

National Consumer Roundtable on Energy:

10 Years of Policy Dialogue and Strategic Collaboration

March 2015



SACOSS

*South Australian Council
of Social Service*



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of Policy Dialogue and Strategic Collaboration
March 2015**

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Acknowledgment

SACOSS acknowledges past and present National Consumer Roundtable on Energy participants for their generous input into this report.

Introduction

The National Consumer Roundtable on Energy (the Roundtable) is an informal coalition of national energy consumer advocates primarily focussed on policy dialogue and strategic collaboration. We consider that the supply of electricity should be regarded as an essential service, on par with water supply and emergency services.

The Roundtable meets face-to-face three times per year in various capital cities of the National Energy Market (NEM). These meetings provide consumer advocates with the opportunity to consider, collaborate and strategise about contemporary energy policy.

This report highlights the numerous key achievements of the Roundtable during its 10 year history.

Background

The Roundtable origins date to 2004. An initial meeting was hosted by the Energy Action Group, in collaboration with the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) and the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC). It provided a national forum for consumer advocates to discuss the implications of the Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE) proposal for a national retail and distribution regulatory regime¹. The following year CALC and CUAC convened a second one-off meeting with consumer advocates to discuss the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF). A significant outcome of this meeting was the formal creation of the Roundtable and the vehicle for consumer advocates with a 'collective and active interest in providing consumer advocacy in the NEM reform process' was established².

From 2006 the Roundtable, as convened by CUAC and CALC, developed into a two day face-to-face meeting held three times per year. In 2007 Roundtable participants created a Charter of Principles for Energy Supply for the purpose of shaping joint advocacy in areas of common interest³ (Appendix A).

In its 10 years of operation the Roundtable has been convened by a number of consumer advocate organisations including:

- Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) and the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) from 2006
- The Australian Council of Social Service from 2011
- The Queensland Council of Social Service from 2012
- The South Australian Council of Social Service from 2013 until present day

The Roundtable Convenor is Jo De Silva, from the South Australian Council of Social Service. The Roundtable Steering Committee provides the executive function of the Roundtable (refer to Appendix B).

Roundtable participation

Participation in the Roundtable is available to individuals or organisations who are members of NEMchat. The NEMchat e-group was initially created to enable community advocates to electronically communicate on issues relating to the MCE reform of the National Electricity Market. The e-group continues to be an online forum for consumer advocates to 'share information, concerns, ideas and advocacy proposals' relating to energy⁴.

Participation in the Roundtable over the past 10 years has included advocates from consumer, social welfare and environmental organisations from the NFP sector (Appendix D). Participating advocates past and present come from a variety of policy, research and service delivery backgrounds.

¹ Tamblyn and Ryan 2013, Proposal for a National Energy Consumer Advocacy Body - Final Report, <http://www.scer.gov.au/files/2013/05/NECAB-Proposal-Final-Report-May-2013.pdf>, p. 19.

² CALC, CUAC and QUT 2010, Making Energy Markets Work for Consumers - The Role of Consumer Advocacy, <http://cuac.org.au/research/cuac-research/166-making-energy-markets-work-for-consumers-the-role-of-consumer-advocacy/file>, p. 43.

³ As per above

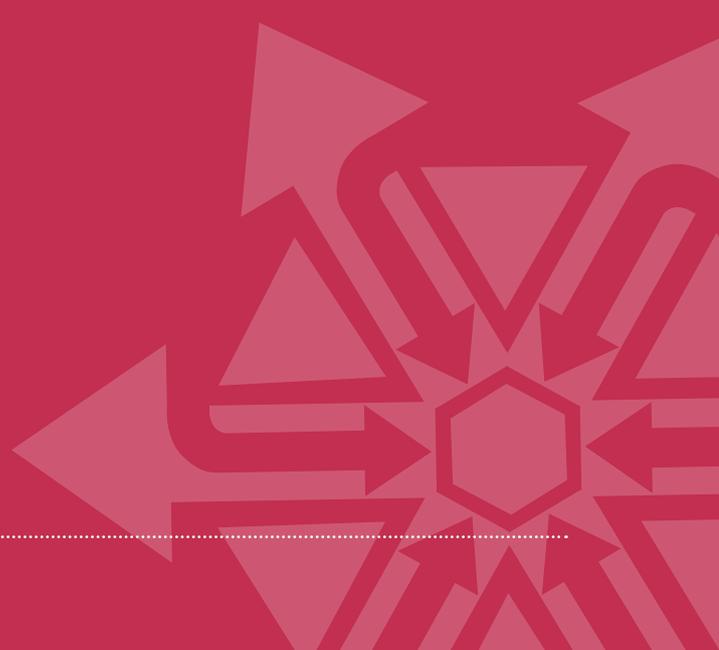
⁴ Yahoo Groups <https://au.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/nemchat/info>

