach to consumer engagement undertaken by energy network businesses was. The AER said that they would be looking for behavioural change; in particular, whether consumer engagement is part of the normal business activity of the network business and how consumer input has influenced the regulatory proposal that has been put before them. The AER believed that they would be better informed with the broad access to information from different perspectives through the AER Customer Consultative Group and the Consumer Challenge Panel and thus make decisions that are more reflective of the long term interests of consumers
5. It was observed that customer consultative committees (CCCs) are a good starting point to build capacity; CCCs can help to facilitate cultural and behavioural change in the business.
6. A few participants voiced that there is a good business case going forward if consumer engagement is undertaken well.

## Where to from here?

Feedback from participants indicated that they found the presentations and the workshop useful and the forum a good networking opportunity to interact with others who are involved in consumer engagement.

CUAC is keen to work with the ENA to develop some of the ideas which have been suggested in the forum, in particular the idea of a 'brains trust.' CUAC anticipates that forum participants would apply the lessons learned from the forum in developing their businesses' and organisations' consumer engagement frameworks. The extent to which this occurs with energy network businesses would be reflected in the quality of the regulatory proposals submitted by the network businesses to the AER in the upcoming distribution price review process.

## Appendix 1: Forum Participants

- Australian Energy Regulator (AER)
- Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)
- Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO)
- AER Consumer Challenge Panel
- Consumer advocates:
  - Alternative Technology Association
  - Brotherhood of St Laurence
  - Consumer Action Law Centre
  - Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre
  - Council of the Ageing
  - Country Women's Association
  - Disability advocate Shaunagh and Wayne Stevens
  - Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales
  - Gordon Renouf (facilitator)
  - National Seniors
  - Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action
  - Public Interest Advocacy Centre
  - Queensland Council of Social Service
  - St Vincent de Paul Society
  - South Australia Council of Social Service
  - Tasmanian Council of Social Service
  - Victorian Council of Social Service
  - Wurundjeri Elder and Community Planner Aboriginal Partnerships for the City of Yarra, Colin Hunter
- Department of State Development, Business and Innovation
- Department of Industry
- Essential Services Commission
- Distribution businesses – Victoria:
  - CitiPower and Powercor Australia

- Jemena
- SP AusNet
- United Energy & Multinet Gas
  
- Distribution businesses - Inter-state:
  - Aurora Energy
  - APA Group
  - Energex
  - Ergon Energy
  - Network New South Wales (Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy & Essential Energy)
  - SA Power Networks
  
- Energy Network Association (ENA)
  
- Yarra Valley Water

## Appendix 2: Speakers Bios

### **Jo Benvenuti**

Jo is the Executive Officer of the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) and the Chair of the Consumers' Federation of Australia. She has extensive experience in the energy and water sectors where she has been CUAC's Executive Officer since late 2008. Her previous positions in this sector have included Manager Strategic Operations at the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), and as a Policy Officer at the Office of the Regulator-General (now the Essential Services Commission). Jo has also worked in welfare services across a diverse range of policy areas, including the aged, housing, and emergency relief provision, and was previously Executive Officer of the Financial and Consumer Rights Council and Executive Manager Corporate Affairs at the RSPCA (Victoria) where she managed animal cruelty investigations. Jo has post graduate qualifications in public policy.

### **John Bradley**

John has diverse experience in the electricity, gas, water and resources sectors. Prior to his appointment as CEO of the Energy Networks Association, he consulted to the International Monetary Fund on State Owned Enterprise reform. He was previously the Director General of Queensland's Department of Premier and Cabinet until 2012, the Director General of the Department of Environment and Resource Management, from 2009 and the CEO of the Queensland Water Commission during the Millennium drought. He led the restructure of the Western Australian electricity industry in 2006 and the South East Queensland water industry in 2010. Earlier in his career, he undertook regulatory reforms in the gas industry and led significant power and gas infrastructure projects. He currently serves as a non-executive Director of Greening Australia Limited.

### **Sara Collins**

Sara is Ergon Energy's Community Strategy Manager. Her responsibilities range from overseeing their community engagement program around new infrastructure, as well as a portfolio of community partnerships, to providing support to Ergon's regional stakeholder engagement activities. She is currently taking the lead in implementing the customer and community engagement programs informing both Ergon Energy's regulatory proposal and network tariff strategy. Sara has a long career in customer and stakeholder engagement – from corporate communications and marketing roles to direct responsibility for engaging and advocating on day to day customer complaints and ministerial level matters. She's played key stakeholder relations roles in a number of Ergon's natural disaster restoration efforts, including their response following Cyclone Larry and Yasi.

She has a very broad understanding of customer and stakeholders' expectations around electricity supply; of the industry's regulatory framework; as well as the broader management challenges facing utilities. Sara is also here representing the tropical north... coming down from sunny Cairns!

### **Jo De Silva**

Jo is a policy and program manager with over 15 years experience advising governments, community service organisations and regulators. Jo has recently focused on energy and water policy in her role as Senior Policy Officer at the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS). Since commencing this role, Jo has been significantly involved with the review of wholesale electricity costs, retail price deregulation, electricity disconnections policy and the Consumer Advocacy and Research Fund for Water. Jo is an inaugural Member of the Consumer Challenge Panel. The Consumer Challenge Panel is a critical friend to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). It is a panel of individual, independent energy experts, charged with challenging the AER and energy businesses on energy distribution and transmission pricing proposals, in the long term interests of consumers. Jo is also currently the Convenor of the National Consumer Roundtable on Energy.

