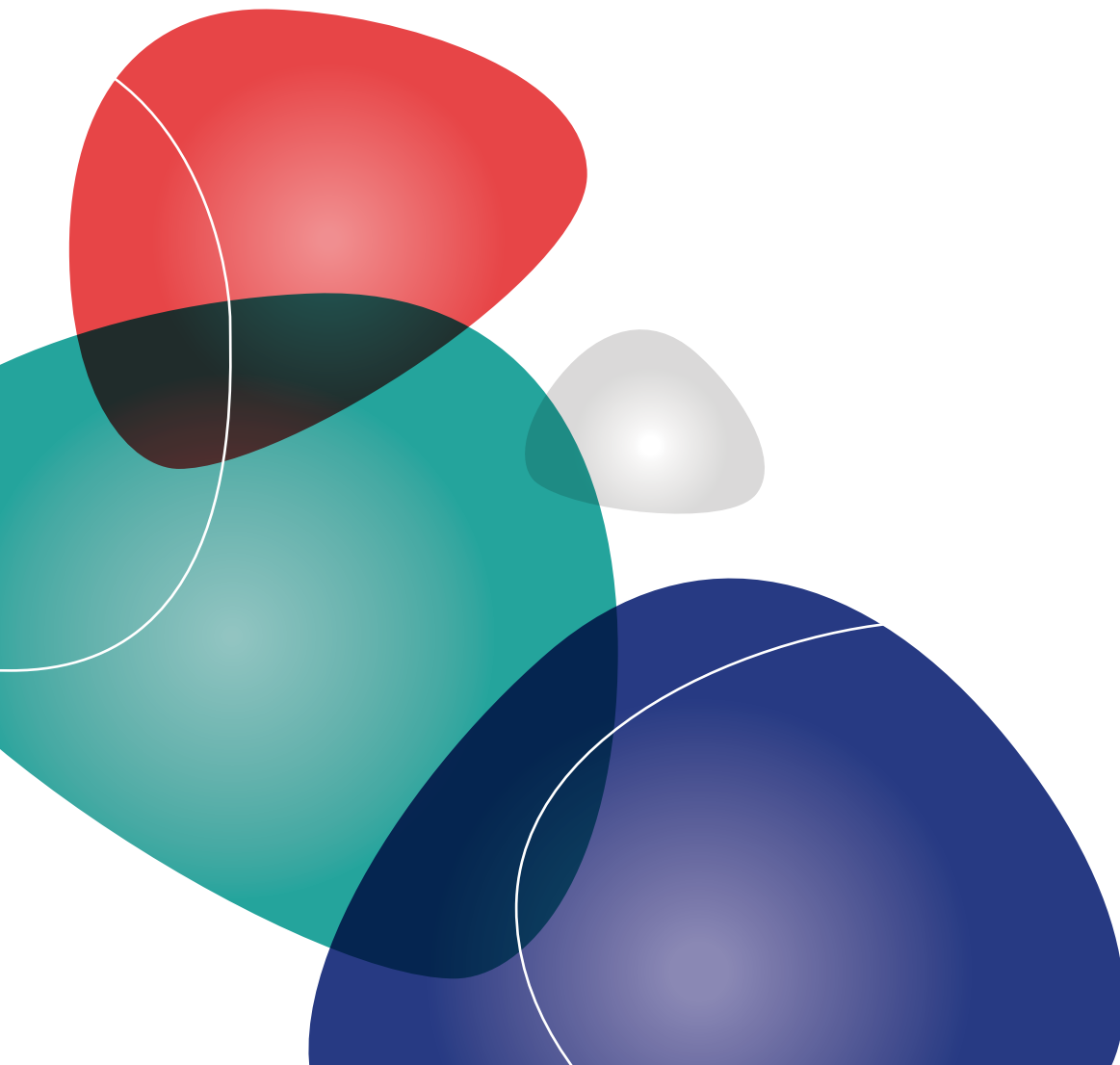




Consumer Engagement report

2021 Report

This report details summarised case studies that were submitted for the joint Energy Networks Australia & Energy Consumer Australia 2021 Consumer Engagement Award





Andrew Dillon
CEO, Energy Networks
Australia

FOREWARD

The diversity and scale of entries to the fifth Energy Consumers Australia and Energy Networks Australia Consumer Engagement Awards has highlighted the ever-growing focus networks are placing on engagement with their customers and communities.

These awards are an opportunity to recognise an Australian energy network business that has demonstrated outstanding leadership in consumer engagement.

Ten entries of extremely high standard were received this year. Nominating companies included AusNet Services, Australian Gas Networks, Endeavour Energy, Ergon Energy, Horizon Power, Powerlink, SA Power Networks and Western Power.

The independent judging panel, comprising members from Energy Consumers Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Uniting Communities, Aging Queensland, the Australian Energy Market Commission, and the Australian Energy Regulator, was unanimous in its decision.

There were four shortlisted finalists:

- » Australian Gas Networks (SA) – Codesigning Services for Vulnerable Customers
- » Ergon Energy (QLD) – Consumer developed Load Control Tariffs
- » Horizon Power (WA) – Exmouth integrated resource plan
- » Powerlink (QLD) – 2023-27 revenue determination process engagement

The winner, Powerlink Queensland, received the award for its consumer engagement approach during its 2023-27 revenue determination process. Powerlink explicitly set an industry-leading objective of delivering a revenue proposal that was capable of acceptance by customers, the Australian Energy Regulator and its own organisation.

This report highlights all 10 nominations, which detail some of the initiatives demonstrating how networks are putting customers at the centre of their businesses.

The ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19 over the past two years has meant networks have had to adopt their methodologies and approaches to ensure meaningful engagement under very difficult circumstances. We are proud of the efforts made by members and their customers this past year to continue engagement that improves outcomes for all.

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JUDGES REPORT

You can find
the Judging
Panel's feedback
and insights
on this year's
applications
here.

Consumer engagement by energy network businesses has progressed and evolved enormously in recent years, and there is a new standard of excellence and knowledge sharing that is important to commend through this Award.

That is, network businesses that are successfully incorporating consumer values into their business culture and practices, and further delivering the services consumers want. We also recognise that each network business is at a different level of maturity when engaging with consumers and integrating consumer priorities into business-as-usual and are pleased to see improvements by networks each year. Thank you to the 10 applications we received this year from eight different network businesses.

This year we saw the continuing challenges of Covid-19, with some cities, regions, and states bearing the brunt of extended lockdowns. The pandemic highlights not only the difficulties being felt two years on, but also the inequalities felt by some energy consumers with a variety of lived experiences. We have also seen changing behaviour around energy consumption, as well as diverse consumer needs and expectations that must be addressed to progress as a sector in a way that delivers favourable consumer outcomes. We acknowledge that restrictions and Covid-19 safety protocols often delayed or altered planned consumer engagement processes and were pleased to see many network businesses continue to engage dynamically with consumers despite these limitations.

Now more than ever, we see the value in networks incorporating sector learnings, such that consumer engagement best practice principles are widely incorporated into business-as-usual, such that outcomes for all consumers continue to improve.

The Judging Panel for this year's award comprised:

- » **Lynne Gallagher**, Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia (Chair)
- » **Gavin Dufty**, Senior Executive, Policy and Research Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
- » **Catriona Lowe**, Board member, Australian Energy Regulator
- » **Mark Henley**, Manager Advocacy and Energy Advocate, Uniting Communities
- » **Robyn Robinson**, Director, Council on the Aging Queensland
- » **Merryn York**, Commissioner, Australian Energy Market Commission

Each year, shortlisted applicants are provided with an opportunity to speak to the Judges directly about their projects. This year, the Judges wanted to hear more about the real outcomes for consumers, if the projects were part of a broader business focus on consumer engagement, and the potential for transferability across the sector.

To understand how these themes were addressed through each project, the Judges asked:

- » What was your motivation for engagement? How was your Board / management team involved in this initiative?
- » How did the engagement make a difference in terms of the consumer outcomes achieved?
- » What were the opportunities for consumers to set the agenda and / or shape the discussion?
- » What are the lessons, insights, applicability to other businesses, and their engagement?
- » How did the project/engagement change the business and its culture?

JUDGING PANEL



Lynne Gallagher
Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia (Chair)

Lynne is an economist/econometrician by qualification and has substantial experience in economic modelling and policy reform processes, including working with the Council of Australian Governments, and in strategic issues management in the corporate sector. Her career has seen her spend 15 years in a technical environment, followed by 12 years in practice and as an adviser. Prior to her appointment as ECA's Director of Research, Lynne was Executive Director, Industry Development at Energy Networks Australia. Lynne brings to ECA strong insights, a strategic focus and a consumer advocacy perspective which has been honed from her work with network businesses, retailers and regulators.



Gavin Dufty
Senior Executive, Policy and Research Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria

Gavin is Senior Executive of Policy and Research Manager at the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Gavin has been as a consumer representative in the energy sector for over 25 years. During this time, he has undertaken research about electricity disconnections; documented changes in energy pricing and its impacts on households; and been involved in the development of state and federal energy consumer protection and concession frameworks.

Gavin is currently a representative on several industry and government committees including gas and electricity distribution companies' customer consultative committees; AGL's national customer council; the AER's customer consultative group and is a board member of Energy Consumers Australia.



Mark Henley
Manager Advocacy and Energy Advocate, Uniting Communities

Mark Henley is an economist, who in addition to his part-time employment at Uniting Communities is a member of the Australian Energy Regulator's Consumer Challenge Panel. He is an inaugural member of the national small energy consumers Roundtable and sits on a number of utility focused consumer reference groups.

Mark has worked in community services for over 40 years, is a Life Member of SACOSS and the Youth Affairs Council of SA, for whom he was the inaugural President.

Issues of interest for Mark include poverty and addressing disadvantage which has meant that he has been actively working on energy affordability issues over recent years as well as taxation, gambling, housing and labour markets.



Catriona Lowe
Board member, Australian Energy Regulator

Catriona Lowe joined the AER Board on 6 February 2020. Catriona has worked as a consumer lawyer and advocate for more than 20 years. Catriona has held previous roles at the Consumer Action Law Centre, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Consumer Law Centre Victoria. Catriona has also been a Director on a number of boards, including the Financial Adviser Standards and Ethics Authority and the Australian Financial Complaints Authority.

Catriona is passionate about making markets work for consumers and ensuring real consumer behaviour is front and centre of relevant policy making. She is committed to promoting change-focussed legal practice and good governance.



Robyn Robinson
Director, Council on the Ageing Queensland

Robyn held executive and senior management positions within the electricity industry in Queensland for over 20 years. She has an extensive background in IT management, business performance improvement and managing organisational change. Robyn combines her knowledge and experience in the Australian energy industry and advocates for the rights and needs of senior energy consumers. In 2013, Robyn was appointed as an inaugural member of the Australian Energy Regulator's Consumer Challenge Panel and was re-appointed to the panel for a second term in 2016. Robyn is currently a member of the Board of two not-for-profit organisations concerned with the well-being of seniors in the community.