Roundtable Highlights: Policy and Strategic Collaboration

The Roundtable priority functions are to:

- Lead constructive policy dialogue;
- Ensure there is a mechanism and capacity in place to activate a coalition of consumer representatives around issues of importance to consumers;
- Document a strategic agenda for national energy consumer advocacy.

Highlights of this work are considered on the following pages.



Lead constructive policy dialogue

The Roundtable has been critically involved in the development of significant policy frameworks in the NEM that have major impact on consumers. Key policy areas include:

The Energy Implementation Reform Group (ERIG)

In 2006 the Council of Australian Government (COAG) established the ERIG with the purpose of implementing reforms to the Australian energy sector with a specific focus on 'the electricity transmission network, the efficiency of energy market structures and the performance of the energy financial markets'⁵.

Roundtable participants were represented on two of the three ERIG Reference Groups⁶. The Roundtable participants also provided a joint submission to the ERIG Discussion Papers. This submission focused on issues such as the balance required between economic efficiencies and social policy goals, the role of Community Service Obligations, retail price regulation and the adequacy of the current regulation framework in addressing complex energy industry structures⁷.

Smart Meters

With the advancement of contemporary energy technologies firmly on the national energy agenda in 2008 the MCE established The National Smart Metering Program (NSMP). This aim of this project was 'to develop a framework for an efficient, flexible and open-access smart metering infrastructure across the NEM'⁸. In support of the framework and for the provision of effective stakeholder engagement five NSMP working groups were established⁹. The

Roundtable was represented on each of the five working groups¹⁰ and participants had major input into the deliverables of this program.

In addition to the above, Roundtable participants collaborated on the development of a Home Area Networks and Direct Load Control Consumers Principles Paper¹¹. This work commenced after the MCE Standing Committee of Officials requested specific input from the Roundtable in 2010¹².

More recently the Roundtable collaborated on a joint submission to the National Smart Meter Consumer Protections and Pricing – Draft Policy Paper¹³.

Review of Australia's Consumer Policy Framework

The Roundtable was heavily involved in the Productivity Commissions Review of Australia's Consumer Policy Framework (2008). This review investigated various aspects of consumer regulation such as methods to improve the consumer policy framework, harmonising and coordinating consumer policy across jurisdictions and areas of consumer regulation that were unlikely to provide clear benefits¹⁴.

The Roundtables active involvement was achieved by attending various public hearings¹⁵ and collaborating on a joint submission for the Commissions Draft Report. The Roundtables joint advocacy focused on relevant consumer issues such as: complexity in product offerings; hardship programs; improving competition in the market; the role of a National Ombudsman; financial counselling and, retail price caps¹⁶.

The Productivity Commission received 256 submissions during the review process with the Roundtable's joint perspective significantly referred to in the Commission's final report¹⁷.

⁵ Consumer Action Law Centre 2007, On the wire, www.consumeraction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/OntheWireed11Jan2007.pdf

⁶ ACOSS 2006, NEM Advocacy Progress Report, www.advocacypanel.com.au/media/docs/AP-133-ACOSS-Progress-report-2-f8aed3ba-fa83-48d8-a9fa-7823b6ffa3e5-0.pdf

⁷ Joint Submission 2006, Energy Reform Implementation Working Group,

⁸ NSMP (Australia), <https://link.aemo.com.au/sites/wcl/smartmetering/default.aspx>

⁹ NSMP (Australia), <https://link.aemo.com.au/sites/wcl/smartmetering/Pages/WorkingGroup.aspx>

¹⁰ NSMP (Australia), <https://link.aemo.com.au/sites/wcl/smartmetering/Pages/WorkingGroup.aspx>