### **Michelle Groves**

Michelle has been CEO of the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) since its inception in May 2005. Before this, she worked at the National Competition Council for 10 years covering third party access, energy market reform and regulatory reform. She has also worked with the Western Australian State Government. She has qualifications in history and law. Little known but possibly interesting fact – Michelle once appeared on the cover of the Perth afternoon newspaper dressed as a skeleton.

### **Colin Hunter**

Uncle Colin Hunter is a proud Wurundjeri man, whose traditional lands extend from inner city Melbourne, south to the Mordialloc Creek, west to the Werribee River, and east to Mount Baw Baw. You'll notice the importance of waterways in tribal boundaries. As well as his community and cultural work with the Wurundjeri community, Uncle Colin also works as the Aboriginal Partnerships Officer for Yarra City Council. Amongst his career highlights, Colin:

- Oversaw the development of Yarra City Council's Reconciliation Action Plan 2012-215
- Implemented the Aboriginal Partnerships Plan 2011-2014
- Provided input, support and guidance to CUAC's research [Wein, Paen, Ya Ang Gim: Victorian Aboriginal Experiences of Energy and Water](#) as a member of the project Steering Group
- Participated in the Thomas Embling Hospital Mental Health policy reference group
- Conducted a Welcome to Country for the Dalai Lama for his Melbourne visit in 2014

### **Sean Kelly**

Sean has 25 years experience in the energy industry – in the former ETSA Corporation, AGL Energy and the SA Government. He has held senior management roles covering national and state energy policy and regulation, energy pricing, and organisation development as well as a wide range of corporate functions including governance, IT, people and audit. Sean in his role as General Manager Corporate Strategy is responsible for regulation, quality management, corporate portfolio management office and enterprise architecture within SA Power Networks.

**Dr Helen Kimberley**

Helen is Senior Manager of the Retirement and Ageing transition in the Research & Policy Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Her later life research interests include combating ageism and promoting human rights, social determinants of health, the capability approach to ageing and wellbeing, and rethinking Australian social policy for the second half of life. Helen has a particular interest in participatory and developmental research methodologies. She holds a PhD and a BEd from La Trobe University, and is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne and an Honorary Research Fellow at Federation University.

**Benjy Lee**

Benjy's role is Manager Energy and Carbon Policy for Jemena, a unique Australian infrastructure company that builds, owns and manages a combination of major electricity, gas and water assets. Benjy is a 'reformed engineer' with over a decade of communications, policy and community development experience. Benjy has worked in the area of energy and carbon policy development for Jemena for the last 6 years. Benjy's current responsibilities include Jemena's recently developed Customer and Market Engagement Strategy. Jemena has been busy designing and rolling out customer engagement programs for the Jemena Gas Network and Jemena Electricity Network's upcoming price review submissions.

**Tarnya McKenzie**

Tarnya is a senior manager with over 12 years experience in the water industry. In her current role as Manager, Marketing and Communications, she is responsible for brand management, media and public relations, digital marketing, customer programs, stakeholder and community engagement and strategic marketing and communications at Yarra Valley Water, the largest water retailer in Melbourne, Australia.

**Richard Owens**

Richard Owens is Acting Senior Director, Transmission and Distribution Networks at the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC). He manages the AEMC's reviews and rule changes related to electricity and gas networks issues, including projects related to network regulation, pricing and connections. He is also currently overseeing the AEMC's implementation of the demand side participation reforms arising from its Power of Choice review, including rule changes related to distribution network pricing, competition in metering and improving customers' access to their energy consumption information. Prior to joining the AEMC, Richard was a lawyer in law firms and government in Australia and New Zealand where he advised on energy regulatory, competition and consumer law issues.

**Andrew Reeves**

Andrew has been Chair of the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) since July 2010 and a board member since July 2008. Before this, he was commissioner of the Tasmanian Government Prices

Oversight Commission and regulator of the Tasmanian electricity supply industry, responsible for economic and technical regulation. Andrew has also had a range of responsibilities within the Tasmanian government. He has professional qualifications in engineering and economics. Little known but possibly interesting fact - Andrew was once interviewed by ABC radio in Hobart about his Haiku.