Robyn has qualifications in science and IT and holds a Master of Science Degree in Operations Research. She is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

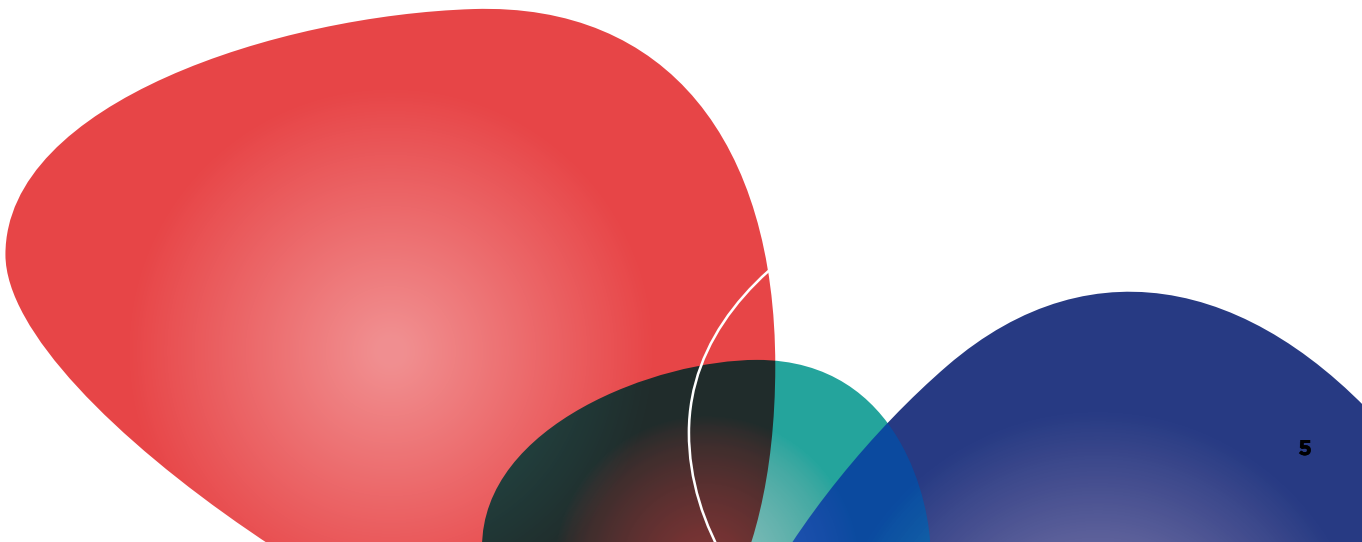


Merryn York
Commissioner, Australian Energy Market Commission

Merryn is one of the five AEMC Commissioners who are responsible for overseeing development of the rules for the national electricity and gas markets and advising governments on energy market development policy.

Prior to joining the AEMC, Merryn worked in the Queensland electricity industry, including eight years as Chief Executive of Powerlink Queensland.

An electrical engineer by profession, Merryn has long held an interest in the interrelation and evolution of the broader energy 'ecosystem'; how collaboration with industry and consumers plays a crucial role in its development; and incorporating technology developments as part of the transition to a lower carbon future.



AusNet Services – 2022-27 Transmission Revenue Reset Post-Lodgement Engagement Program



Principal company:

AusNet Services

Name of project:

2022-27 Transmission Revenue Reset (TRR) Post-Lodgement Engagement Program

Project timeline:

February - August 2021, with some activities ongoing

Location:

Victoria, Australia

Description: The environment in which AusNet Services lodged its Initial Proposal for its transmission network was fast-changing, making it difficult to account for recent and anticipated developments and announcements in its initial plans. AusNet identified that further, post-lodgement engagement was critical to ensure its Revised Proposal reflected these developments and uncertainties while meeting the needs and preferences of its customers and stakeholders. In response, AusNet Services developed the TRR Post-Lodgement Engagement Program. The centrepiece of its Engagement Program was a seven-part collaborative workshop series, complementing meetings of the existing Transmission Customer Advisory Panel (CAP).

Approach: AusNet took a highly collaborative approach to developing the Engagement Program by leveraging the CAP that was established in the pre-lodgement engagement program in 2019. The result was a series of two-hour workshops at regular intervals. The workshops addressed a specific topic/s that stakeholders were interested in. A diverse range of customers and stakeholders participated in all activities.

Benefit, results and outcomes: During these deep dive sessions, AusNet and stakeholders recognised there was uncertainty with respect to the impact on forecasts. Therefore, the engagement focused on the best way to address that uncertainty given the regulatory framework. What emerged from these sessions as the overwhelming concern for stakeholders was the long-term effect on Victorian transmission prices of the substantial investments outlined in the Integrated System Plan and REZ Development Plan (RDP) both of which were outside the scope of Ausnet's reset.

The Revised Proposal will respond to these concerns by:

- » Removing any duplication identified.
- » Ensuring replacement projects are coordinated in scope and timing with ISP and RDP projects where there is clear sequencing required.
- » Where future costs are uncertain, preferring solutions that meet customers strong preference to only pay actual costs such as pass-through provisions and contingent projects.

Leadership and transferability: AusNet involved a wide range of internal stakeholders in its regulatory reviews. Embedding customer and stakeholder engagement as a business-as-usual activity ensures the outputs are actioned quickly.

The key learnings include:

- » The benefits of involving senior leaders in customer and stakeholder engagement activities.
- » The value that stakeholders and customers bring to conversations about the networks' future.
- » The benefits of being open and honest, and willing to discuss difficult topics. These conversations build trust between networks and stakeholders and improved the quality of the output.
- » The importance of engaging stakeholders in the design of the engagement program to ensure best use of their time.
- » The value of choosing an engaging format and making it easy for stakeholders to participate in conversations on topics that interest them.
- » The benefits of being flexible and adapting the engagement program to include additional activities as required.
- » The importance of reporting back to stakeholders on what AusNet thought it heard, and on how their input had shaped its plans.
- » The return-on-investment for networks in taking the time to clearly explain concepts, available options, and the pros/cons and impacts on customers of those options. While this takes time, this leads to better-quality conversations, more engaged stakeholders and actionable outputs.

