

21 November 2018

SHOWCASING NETWORK ENGAGEMENT WITH CUSTOMERS

Five innovative projects focussed on improving the way energy network businesses engage with customers have been shortlisted in the Energy Networks Australia and Energy Consumers Australia 2018 Consumer Engagement Award.

The successful finalists are Essential Energy (New South Wales), SA Power Networks (South Australia), TransGrid (New South Wales), the joint Victorian distribution businesses and Western Power (Western Australia).

Energy Consumers Australia CEO Rosemary Sinclair said the awards provided a snapshot of an industry sector that was increasingly recognising the value of engaging with consumers as partners to solve big challenges around affordability, trust and transformation.

“Each of the finalists demonstrated that they had engaged with their customers to understand their needs and shape their services,” she said.

“While engagement is at different stages of maturity in different network businesses, we saw an across-the-board improvement in the quality of applications and the projects this year.

“We’re seeing the beginnings of a new and very different network culture motivated by a desire to deliver the right outcomes for consumers – whether that’s through a revenue reset, a project to solve a local problem, or in everyday business operations.”

Energy Networks Australia CEO Andrew Dillon said outcomes from consumer engagement projects were helping define the role networks would play as the energy platforms for consumers in the rapidly transforming sector.

“We are moving well beyond consumer engagement being a compliance activity, to a way networks do business, where working with customers and the community is a critical element to designing our future energy grids,” he said.

Essential Energy, Customer Engagement Regulatory Proposal

More than 3,000 customer interactions ensured the views of Essential Energy’s regionally, culturally, demographically and economically diverse customer base was accurately and meaningfully reflected in the businesses’ 2019-24 Regulatory Proposal.

The benefits of the engagement program went far beyond the regulatory proposal itself with cultural, process, marketing and service feedback extending to broader business activities.

SA Power Networks, Regulatory Proposal Engagement – Deep Dive Workshop program

The Deep Dive Workshop program was a critical activity during Phase 3 of SA Power Networks’ 2020-2025 Regulatory Proposal customer engagement program. Feedback from stakeholders and consumers throughout the workshops directly informed the narrative and development of SA Power Networks’ Draft Plan.

The provision of early thinking and expenditure estimates provided a real opportunity for customers and advocates to influence specific areas of the plan, with executive level sponsorship of consumer engagement evident throughout the entire program.

TransGrid, Powering Sydney's Future

Consumer and stakeholder engagement helped shape the final proposal of Powering Sydney's Future, a project designed to alleviate the increasing risk to consumer electricity supply arising from aging electricity infrastructure in the inner Sydney area.

As a result of engagement with stakeholders, TransGrid altered the preferred option, to include the implementation of a single 330kV cable, with conduits for a second cable if future need arises, deferring investment through demand management and refining the project scope. TransGrid has adopted a forward looking and innovative approach to continued Stakeholder Monitoring of the project and has committed to return full value of underspent capital to consumers.

Victorian electricity distribution businesses, joint consultation on Network Pricing Design

CitiPower, Powercor, United Energy, Jemena and AusNet Services committed to a joint approach to pricing for residential and small business customers until at least 2025. This approach means Victorian customers and retailers will face a single common set of pricing structures and it allows all stakeholders (including consumer advocates) to more efficiently engage with the Victorian networks.

The aim of the consultation is to ensure network pricing post-2021 is sustainable and meets consumers' needs. Five pricing principles were developed at the first forum by stakeholders, rather than the distribution businesses, and these have shaped the process of consultation. The businesses are undertaking research into the impacts of potential changes on consumers.

Western Power, Kalbarri Microgrid

Community engagement was key to the evaluation and development of a microgrid for Kalbarri, a town on the most northern edge of Western Power's network, currently supplied by a single long line, prone to frequent outages.

A community reference group was formed and an engagement plan implemented to work directly with locals. The outcome was that community views and aspirations for Kalbarri as a eco-tourist destination were included in the feasibility assessment, and subsequently shaped the project design and construction (now underway) of the renewable powered microgrid.

The Energy Network Consumer Engagement Award will be presented by Rosemary Sinclair at the Energy Networks Australia Annual Dinner on Tuesday 27 November.

Details of the judging panel can be found [here](#).

ENDS

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Energy Networks Australia represents Australia's electricity transmission and distribution networks and gas distribution networks. Our members provide energy to virtually every household and business in Australia.

Energy Consumers Australia is the national voice for residential and small business energy consumers. Established by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2015, our objective is to promote the long-term interests of consumers with respect to price, quality, reliability, safety and security of supply.