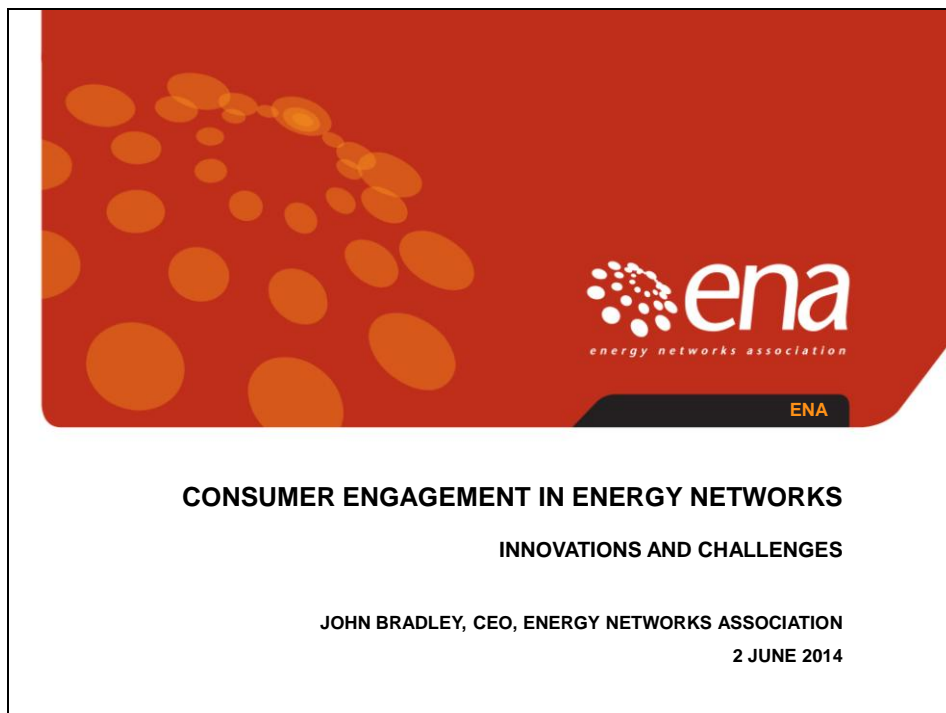
### **Gordon Renouf**

Gordon, a lawyer and consumer advocate, is a consultant whose special expertise includes consumer policy and stakeholder engagement. He is the Deputy Chair of the Consumers' Federation Australia and a member of the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Committee. He is one of the founders of Ethical Consumers Australia and the Chair of the Board of Good Environmental Choice Australia, and Deputy Chair of Justice Connect.

### **Shaunagh Stevens**

Shaunagh was born with cerebral palsy. She is married with two teenage daughters who admire her positive attitude and fighting spirit. She is a fully qualified primary teacher and completed a Diploma in Community Development in 2012. Shaunagh is a committed and passionate advocate who takes a human rights approach to her work. Her sense of justice extends to all disadvantaged groups within the community. In 2013 Shaunagh was nominated for a State award which recognised and rewarded women with disabilities who have made a significant contribution to their community and improved the status of women with disabilities in Victoria. For the past 8 years she has been a valued member of Disability South-east (DAS) an action group working on systemic issues and in 2012 she was elected the groups' first chairperson. She went on to join the Committee of Management of the Disability Resources Centre (DRC) and currently Shaunagh is DRC's secretary. The DRC advocates for adults with disabilities. For the past four years Shaunagh has sat on the COM of Beaconsfield Neighbourhood Centre and currently is their secretary. She also has been a member of the Cardinia Shire Access and Inclusion Advisory committee.

**Appendix 3 - Session1: Key expectations from consumer engagement**  
**John Bradley, CEO, Energy Networks Association**