Australian Gas Network, Co-designing Services for Vulnerable Customers



Principal company:

Australian Gas Infrastructure Group

Name of project:

Co-designing Services for Vulnerable Customers

Project partners:

The engagement program was designed with our key stakeholders, with an engagement methodology delivered with KPMG Australia.

Project timeline:

July 2019 to July 2021 (ongoing)

This project evolved as part of AGN's customer and stakeholder engagement program in South Australia which informed the 2021-2026 Access Arrangement proposal.

- » On 27 November 2020 the AER published its draft decision on AGN's proposal for the 2021-2026 period.
- » We submitted a revised proposal to the AER on 13 January 2021.
- » On 30 April 2021 the AER published its final decision on AGN's access arrangement for the 2021-2026 period.

Location:

South Australia (SA)

Description: Following extensive customer and stakeholder engagement, AGN will be introducing new services for vulnerable customers. Driven by customer and stakeholder needs, the program was developed using a co-design methodology with experts from the social and community service sector. On 30 April 2021 the AER approved operating expenditure to fund this program from 1 July 2021, the first of its kind in Australia.

Approach: When price and affordability was identified as a key issue for both customers and communities, AGN ran a series of co-design workshops which were independently facilitated and brought together experts from the social and community services sector.

The following key themes emerged as priorities for AGN to consider:

- » Understanding customers better through customer relationship management, priority services and empathy in service delivery.
- » Doing more in the community through engagement outreach and education programs.
- » Being proactive in situations when customers are vulnerable.
- » Being present in the affordability debate; and
- » Ensuring clear accountability for vulnerable customers within AGN.

Benefit, results and outcomes: Traditionally the provision of assistance to vulnerable customers has been the domain of energy retailers, not-for-profit organisations and governments. Through its stakeholder engagement process, the development of the Energy Charter (to which AGIG is a signatory), and the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that AGN as a gas distribution business had a larger role to play in supporting vulnerable customers. The question "How might AGN better support vulnerable customers now and in the future?" was a key part of developing AGN's future plans in South Australia. On 30 April 2021 the AER approved operating expenditure to fund the program as part of its Final Decision.

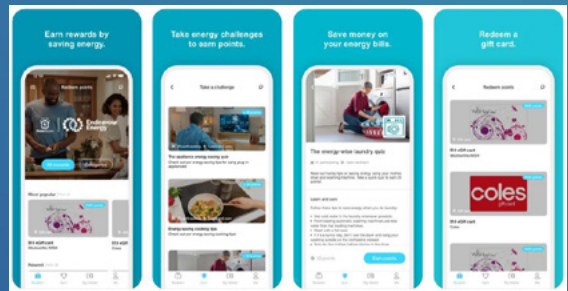
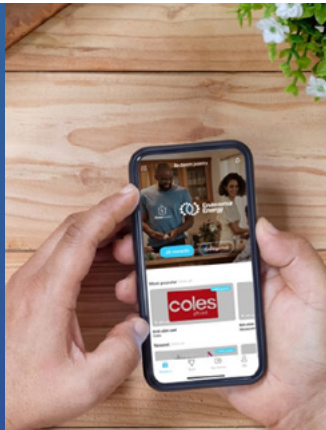
Under the new program of services, customers will now benefit from:

- » A dedicated contact person within AGN who can work directly with customers, respond to feedback, liaise with community organisations and link customers to other services.
- » Improved customer service by implementing CSAT for customers experiencing vulnerability.
- » Trained staff in call centres and the field who are better skilled to respond to the needs of vulnerable customers.
- » A priority service register and tailored services for vulnerable customers.
- » Free gas safety appliance checks for customers who may not do this regularly due to financial barriers.
- » Access to funding for switching to more efficient appliances.
- » Access to funding for emergency repairs on the customer's property.

Leadership and transferability: Given the social complexities around vulnerability, working together with experts was not only beneficial for program design, but it gave AGN executives and staff unparalleled access to in-depth discussions around social issues. Key learnings for its future engagement activities, and the broader energy sector include:

- » The importance of working closely with key stakeholders and experts on areas or issues outside the traditional domain of gas network businesses.
- » Co-design methodology is a very useful engagement approach when there is a need to design "together" rather than traditional models which seek feedback on draft proposals.
- » Working collaboratively through the co-design process to develop solutions together has built stronger relationships with key stakeholders.

Endeavour Energy, PowerSavers: Endeavour Energy's Digital Customer Engagement Platform (DCEP)



Principal company:
Endeavour Energy

Name of project:
PowerSavers:
Endeavour Energy's Digital Customer Engagement Platform (DCEP)

Project partners:
Endeavour Energy led this collaborative project with partners GreenBe Software Pty Ltd, Langdale Consultants Pty Ltd, Reposit Power Pty Ltd, Barnardos Australia, Bush Heritage Australia, The Children's Hospital at Westmead, The Salvation Army, Energy Consumers Australia, EWON, PIAC, The Energy Charter, Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils and Blacktown, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven and Wollondilly Councils.

Project timeline:
July 2020 to June 2021

Location:
Glenmore Park, Jamisontown, Kingswood, Penrith and South Penrith; and all suburbs in Endeavour Energy's distribution network area for the AtHomeSaver program, servicing more than 2.5 million people living across Sydney's Greater West, the Blue Mountains, the Southern Highlands, Illawarra and the South Coast of NSW.