¹¹ ATA 2011, <http://www.advocacypanel.com.au/media/docs/AP-407-ATA-Consumer-Principles-for-Home-Area-Networks-etc-520d4538-262f-4474-9eb1-6321e2515944-0.pdf>

¹² ATA 2010/2011, Global Advocacy Grant Final Report, <http://www.advocacypanel.com.au/media/docs/AP-407-ATA-Final-Report-46c68aec-f907-485c-b132-3e659bbf5239-0.pdf>

¹³ National Consumer Roundtable on Energy 2012, <http://www.scer.gov.au/files/2012/06/Joint-Consumer-Submission.pdf>

¹⁴ Productivity Commission, Consumer Policy Framework, <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/consumer>

¹⁵ Productivity Commission, Public Hearings, <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/consumer/public-hearings>

¹⁶ National Consumers Roundtable on Energy 2008, <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/consumer/submissions/subdr199.pdf>

¹⁷ Productivity Commission 2008, Review of Australia's Consumer Policy Framework, vol. 2, pp. 94, 110, 114, 205, 298 & 474.

A detailed NECF Case Study identified the following:

The National Energy Customer Framework (NECF)

The NECF, as established in 2012 is a suite of legal instruments regulating 'the sale and supply of electricity and gas to retail customers'¹⁸. Roundtable participants highlighted deficiencies in the proposed level of consumer protections in the draft NECF. This was achieved by comparing the proposed levels to what was considered best practice amongst the state and territories at the time.

*'This work exposed the proposed package as inadequate in that it [would] lead to an erosion of consumer protections in some jurisdictions. Areas of focus included the requirements for customer hardship policies and the ability of retailers to disconnect customers from supply where they are experiencing difficulty paying their bills'*¹⁹.

The Roundtable furthered its consumer advocacy on the NECF by holding a public protest in 2010. The 'Fair Go - Don't Unplug Australians' demonstration was held outside the bi-annual meeting of Federal, State and Territory Energy Ministers where decisions would be made on the final form of the new national law for energy customer protections. The Roundtable message was clear 'major failures in the law will lead to unfair treatment of consumers and faster disconnections of households and small businesses, particularly at a time when energy prices across Australia are rising rapidly'. Documentation outlining the 10 key problems with the law was handed to Ministers as they entered their meeting²⁰.

Several years later at the March 2012 Roundtable meeting 'Officials acknowledged that consumer input has significantly and constructively shaped the NECF'²². This was reiterated by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) in their submission to the Senate Select Committee on Electricity Prices. The AER stated that the 'Roundtable has proven highly effective in allowing consumer organisations to share information and coordinate advocacy efforts on key consumer issues, including on the development of the NECF'²³.

*'NECF is the result of four years of policy development. Consumer advocates have made significant contributions to the policy process and had a significant impact on the outcome. Consumer advocates assessment is that "Whilst no consumer protection bill is perfect, the NECF Bill does contain hard fought and vital protections for consumers with particular changes and improvements to most jurisdictions"'*²¹.

¹⁸ AEMC 2015, Guide to the application of the NECF, <http://www.aemc.gov.au/Energy-Rules/Retail-energy-rules/Guide-to-application-of-the-NECF>

¹⁹ PIAC 2009, Well Connected, National Energy Customer Framework, No. 34, p.1.

²⁰ PIAC 2010, Fair Go - Don't unplug Australians, <http://www.piac.asn.au/sites/default/files/news/attachments/MediaRelease-Actiononconsumerenergylaw110610Final-1.pdf>

²¹ CALC, CUAC et al. 2010, Making the energy market work for consumers - the role of consumer advocacy, p. 166, <http://www.cuac.org.au/research/cuac-research/166-making-energy-markets-work-for-consumers-the-role-of-consumer-advocacy/file>

²² Uniting Care 2012, Progress Report, <http://www.advocacypanel.com.au/how-to-apply/applications-received/national-energy-advocacy-201112.html>

²³ AER 2012, Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Electricity Prices, <http://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/AER%20Submission%20-%20Submission%20to%20Senate%20Select%20Committee%20on%20Electricity%20Prices.pdf>, p. 10.