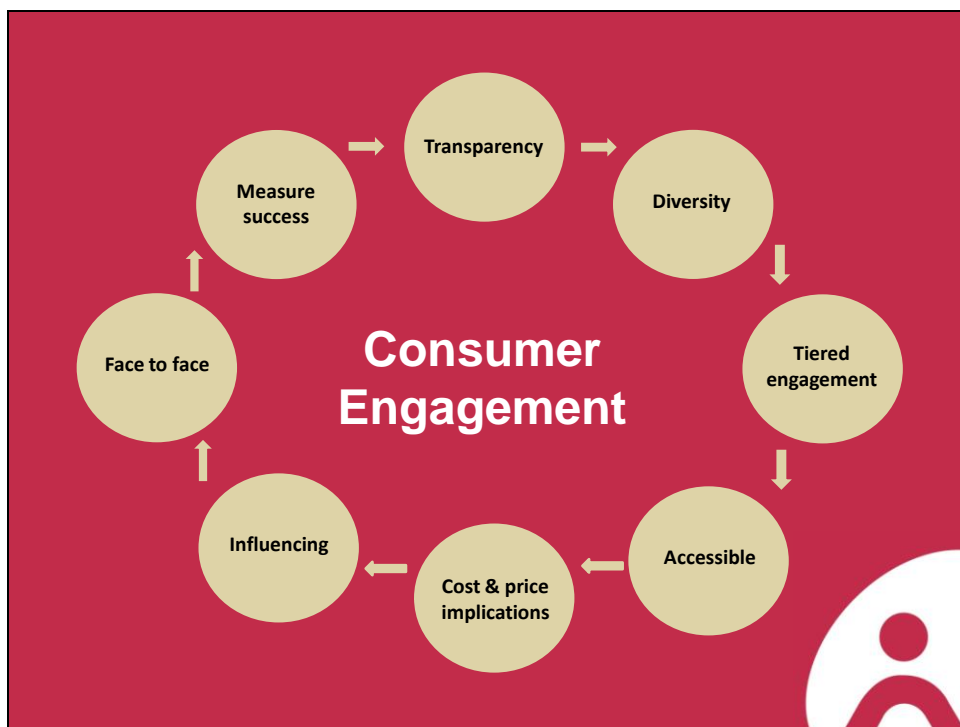
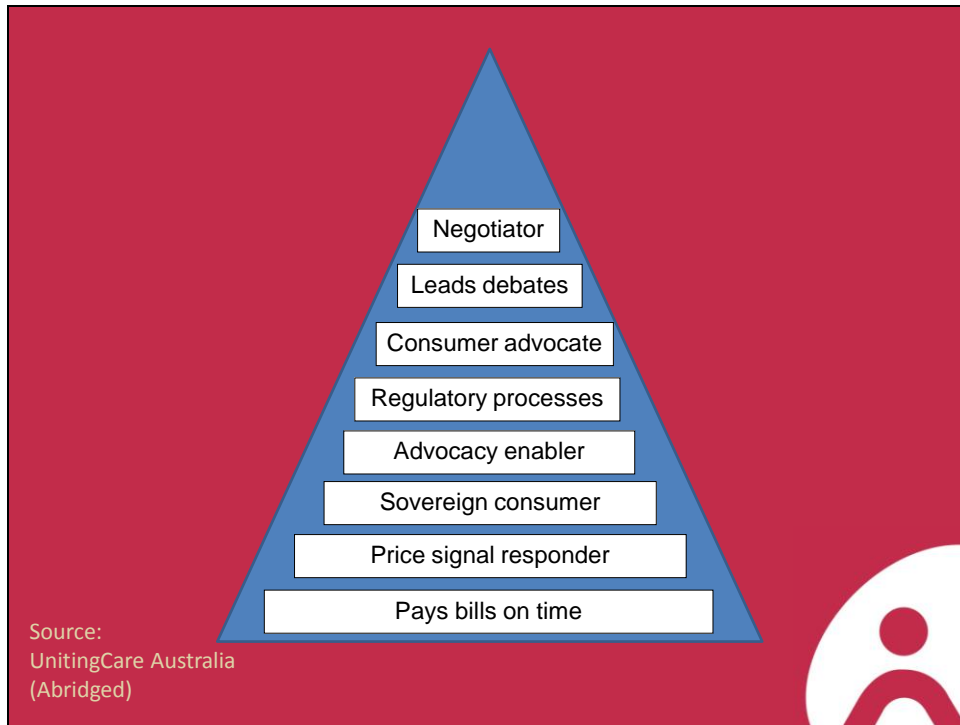
The slide content is presented on a white background with a red header bar at the top, which includes the ENA logo. The main heading is 'Networks exist to serve their customer needs'. Below this, there are three main bullet points: 'A Transforming Relationship:', 'Innovation in Engagement Channels', and 'Demand Side Participation in 'Exchange' Networks'. The first bullet point is further detailed with a sub-bullet 'Negotiated service delivery –' which includes four sub-points: 'Five year business plans', 'Infrastructure Planning', 'Design of Products and Services', and 'Reliability Investment'. The second bullet point is 'Trust is the basis of a long-term partnership with Consumers'.

## Expectations...

- Energy network businesses are **responsible** for their customer relationship, not a regulatory intermediary or retailer.
- ENA supports the **flexibility** of the AER Guideline...
  - Principles not prescription.
  - Tailored to recognise differences
  - Building Capacity over time
- Engagement should be **accessible, meaningful** and **transparent** about what can be influenced, and how views were considered.
- Engagement requirements should **not be duplicative** and should recognise time commitments of consumers.
- Regulatory frameworks should not inhibit the ability of networks to **meet changing consumer needs**


## Appendix 4 - Session1: Key expectations from consumer engagement

Jo De Silva, Senior Policy Officer, South Australian Council of Social Service;  
Convenor, National Consumer Roundtable on Energy



## Appendix 5 - Session 2a: Engagement methodologies

Dr Helen Kimberley, Senior Manager, Brotherhood of St Laurence



# Engagement Considerations

*Consumer Engagement in Energy Networks:  
Innovations and Challenges*  
National Forum, Melbourne, 3 June 2014  
Dr Helen Kimberley  
Brotherhood of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty



# Degrees of separation

How close do you want to be to your consumers?

- Survey
- Interview
- Focus group
- Participatory research

Working for an Australia free of poverty

## Research considerations

- Clear information in accessible language
- Integrity and value
- Research ethics
- Minimising risk to consumers
- Privacy and confidentiality

## The message

How can we gain consumer interest and trust?

Conduct research that not only meets the hallmarks of honesty and integrity but is seen by consumers to do so

## References

- ***The Australian Privacy Principles***  
<http://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-resources/privacy-fact-sheets/other/privacy-fact-sheet-17-australian-privacy-principles>
- ***National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research*** <https://www.nhmrc.files.nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72-national-statement-march-2014-140331.pdf>

## Appendix 6 - Session 2a: Engagement methodologies

### Shaunagh Stevens, Disability Advocate

Hello everyone my purpose today for speaking is to put a face to a group of people – people with disabilities- because we are often underrepresented in various forms of engagement.

People with disabilities face many barriers every day—from physical obstacles in the built environment to systemic barriers in employment education to name a few. Yet, often, the most difficult barriers to overcome are the attitudes of others in regards to us. Whether their attitudes stem from ignorance, fear or misunderstanding these attitudes keep us from appreciating—and experiencing—our full potential.

For instance I am often been pitied or patronised. People have confessed with embarrassment that before they got to know me they'd avoid me. They say they say they feared "doing or saying the wrong thing" *It makes me feel very uncomfortable when I am treated like some sort of inspirational hero because I pursued a profession, got married and raised a family whilst managing my disability.*

People with disabilities *do not* want to be hero worshiped because we perform normal everyday tasks. The way I see it is my disability is here to stay; I have simply learnt to adapt by using my skills and knowledge, just as you have to adapt to being tall, short, and bald.