Description: *PowerSavers* introduced a Digital Customer Engagement Platform (DCEP) featuring a web portal and mobile application (app) as an innovative approach to improve participation rates in customer engagement, recruitment and management of Endeavour Energy's portfolio of residential demand management (DM) programs.

To support consumers impacted by Covid-19 and experiencing financial difficulties, *AtHomeSaver* was later developed to provide advice on managing energy use and reducing electricity bills.

Benefit to consumers:

- » Easy access to financially rewarding DM programs.
- » Easy to use, convenient and intuitive app and web portal.
- » Actively making a difference to our environment and the way we view energy consumption.
- » An ability to participate in community benefiting programs; and
- » An ability to play a role in minimising future network costs by reducing peak demand.

Benefit, results and outcomes:

- » Customers are interested in participating in DM programs and are willing to register for and participate via apps. They are also willing to allow their appliances to be controlled.
- » Customers need to be engaged and incentivised to participate on Event days upfront to maintain their interest throughout the program.
- » Modern communication, gamification techniques and digital engagement gave us feedback on future network issues and drove interest in future programs, which rated very strongly.
- » This project helped to inform customers of Endeavour Energy's role in the energy industry and increased brand awareness, building trust in our service offerings.
- » The program has improved our recruitment approach for new DM programs. Customers who have participated in past programs are first invited to be involved, leading to higher conversion rates and lower acquisition costs.

Leadership and transferability: By adopting a customer-centric approach to service delivery that utilises innovative technology, facilitates two-way communications and partners with trusted agencies, customers respond. If the role they can play in managing peak demand to keep the cost of electricity down in the future is effectively communicated and they receive incentives to change behaviour, customers are eager to participate.

The scalability and agility of the DCEP was evident with the onset of Covid-19 and the ability for Endeavour Energy to utilise what it had developed for DM programs to support impacted consumers, beyond the original target and scope of the project.

The DCEP provides a highly accessible and easy to use communications channel, which has unlocked new opportunities for dynamic engagement with consumers, with potential for the solution to apply to other activities with consumers including co-design, outage management and satisfaction surveys.

Ergon Energy: Consumer developed Load Control Tariffs – providing irrigators greater choices for optimising the water energy nexus

**2021
Finalist**
Consumer
Engagement
Award



Principal company:

Ergon Energy

Name of project:

Consumer-developed Load Control Tariffs – providing irrigators greater choices for optimising the water energy nexus

Project partners:

Ergon Energy; Queensland Farmers Federation; Cotton Australia; Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group and Queensland Cane Growers Organisation

Project timeline:

2019 – June 2021

Location:

Regional Queensland, including Bundaberg and Atherton Tablelands

Description: Driven by the need to solve an affordability constraint that could lead to rationed irrigated water amounts, participants successfully trialled an existing economy tariff and that was then customised for irrigators. Three new tariffs were then implemented by Ergon for all business customers. It informed the Tariff Structure Statement and was successfully ratified in time for the next Regulatory Period.

Benefit to consumers: Irrigators could afford to apply the amount of water that the crop required based on the Crop Water Index, optimising the water energy nexus and increasing profitability. Dynamic Load control tariff participants were able to adjust to supply interruptions.

Digital metering meant tariffs could be provided to all sites, and customers could access detailed electricity usage information, giving them more data to consider options and other tariffs, and gave Ergon better insights into irrigation customers usage patterns.

Approach: Irrigator advocates requested consideration of other tariff options to suit primary producers once the current tariffs became obsolete. In response, Ergon Energy engaged with 75 participants in a trial around controlled load and demand tariffs. Building on this and following a digital meter upgrade to provide monthly consumption data, around 60 per cent of participants accessed an on-line portal to guide their usage decisions. A subsequent trial focussed only on controlled load tariffs, engaged around 80 sites. This assessed if non-domestic customers could adjust to existing load control tariffs, and what other features, tariffs or supporting measures were needed to assist customers to adjust.

Benefit, results and outcomes: These important trials have helped the network business better understand the potential for offering controlled load and demand tariffs as an alternative to the current transitional agricultural tariffs, which expired in mid-2020. It also produced, for the first time, a data set of agricultural customer load profiles, helping to provide greater insight into customer electricity needs and facilitating more advanced tariff analysis.

With these trial outcomes, Ergon has been able to:

- » Optimise load control systems to ensure it was fit for purpose.
- » Trial and further develop outage notifications systems via SMS / email.
- » Publish guides to help customers and their electricians better understand the technical requirements to move customers to load control tariffs.
- » Develop detailed on-line load control tariff content to guide customers.

Leadership and transferability: Ergon now has a greater understanding of agricultural customers' electricity consumption profiles, and developed better tariff options through:

- » Load profile data gathered on small irrigation customers can be utilised in investigating demand management opportunities in network constraint areas.
- » Better understanding of agricultural customers' meter box/switchboard issues.
- » Identifying required changes to key technical documents.
- » Development of a follow-on initiative to further evaluate a load control Tariff used for irrigation purposes.
- » Continuing to apply and share valuable tariff development process learnings.
- » Identifying the ability of participants to be able to access data, adjust to remote reading, barriers to on-line energy Portal use and options to improve habits of switching off main switches in meter boxes impacting remotely read meters.

Another important customer benefit has been our partners, the peak industry bodies honing their knowledge and understanding of tariffs to advise their members.