Roundtable Highlights: Policy
and Strategic Collaboration

Energy White Papers

The 2012 Energy White Paper (EWP) 'sets out the Australian Government's policy framework to guide the transformation of Australia's energy and energy resource sectors'²⁴. The Roundtable met with the government's EWP Principal Advisor, Bruce Wilson in June 2011 to discuss high priority consumer issues. The meeting concluded with Bruce noting that the 'time was very well spent and really stirred my thinking on the issue of energy affordability'²⁵.

Numerous Roundtable organisations²⁶ made submissions to the EWP process where energy affordability was again highlighted as a high-order priority. The final EWP acknowledged this issue and the Federal Government subsequently allocated \$10million over three years to gather information on household sector energy consumption 'to better understand the social and economic implications of energy costs'²⁷.

The 2014/15 EWP process seeks to 'set out a coherent and integrated approach to energy policy to reduce cost pressures on households and businesses, improve Australia's international competitiveness and grow our export base and economic prosperity'²⁸. Once again Roundtable participants have been actively involved, culminating in 12 separate submissions to the EWP Issues Paper and Green Paper processes.

In addition senior members of the Department of Industry were invited to participate in recent Roundtable meetings (March, June and October 2014) for the purpose of identifying and consulting on relevant consumer issues. This input from Roundtable participants has been effective in shaping the Department's thinking on energy consumer issues and was evidenced by feedback expressed at the June 2014 meeting. A representative from the Department of Industry noted that:

'... the advocacy demonstrated by the Roundtable on the Energy White Paper session [Canberra March 2014] was formative and those conversations stayed with the department during the White Paper process. The Department of Industry is interested in future discussions with Roundtable participants regarding the Energy Green Paper'²⁹.

Other prominent policy dialogue in which the Roundtable has actively contributed includes:

1. Demand Response Mechanism
2. Network Tariff Reform
3. The development of Energy Consumers Australia
4. National Review of the Energy Concessions

Current Roundtable policy work

The Roundtable is currently focusing on the following strategic priority areas:

- Gas
- Decentralised energy
- Consumer choice in a complex market
- Demand Response Mechanism
- Disconnections
- National Review of the Energy Concessions
- Energy productivity
- Tariffs
- Affordability

Consumer coalitions

A priority function of the Roundtable is to ensure there is a mechanism and capacity in place to activate a coalition of consumer representatives around issues of importance to consumers. The policy work previously highlighted indicates the range and extent of the coalitions which have been formed as a result of Roundtable participation. These key strategic coalitions have emerged in the following areas:

- Energy market structural reform
- Smart meters
- Consumer Policy Framework
- National Energy Customer Framework
- Energy White Paper development
- Demand Response Mechanism
- National Review of the Energy Concessions
- Energy Affordability
- AER Better Regulation Program

For more detail on these coalitions, refer to the previous section.

²⁴ Australian Government 2012, Energy White Paper – Australia's Energy Transformation, http://www.aip.com.au/pdf/Energy_%20White_Paper_2012.pdf, p. iii.

²⁵ ACOSS 2011, NEM Advocacy – Meeting of National Consumers' Roundtable on Energy June 2011 Progress Report, <http://www.advocacypanel.com.au/media/docs/AP-483-ACOSS-Report-0ad432c7-206f-4154-81b2-cbb45a8019b6-0.pdf>, p. 2.

²⁶ SACOSS, QCOSS, CALC, CUAC and Uniting Care Australia

²⁷ Australian Government 2012, Energy White Paper – Australia's Energy Transformation, www.aip.com.au/pdf/Energy_%20White_Paper_2012.pdf, p. 40.

²⁸ Australian Government, Energy White Paper, <http://ewp.industry.gov.au/>

²⁹ SACOSS 2014, National Consumer Roundtable on Energy – organisation of meetings Acquittal Report, <http://www.advocacypanel.com.au/media/docs/National-Consumers-Roundtable-on-Energy-Acquittal-Report-2013-14-cc10430d-cd44-4ced-829a-4b328a7374a9-0.pdf>

Strategic Agenda

The Roundtable meetings involve two full days of in depth discussions on a number of strategic energy consumer issues. The structure of the meeting is such that dialogue is followed by direction. Through complex policy discussion, Roundtable delegates consolidate their own organisational strategic agendas as well as contribute to a flexible agenda for the Roundtable participants to collaborate on both during and in between meetings. The Roundtable Convenor acts as an information conduit for Roundtable participants, to both synthesise emerging priorities into a workable agenda for collaboration as well as engage with external stakeholders to help formulate the Roundtable agenda.