People assume I have an intellectual disability just because I have a physical one so they often speak to the person I am with rather than me. This makes me feel like a second class citizen.

#### **Here are 3 important tips that will assist you engage with us:**

1. Treat us as you would like to be treated.
  2. Think of the person first, not our disability.
  3. Relax and be yourself!
- Actively listen to us. Do not make assumptions about what we can or cannot do.
  - Talk directly to us, not to our companions, carers, or interpreters

For example when interacting with someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, remember that some individuals may be able to hear, some may be able to lip read, while others prefer to use sign language.

If someone is blind or visually impaired, always introduce yourself and let them know when you are leaving. You may offer your arm or elbow as a guide but never grab the individual or pat their guide dog.

- When interacting with someone who uses a wheelchair, don't invade their personal space by pushing their wheelchair unless they want assistance. Don't lean on, or hold the person's wheelchair.
- If someone has a cognitive disability Speak in clear, simple sentences and give them time to respond. It's ok to ask them to repeat it

### **Now let's take a closer look at the built environment including transport.**

I have had Cerebral Palsy (CP) since birth but like most of you I did not give access a second thought. That was until I needed to use a wheelchair to access the community. Now access or should I say lack thereof is always on my mind because it consistently impacts negatively on my life and my family's life.

If you think about it, we are living longer and throughout our lives we will all experience some level of disability sometimes without warning, hence the need for Universal design

Universal design is "cradle to grave" design; in other words, it is an approach to design that honours human diversity, addressing the right for everyone-- regardless of their age, ability, or circumstance-- to use all space, products, and information in an independent, inclusive, and equal way.

By designing for this diversity, we can create things that are more user-friendly for everyone. For instance, crossovers were designed by and for people using wheelchairs, but as we know they also benefit others e.g. parents with prams.

It was my intention to use my motorised chair and travel here by train. However my inability to find out whether I could catch an accessible tram to get me to my afternoon appt made that impossible.

The accessible environment I need looks like this:

- Wide accessible parking bays that enable me to transfer into my chair from the front seat
- A clear wide *continuous path of travel* with no steps or other barriers (such as steep inclines, uneven or loose surfaces) to the main doors
- An open plan design inside the building best suits my needs. If corridors are necessary then they need to be wide enough to comfortably fit my chair. This will assist me to access the doorways. The doorways need to be wider than normal
- If either the Internal or external paths of travel include a ramp, the slope must meet the Access to premise Standards which came into effect in 2011

- If I need to use a lift it must be large enough to allow me to enter and turn around so I can use the control panel

It is not uncommon for people with disabilities to have continence issues so I cannot stress enough it's much more than an inconvenience when the toilet facilities do not meet their needs. It's their dignity which is at risk. For this reason a room close to an accessible toilet is preferable and an attendant carer is often required.

It is essential that the accessible toilet has:

- Grab rails
- All fixtures such as the toilet, sink, taps, coat hooks and paper towel/ hand dryer at a suitable height and location for ease of use

To finish I'd like to encourage each of you to:

Google the Office of Disability Access to the Built Environment – Checklist and

Next time you are out and about take a closer look at the built environment and ask yourself would Shaunagh be able to access the shops, open spaces and facilities.

I hope that my talk today has raised your awareness re the barriers PWD often encounter when trying to participate in meaningful and genuine engagement.

Thank you


Appendix 7 - Session 2b: Let's hear from industry: various approaches  
Benjy Lee, Manager, Energy & Carbon Policy, Jemena