Ergon Energy: Diamantina solar power partnership



Principal company:

Ergon Energy

Name of project:

Diamantina Solar Power Partnership

Project partners:

Ergon Energy & Diamantina Shire Council

Project timeline:

June 2020 to August 2021

Location:

Birdsville and Bedourie Townships, in the Diamantina Shire, Western Queensland

Funding:

Internal network business funding

Description: The Diamantina Solar Power Project was a collaborative effort to transform Bedourie and Birdsville from diesel dependant to solar enabled. The biggest challenge integrating high levels of solar into remote western Queensland communities is maintaining network stability. To overcome this challenge the team engaged with key stakeholders and industry to deliver a low cost 3G/4G monitoring and control system. This project facilitated an increased amount of renewable energy in Birdsville and Bedourie by actively encouraging customer, community-owned, operated renewable generation - largely rooftop solar - managed by smart controls.

Benefit to consumers:

- » Using dynamic solar PV connections, Ergon Energy increased the installed capacity from 90kVA to over 700kVA across the two towns.
- » A major housing provider added solar PV onto buildings, reducing tenant and Council electricity bills.
- » This significant development provides direct financial benefit to the community.

Approach: Diamantina Shire Council (DSC) covers 95,000km². With the two townships two hours' drive apart, engagement was most effective using community newsletters. The team also provided primary school curriculum-approved solar energy demonstration workbooks and model house kits to local schools.

Ergon Energy used existing council communication channels - websites, the local newsletter and Facebook - to provide updates to the community members and provided simple and concise explanations and graphics, as well as household tips on how to get the best from their new solar systems.

The technical teams were located in Barcaldine, Cairns, Newcastle, and Toowoomba.

Technical challenges were communicated through regular working groups with the council, DSC engineer and Ergon Energy Network. DSC engaged with the tenants of their council-owned houses, businesses, workshops and buildings in both townships, to explain the project, set expectations and inform timing.

Benefit, results and outcomes: More than 700kW of PV across 74 premises and two towns was installed, as well as an additional 100kW of solar PV by private customers and businesses. Operationally, the dynamic solar PV installed in Birdsville has met 35 per cent of daytime community energy needs from renewable energy, delivered maximum instantaneous solar PV penetration of 79 per cent, and reduced emissions by using 6000L less of diesel for power generation.

Close engagement with DSC and TSC allowed design, equipment procurement and installation to combine to successfully deliver a management interface which allows significantly higher penetrations of solar PV installations in remote communities.

Ergon Energy is planning the deployment of energy storage to further integrate renewable energy.

Leadership and transferability: Ergon Energy is focussed on supporting positive community outcomes; environmentally and financially sustainable energy solutions for each community underpinned by our most important principle of enabling a customer and community led transition to renewables.

Online meetings where participants are on camera allow genuine interaction and engagement with key stakeholders. Key technology and dynamic solar management concepts can be clearly explained and demonstrated.

The project team worked hard to understand the community and council needs with respect to energy supply in the future, as well as the level of community willingness to be involved in energy generation. Initial consultation showed that unless community members owned the solar system, they were more interested in a 'set and forget' model.

Horizon Power: Exmouth integrated resource plan

2021
Finalist

Consumer
Engagement
Award

HORIZON
POWER



Principal company:

Horizon Power

Name of project:

Exmouth Integrated
Resource Plan

Project timeline:

Phase 2: July 2020 to
October 2021

Location:

Exmouth, Western Australia

Description: Horizon Power is striving for increasingly cleaner and greener energy solutions reflecting the values of its communities and has introduced a new process called Integrated Resource Planning (IRP).

IRP is a public process where Horizon Power works with communities and stakeholders to explore energy options to shape their future energy system. Exmouth is the first community to benefit from this process.

Approach: Horizon Power designed a framework that enables development of a community-specific engagement plan, that ensures timely and consistent consultation, communication and listening for both internal and external stakeholders.

During the community session in Exmouth, Horizon Power provided participants the opportunity to provide their thoughts on what they would like considered as part of the options analysis phase of preparing the business case from generation sources to land acquisition and placement of infrastructure.

Across the project, contact was maintained through email, website and community newsletter, as well as regular meetings with key stakeholders.

Benefit, results and outcomes: Horizon Power is exploring options for procuring a long-term electricity supply solution for Exmouth, commencing in 2024. With the advancement of technology and availability of online information, customers are becoming more energy literate and aware of the possibilities for their energy needs.

The purpose of the IRP was to understand the level of community interest in the co-design process, as well as seek understanding and input for centralised energy solutions and customer products.

Feedback from the sessions confirmed Exmouth has a strong and positive environmental culture that reflects its inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Many workshop participants expressed a desire for Exmouth to be regarded as a leader in renewable energy. They were also keen to understand why more renewable options were not currently available as well as related details such as cost, reliability trade-offs and hosting capacity.

The community has given Horizon Power the support to pursue high penetration renewable outcomes and an understanding of the specific challenges of where there is a need to work collaboratively, on things such as the location and visibility of the generation hub.

Leadership and transferability: Horizon Power's long-term IRP process is a new approach that was developed following the launch of its corporate strategy in late 2019. The new strategy outlines community involvement as a guiding principle when fulfilling its ambition to deliver energy solutions for regional growth and vibrant communities.

The work undertaken in Exmouth is the first time Horizon Power has formally undertaken front-end engagement with its communities and major stakeholders to explore opportunities and solutions that will shape the future energy solutions.

The key learnings include:

- » Communities want to be engaged and given the opportunity to discuss the current and future energy supply solutions.
- » Each town has different drivers, levels of interest and values around what is important to them; and,
- » Engaging the local community brings perspective and insights that genuinely shape the options analysis and have flow-on impacts.

Horizon Power, Renew the regions



Principal company:

Horizon Power

Name of project:

Horizon Power's 'Renew the Regions' campaign

Project timeline:

July 2020 to December 2021

Location:

Regional & Remote Western Australia

Result of actively listening to the voice of our customers and communities through the 'Renew the Regions' campaign.