Whilst other energy consumer fora exist which enable strategic policy discussion, including NEMchat and jurisdictional networks, the unique position of the Roundtable is that it combines policy dialogue with strategic consumer collaborations. All participants of the Roundtable collaborate in a collegial nature on national issues, rather than in a strictly consultative role. This collegiality provides a basis through which strategic collaboration is possible because all participants have an equal say on which direction is set. To ensure that this works of course requires a great deal of trust between participants - formed from working together over many years - as well as strong convening and facilitation skills.

Roundtable Highlights: Policy and Strategic Collaboration



Other Roundtable Achievements

The Roundtable is positioned to achieve significant outcomes in the areas of collaborative relationships with senior industry leaders and sector development.

Supportive relationships with senior industry leaders

A key strength of the Roundtable participants is its ability to maintain high level relationships with senior energy industry leaders. Roundtable meetings have a rich history of participation of senior industry guest speakers (Appendix D). Roundtable participants are highly respected and trusted as well informed, collaborative stakeholders and are called on to exercise these capacities both within Roundtable meetings and outside of the meeting context.

These supportive relationships provide Roundtable participants with the opportunity to advocate for their constituents on important energy market reforms. They enable the various consumer perspectives and concerns to be given a voice in a NEM of well-funded and resourced industry stakeholders. As a consequence of these strong working relationships, Roundtable participants have worked with numerous government and industry representatives on major energy policy. These stakeholders include:

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism, Ministerial Council on Energy, Federal Government Ministers, the Department of Industry, the Australian Energy Regulator, the Australian Energy Market Commission, the Australian Energy Market Operator, Energy Retailers Association of Australia, The Energy Supply Association of Australia, the National Generators Forum, COAG Energy Council and the Energy Retailers Association of Australia.

The strong regard for these relationships has been expressed by various leading energy stakeholders. A consumer advocacy research reported published by CALC, CUAC et al. states 'The Roundtable has received very positive feedback from regulators, commenting that they value this consultative function'³⁰. More recently, the AEMC highlighted the Roundtable's role in the AEMC's consumer

engagement program³¹. At a very senior level, the AEMC sought the views of the Roundtable Steering Committee for the purpose of identifying effective AEMC consumer engagement strategies.

The Roundtable's standing in the energy sector was also recently acknowledged when the current Roundtable Convenor, Ms Jo De Silva from SACOSS, was invited to attend the COAG Energy Council meeting in Adelaide (December 2014).

The internal relationships between Roundtable participants are equally important as those established externally. Roundtable participants have cultivated strong collaborative and collegial working relationships over the 10 years of Roundtable operation. External experts acknowledge that 'a strength of the Roundtable is its ability to bring diverse [consumer] groups together'³², where different perspectives are valued and participants freely share their expertise and knowledge.

Sector Development

The Roundtable has a rich history of building the capacity of its participants and this is extremely important in national energy consumer advocacy where resources are more limited than for other stakeholders. Roundtable meetings provide an important and valued opportunity for participants to develop their energy sector knowledge and expertise.

The Roundtable fulfils its sector development role in several ways. Firstly it encourages a diverse participant base and ensures that a broad range of perspectives, needs and issues are included in the policy dialogue. This exposure to other jurisdictional issues often culminates in the establishment of common themes that translate into collaborative action.

The current list of Roundtable participants highlights a stable participant base, with the majority of participants having been actively involved in the Roundtable for a significant number of years. This has

³⁰ CALC, CUAC, PIAC and QUT 2011, Making energy markets work for consumers, the role of consumer advocacy, <http://www.cuac.org.au/research/cuac-research/166-making-energy-markets-work-for-consumers-the-role-of-consumer-advocacy/file>, p. 44.

³¹ AEMC 2015, Engaging with us, <http://www.aemc.gov.au/About-Us/Engaging-with-us>

³² Tamblyn J and Ryan J 2013, Proposal for a national energy consumer body, <http://www.scer.gov.au/files/2013/05/NECAB-Proposal-Final-Report-May-2013.pdf>, p. 19.



resulted in the creation of a rich organisational brains trust, comprising of past and present energy issues and solutions. This brains trust is the knowledge, skills, experience and insights that participants have acquired over many years and its legacy is freely shared amongst Roundtable participants. Access to the Roundtable’s brains trust is highly regarded by its participants. The brains trust is valued by all participants, including advocates who work alone in small organisations with portfolios that are not energy centric.