## Customer Engagement

Benjy Lee  
Manager Energy & Carbon Policy

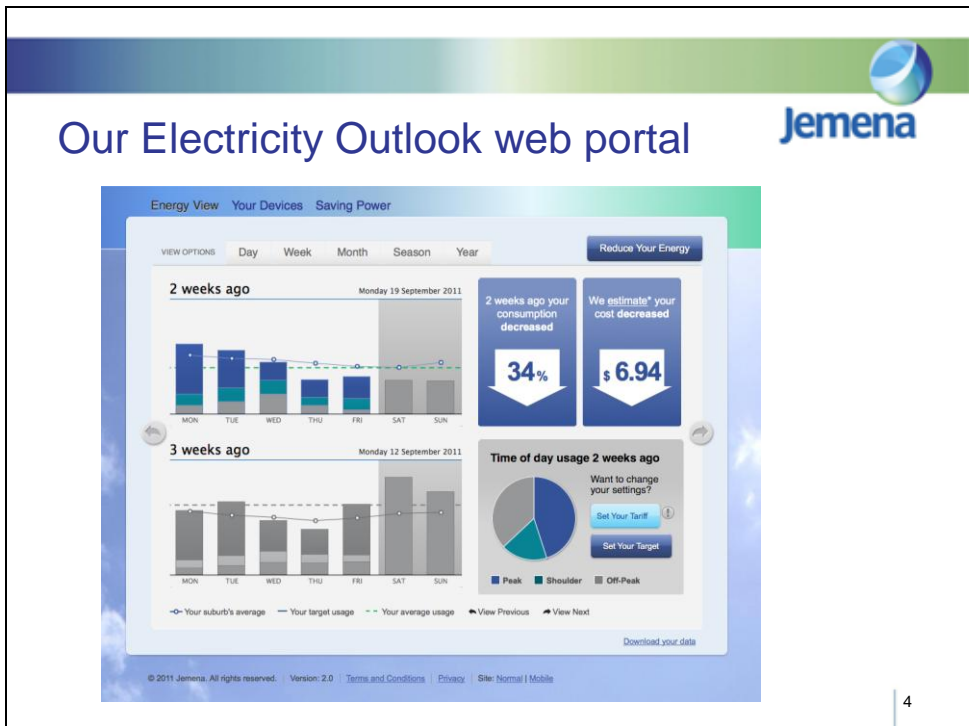
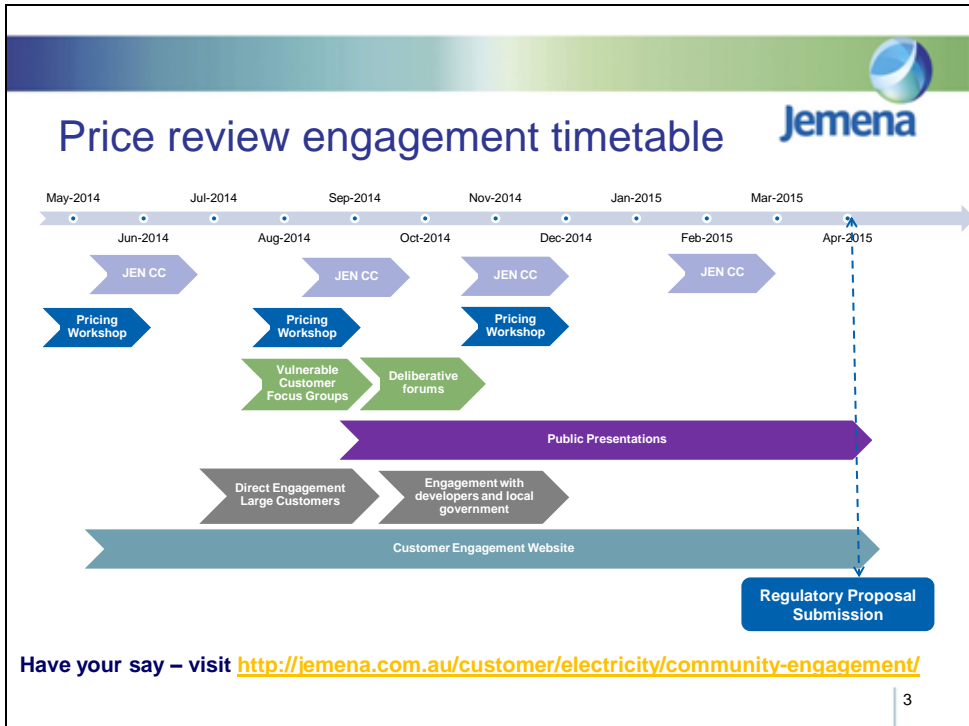
30 May 2014



Taking our consumer engagement to the next level ...