Description: Horizon Power's 'Renew the Regions' campaign is an extensive integrated marketing and engagement program that has meaningfully engaged customers and community in the expedited delivery of the network's five-year strategy.

Approach: The campaign was an integrated marketing and community engagement program that used a multichannel approach to deliver strategic outcomes.

Horizon Power led with broad-reach activities to raise awareness of its brand and ambition to 'renew the regions' by delivering renewable energy programs. This approach allowed Horizon Power to engage a broad range of internal and external stakeholders, ranging from those who had low level interest and were passively engaged, right through to specific interest groups who were highly interested and engaged in the projects being delivered.

About 817 members of the community attended one of the 24 community engagement sessions that were delivered across the entirety of Horizon Power's service area between September 2020 and June 2021. Local knowledge informed the community engagement approach, including location, time, and accessibility. An online community engagement option was developed for remote locations and locations that may not have been accessible due to emergent COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Benefit, results and outcomes: The 'Renew the Regions' campaign was designed to engage internal and external audiences on the delivery of the \$75 million program of work the Western Australian State Government developed in response to the impacts of COVID-19 and is accelerating the State's transition to renewable energy.

The business had not undertaken community engagement to this scale and level of complexity before. Horizon Power's challenge was to rapidly plan and execute community engagement across the state, clearly articulate 18 major projects for launch, as well as sustain ongoing updates to numerous regional communities.

The campaign demonstrated strong social, economic, environmental and communication outcomes:

- » A meaningful way for communities to engage by allowing a two-way flow of information and communication.
- » Engagement sessions were attended by a member of the Executive or CEO, a cross-functional team of specialists and local representatives. Horizon Power received positive feedback on its willingness to be open and transparent during Q&A sessions.
- » Hosting 'in-person' community engagement events in each of the regional towns created an additional economic stimulus by working with local suppliers.
- » Broad-reach and targeted communications raised awareness of opportunities for local business to partner to deliver the program of works.
- » Community engagement sessions were a critical path to raise this awareness with regional audiences who may not always be accessible through conventional marketing and advertising channels.
- » The microsite sustained strong engagement levels with ~10,000 unique visitors since launching, approximately 10% of their entire customer base. Tailored e-newsletters sent to attendees had outstanding engagement results of 60-70% open rates.

Leadership and transferability: The 'Renew the Regions' campaign has created a unified and strong brand platform aligned with Horizon Power's corporate strategy, as well as a compelling and engaging narrative rallying behind the spirit of regional and remote WA.

At a strategic level, Horizon Power has developed a Social Impact Index - a framework to understand Horizon Power's social contribution to our regional communities - as a direct result of actively listening to the voice of our customers and communities through the 'Renew the Regions' campaign.

**2021
Winner**
Consumer
Engagement
Award



Principal company:

Powerlink Queensland

Name of project:

Powerlink Queensland 2023-27 revenue determination process engagement

Project timeline:

May 2019 to January 2021

Location:

Queensland

Description: Powerlink explicitly set an industry-leading objective of delivering a revenue proposal that was capable of acceptance by its customers, the AER and Powerlink.

Benefit to consumers: The co-designed approach allowed customers to influence Powerlink's engagement strategy and revenue proposal to a degree not previously seen in the industry.

Customer benefits of the engagement included:

- » No surprises - Powerlink provided six successive forecasts on the Revenue Proposal to customers prior to lodgement.
- » Transparency - Powerlink shared more information than in its previous revenue determination processes to influence - customers constantly influenced engagement scope and activities with Powerlink releasing six versions of its engagement plan between in fourteen months
- » Capacity building - Powerlink prepared a range of information sheets and briefing sessions to build understanding among customers.
- » Constructive discomfort - customer input helped drive a culture of constructive discomfort in Powerlink » Governance - customers reviewed and approved detailed minutes of engagement meetings to provide confidence their views were appropriately recorded

Business benefits for Powerlink included time and cost savings from avoiding a protracted revenue determination process, boosting trust with customers, and greater confidence for staff that they were working on the "right things".

Approach: The engagement process formally commenced in May 2019 via a co-design workshop, the first time a network business co-designed its engagement approach for a revenue determination. A Revenue Proposal Reference Group (RPRG) was established as a sub-set of the wider customer panel. The RPRG allowed for deeper and more frequent engagement on key topics, creating greater awareness and understanding of the issues, trade-offs and consequences of taking various courses of action, and met ten times over twelve months. Members of the Powerlink Board and executive team actively participated in the initial full-day co-design workshop and attended customer panel and RPRG meetings.

Benefit, results and outcomes: With board and executive team endorsement, Powerlink has moved the concept of lodging a revenue proposal that is 'capable of acceptance' from an aspirational to an achievable goal.

Specific learnings from this engagement process included:

- » Implementing a genuine co-design engagement approach requires board and executive team support.
- » Importance of education and building capacity with customers
- » True collaboration must be anchored by a commitment to early engagement.
- » It is challenging to attract a broader stakeholder base for involvement in transmission engagement due to its location in the supply chain.
- » If time-intensive, seek to financially reimburse engagement participants for their time.

Leadership and transferability: The key learning from this revenue determination process is that Powerlink did not appreciate the challenges associated with defining 'capable of acceptance' and determining what this means up-front.

By undertaking an authentic codesign process with customers that is iterative, transparent and allows appropriate levels of influence, upfront engagement has resulted in greater streamlining, cost and time efficiencies, and trust. But most importantly, it has delivered positive outcomes for customers.