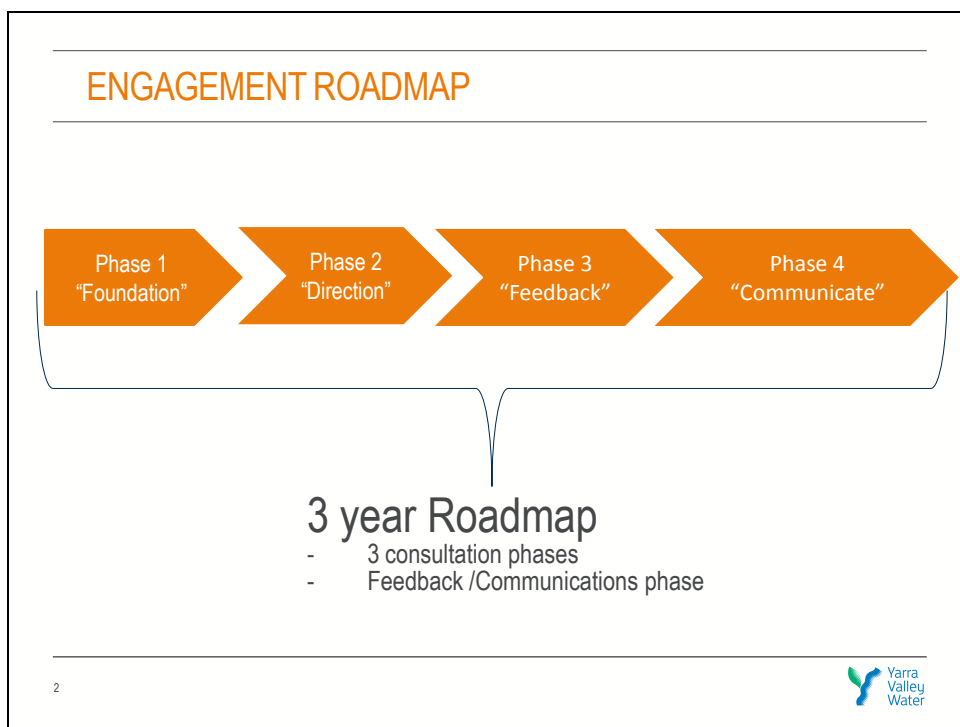


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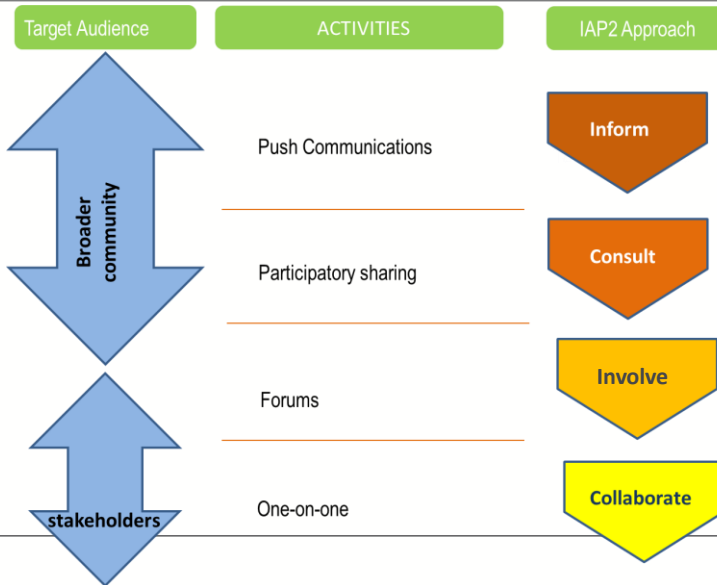


## Appendix 8- Session 2b: Let's hear from industry: various approaches

Tarnya McKenzie, Manager, Marketing & Communications, Yarra Valley Water



## APPROACH & ACTIVITIES



3



## INSPIRATIONAL INSIGHT




4




Appendix 9 – Session 2b: Let’s hear from industry: various approaches  
 Sara Collins, Community Strategy Manager, Ergon Energy

## Ergon Energy’s Approach to Consumer Engagement



Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre  
May 2014



### Engagement on future investment



**2013**  
Jul-Aug

Listening Sessions

Aug-Nov

Online Survey/  
Customer Discussion Groups

Sept-Nov


Cost Trade Off Research

**2014**  
Apr-May

Release of Insights, Directions and Priorities

Oct

Proposal Submitted to the AER



2

## Peak body engagement builds capacity



Customer Council Working Group  
 Local government engagement (incl A&TSI)  
 Developers Reference Group  
 Solar Industry & Electrical Contractors Sessions

## Our refreshed customer commitments ...



We've used what our customers have told us to refresh our service commitments and guide our investment plans.

[www.ergon.com.au/futureinvestment](http://www.ergon.com.au/futureinvestment)



### PEACE OF MIND

1. Our goal is for our safety performance to stand with the best in our industry... to be Always Safe.
2. We'll maintain recent overall improvements in power supply reliability... and continue to improve the experience of customers who are suffering outages well outside our standards.
3. We'll be there after the storm, prepared and with the resources to respond to whatever Mother Nature delivers.
4. We'll meet our guaranteed services commitments. If we don't, we'll pay you.



### CHOICE AND CONTROL

5. We're looking to the future - and evolving the network to best support customer choice in economic electricity supply solutions.
6. We'll make it easier for you to contact us, whether by phone, Facebook, or Twitter, and provide you with the information you need, when and how you need it.
7. We'll play our part in powering the economy by making it easier to connect to the network.



### FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE PRICE

8. We're targeting to reduce what we charge for the use of our network in 2015/16, and keep increases overall in network charges under inflation for the next five years.

Appendix 10 - Session 2b: Let's hear from industry: various approaches  
 Sean Kelly, GM Corporate Strategy, SA Power Networks



# Directions and Priorities - Key Investments



## Appendix 11 - Session 3: From planning to practice

### Case Studies

#### 1. Case study 1: The Village

'The Village' is a small holiday and fishing town in East Gippsland. At the 2014 census, it had a population of close to 1,200. During holiday seasons, the population swells to around 10,000 as it is a popular and beautiful area surrounded by national parks, secluded beaches and pristine waterways. It is one of the most isolated towns in Victoria, 50km off the nearest highway and half way between Melbourne and Sydney.

This region is prone to supply disruptions due to natural events. There is one 22kva (Kilo Volt Amperes) line in place from 'Viewpoint' which is about 70 km away. Vegetation, wildlife, lighting, faulty equipment have all contributed to the faults that resulted in 3,500 minutes of outages in 2013.

There are no heavy energy users in the Village; energy demand is quite uniform amongst the residences and small businesses. Over 100 households have solar photovoltaic systems installed. Residents are concerned with reliability and sustainability of supply. The community is keen to find out what their most cost effective options moving forward are, including the feasibility of using locally generated and stored electricity when external supply is unavailable. Visual amenity (i.e. aesthetics) is important to the community and any options to address the reliability and sustainability of supply need to take this into account.

The community have raised their concerns with their electricity distribution business and local council. Imagine that you work in the distribution business and have been assigned the task of addressing the concerns of the community.

- What insights can you learn from the experience of other network businesses and consumer organisations that would help you engage with the community?
- What information would you provide to assist the community to make an informed decision? How would you simplify the information you will be providing to the community?
- What are some of the challenges that might arise in such consultations?

## 2. Case study 2: Regional Network

'Regional Network' is planning to build a new substation in 'Centrepoint' which has been identified as one of the new regional growth corridors in Victoria. In the past five years, the number of residents and small-medium sized businesses has more than tripled in this region. About 41 percent of the population are newly arrived migrants or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The substation is needed to meet the increasing demand for electricity and to improve the reliability of supply for all households and businesses in Centrepoint. The site for the substation is near a high density residential development 5.5km from the CBD. There is a primary school, a community hospital and a few local cafes in this area. The residents are unhappy with the proposal. They have raised health and safety concerns (electric and magnetic fields), aesthetics, noise levels during construction to their local member.

Planning permission has been obtained from the relevant government agencies and local council. An environmental impact assessment is in progress and will be completed soon. This will be made public.

'Regional 'Network' understands the importance of balancing local issues against the electricity needs of the wider community, and plan to engage with nearby residences over the coming weeks.

Imagine that you work in the distribution business and have been assigned the task of engaging with the community around this issue.

- What insights can you learn from the experience of other network businesses and consumer organisations that would help you engage with the community?
- Who might miss out on key information and what channels/methods of engagement could be used to reach them?
- Identify what some of the community concerns are in this case? Are they competing concerns and if so, what might these be? How would you address these concerns?

### 3. Case study 3: 'The Network'

'The Network' the electricity distributor for the outer western suburbs, had to undertake some maintenance works which would affect about 180 households as their supply for electricity would be interrupted for a few hours. While the works do not fall within the definition of an emergency, these maintenance works are important to ensure ongoing reliability of supply. 'The Network' notified households 4 business days in advance of the planned outage. The planned outage was scheduled on a week day where the temperature was forecasted to be high – 39.5 degrees. The notice also stated that the planned interruption would occur between 8am to 12pm.

A day before the scheduled maintenance work, Jane, a local resident called up 'The Network' expressing concern about the planned interruption – it would affect her ability to pump water for her household and her farm animals.

'The Network' decided, on the day the maintenance works were scheduled to occur, to undertake the maintenance work between 7am to 11am instead of 8am to 12pm to avoid the higher temperature expected at noon. Jane subsequently took her story to the local paper – as the maintenance work started an hour earlier than scheduled, she did not have time to pump water in advance for her household and her animals. Many readers commented on the online edition of the article complaining about other negative experiences they have had with the Network over various issues.

- What would you not do and why? Do you think the Network acted appropriately in this instance? What could the Network have done better?
- Imagine that you work in the Network and have been asked to respond to the newspaper article, to Jane and to the local community. What insights can you learn from the experience of other network businesses and consumer organisations that would help you?

### 4. Case study 4: Downtown Network

Bob works from home. A few weeks ago he received a letter from Downtown Network notifying him that there would be an interruption to his electricity supply (planned outage) on Thurs 8 May between 9am to 4pm. An electricity pole had to be replaced. Enclosed with the letter was a 'Practical Guide to Managing Outages.' Between 1 to 8 May, Bob noticed that work was being undertaken out in the street; there was digging and fences were placed around some electricity poles. Bob had subscribed to receive notifications and updates about outages earlier on. Between Tue 6 to Thurs 8 May, Bob received 6 SMS and 8 emails from Downtown Network. Some reminded him about the 8 May planned outage while others referred to a 5 May planned outage. Bob thought that the 5 May references were

errors and did not act on them. On Wed 7 May Bob called Downtown Network to ask if the planned outage on 8 May was going ahead. He was placed on hold while the customer service representative spoke to the project manager in charge of outages. Subsequently, the customer service representative confirmed that the 8 May planned outage was going ahead and that it would take place between 9am to 4pm. The planned outage would be cancelled only in the event of bad weather or if there was an emergency elsewhere which required resources to be diverted.

On Thurs 8 May, Bob received an SMS and email at 7:30am reminding him about the planned outage. The works in the street started at 8:30am. At 9:30am Bob received an SMS and an email from Downtown Network informing him that the outage had been cancelled. The works still continued (the road was closed, there was digging etc). On Sun 25 May, Bob received an SMS and email reminding him that the planned outage would occur on Wed 28 May between 9am to 4pm. The fact that it was a reminder suggested that Downtown Network had provided prior notification of the Wed 28 May planned outage. Bob hadn't received any notification. On Sun 25 May, Bob used the online form on Downtown Network's website to describe what had been happening and to ask if there would be an outage on 28 May. Bob received a response from [info@downtown.com.au](mailto:info@downtown.com.au) on Mon 26 May informing him that his email will be forwarded to the outage unit for their response. Bob replied via email on Tues 27 May stating that he assumed that there would be no planned outage on 28 May as he had not received prior notification about this. The digging in the street continued.

On Wed 28 May, 9:10am the power went off. Bob used his mobile phone application to check whether there was an outage in his locality. No reports of outages in his area were listed. Bob kept checking regularly for outage updates. At 12:30pm, Bob discovered that the outage was listed and that 166 customers were affected. The report also stated that power had been partially restored and expected to be fully restored by 2pm. Bob checked for an update at 2pm and there was no update. Bob is still waiting to hear back from the outage unit. Since then, 55 customers have also lodged similar complaints to Downtown Network

- What would you not do and why? Do you think Downtown Network acted appropriately in this instance? What could Downtown Network have done better?
- Imagine that you work in Downtown Network and have been asked to respond to Bob and the community. What insights can you learn from the experience of other network businesses and consumer organisations that would help you?