SA Power Networks, Solar industry reference group



Name of company:

SA Power Networks

Title:

Solar Industry Reference Group (SIRG): Partnering with the Solar Industry to develop a world leading 'smart' DER service offering and transform industry capabilities

Principal company:

SA Power Networks

Name of project:

Solar Industry Reference Group (SIRG)

Project timeline:

September 2020 – current (ongoing)

Location:

South Australia

Description: As the distributed energy transition accelerates, it is now widely regarded that distributed energy resources (DER) will need to become a 'smarter', more active part of the energy system. SA Power Networks has been leading the development of innovative new service options for customers, such as 'Flexible Exports' enabled by 'smart DER'. SA Power Networks recognised the need to engage deeply with the solar industry to enable the significant shift to 'smart DER' and formed a 16-member Solar Industry Reference Group (SIRG) in September 2020 comprising installers, peak bodies, key influencers, and other stakeholders for this purpose.

Approach: A significant development in its approach was a transition towards more collaborative engagement with stakeholders. This has involved moving from an inform/consult model to one of co-design. SAPN utilised new interactive tools including online brainstorming boards, electronic newsletters, group webinars and discussions hosted on social channels and its engagement website www.TalkingPower.com.au.

Accessibility: A key focus has been ensuring that the solar industry have the information they need to support their conversations with customers.

Inclusiveness: Recruitment to the SIRG focused on attracting a diverse blend of stakeholders of different ages, genders, demographics and professional backgrounds.

Transparency: Questions, feedback and suggestions are documented and SAPN responds by committing to agreed actions or engaging in further consultation.

Measurability: SIRG members are regularly invited to provide qualitative feedback on their experiences.

Benefit, results and outcomes: Solar retailers and installers play a key role in selling, installing and supporting distributed energy solutions for customers.

However, the transition to more active DER introduces complexity, requiring a much greater level of understanding, skills and operational capabilities in the solar industry than traditional 'hang and forget' solar installations. The solar industry is incredibly large and diverse, and although well represented by a number of peak bodies, engagement with the 'front-line' can be very challenging. The solar industry is also quite often the primary facilitator of solutions when customers are considering ways to reduce their power bills or live more sustainably. The SIRG has helped us more deeply understand the diversity of the solar industry and solar customers' needs and driven key improvements in our services including:

- » Flexible Exports
- » DER connections process
- » Industry support
- » Communications
- » Compliance management

The SIRG have been actively engaged in supporting these improvements by providing feedback on proposed concepts, co-designing materials/solutions, participating in tests and demonstrations and providing advocacy within the solar community.

Leadership and transferability: South Australia is at the global forefront of the distributed energy transition. SAPN's leadership will play an important role in enabling an efficient and orderly transition that maximises benefits for customers, the community and the industry. The implementation of Flexible Exports will be the first service offering of its type to reach scale in the Australian market.

Close engagement with the solar community throughout the development of these new service offerings is incredibly important. A key learning from SIRG engagement has been the willingness of members to share insights in a forum with their competitors in pursuit of greater outcomes for customers.

Western Power, Stand-Alone Power Systems Program



Principal company:

Western Power

Name of project:

Stand-Alone Power Systems Program: Responding to consumer demand for cleaner, more reliable energy generation solutions

Project partners:

Western Power SPS customers, WA Government, WA business

Project timeline:

ongoing

Location:

Western Australia

Description: Where once Western Power's network consisted of wires, poles and substations spread across vast tracts of Western Australia, it now integrates stand-alone power systems (SPS) technology as part of a modern generation mix that better meets the needs of customers. Western Power's SPS project incorporates extensive community engagement targeting communities throughout Western Australia where SPS technology has been implemented or is likely to be implemented in future.

Approach: The passage of the Electricity Industry Amendment Act 2020 granted Western Power the statutory function to provide regional customers with new energy solutions as part of its normal network operator function.

Western Power undertook a comprehensive customer engagement process including identifying prospective locations, liaising with customers and evaluating their use of SPS. Unit sizing is based on a detailed customer energy audit, site inspection, load profile and future upgrade plans – all essential in ensuring customer's current and potential electricity needs are catered for.

Benefit, results and outcomes: SPS provides regional customers with a cost-effective, safe and reliable alternative to pole-and-wire power distribution, particularly in regional and remote locations where supply costs are high and power reliability and quality are impacted by distance, access issues, terrain and events such as storms and bushfires.

Western Power has embedded a genuine customer focus across every stage of its SPS project. An ongoing education and engagement program ensures all sectors of the community are educated about SPS technology, its applications and opportunities.

Western Power installed 52 SPS between May and November 2020. In Round two 88 units will be installed in 2021-22, which will replace about 330kms of overhead powerlines delivering significant cost savings. The business is looking to deploy 4,000 units in the coming decade and the use of 6,000 SPS means that more than 23,000kms of overhead assets could be decommissioned.

Our SPS program uses existing technology on a scale never seen in Australia. It demonstrates that engaging customers and stakeholders in a meaningful, open and honest manner from planning through to activation improves the likelihood of success and supports modernisation of the network.

Leadership and transferability: The strategy and activities put in place to inform and educate stakeholders and customers about the SPS project provide a blueprint for future activities as Western Power transforms from a poles-and-wires network to a flexible, modular grid.

In 2021 the Western Power Board approved a new 10-year corporate strategy centred on 'powering the lives of our community'. The strategy recognises that the community wants more reliable and increasing renewable electricity and a grid that keeps costs low and supports jobs and growth.

As Western Australia prepares for a climate-resilient and prosperous decarbonised future based on an ambition towards shifting to net-zero emissions by 2050, the Western Power grid has a critical enabling role in reducing emissions.

The success of SPS program customer engagement activity provides a blueprint for future engagements on grid innovation and Western Power's response to the changing energy needs of its customers across Western Australia.



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