The Roundtable’s success in building capacity is demonstrated in the following member feedback: ‘Roundtable meetings have proven extremely valuable in boosting community sector capacity to participate in NEM regulatory and policy debates’³³. It is also evidenced by the active involvement of Roundtable organisations in various AEMC Rule Changes and Market Reviews³⁴. This advocacy is directed at the highest level of decision-making for national energy policy.

Identifying where, and with whom, energy expertise resides is another example of how the Roundtable builds capacity and this includes:

- Recognising the value of the Victorian experience (who took the lead on deregulation in regulatory energy markets) and learning from it
- Collaborating on highly technical submissions in-house and with external parties (i.e. the AER submission on the weighted average cost of capital)
- Establishing the master class framework as an additional consumer advocate forum
- Actively working on gas issues (when electricity has been a long-term focus), to understand the impacts for consumers

Lastly it is the Roundtables culture of generosity that underpins support for its participants and is particularly important for consumer advocates who are new to the energy sector. A long-serving Roundtable member recently commented “The Roundtable is incredibly generous, incredibly open and incredibly sharing”.

³³ CALC, CUAC, PIAC and QUT 2011, Making energy markets work for consumers, the role of consumer advocacy, <http://cuac.org.au/search-result-page?searchword=making+energy+market>, p. 44.

³⁴ AEMC <http://www.aemc.gov.au/Markets-Reviews-Advice> and <http://www.aemc.gov.au/Rule-Changes?topicId=0&status=0>

³⁵ Major Energy Users inc. and some participants of the Roundtable 2008, AER review of parameters for weighted average cost of capital, <https://www.aer.gov.au/sites/default/files/MEU%20and%20National%20Consumers%20Roundtable%20on%20Energy%20-%20submission%20to%20Review%20of%20electricity%20transmission%20and%20distribution%20WACC%20parameters%20-%20September%202008.pdf>

Forward Agenda

The opportunity for consumer advocates to participate in the Roundtable is currently made possible via funding from the Consumer Advocacy Panel. This funding also extends to the organisation and facilitation of each Roundtable meeting. Without ongoing funding support it is inevitable that the Roundtable will struggle to maintain its important role of supporting consumer advocacy in the energy sector.

The current format of Roundtable meetings (face-to-face three times per year) is considered by participants as an essential tool in supporting their consumer advocacy. This framework allows advocates to have in depth policy discussions but it also provides the opportunity to fully explore these issues in a strategic framework. This often provides important context that is not easily accessible via email or phone conversations.

Overall, the continued function of the Roundtable is viewed as crucial given the substantial workload over the next 18 – 24 months, including:

- Every network business will be at some active stage of their next regulatory reset, with each process required to seek consumer input;
- Significant rule changes on the horizon;
- Energy productivity developments;
- The need to reform the NECF;
- Research and debate regarding tariffs;
- East coast gas market concerns;
- ‘Live’ issues resulting from the consumer driven rule change (CUAC/ CALC) regarding ‘price certainty’
- The imminent wide scale adoption of smart meters;
- Developments in solar and battery storage technology;
- Ongoing wholesale energy market concerns (e.g. Ramp rates rule change) and,
- Market concentration issues.

The Roundtable is seen as an important vehicle for addressing this substantial agenda by what is still a relatively small number of committed energy consumer advocates.

³⁰ CALC, CUAC, PIAC and QUT 2011, Making energy markets work for consumers, the role of consumer advocacy, <http://www.cuac.org.au/research/cuac-research/166-making-energy-markets-work-for-consumers-the-role-of-consumer-advocacy/file>, p. 44.

³¹ AEMC 2015, Engaging with us, <http://www.aemc.gov.au/About-Us/Engaging-with-us>

³² Tamblyn J and Ryan J 2013, Proposal for a national energy consumer body, <http://www.scer.gov.au/files/2013/05/NECAB-Proposal-Final-Report-May-2013.pdf>, p. 19.

Appendices

Appendix A: National Consumer Roundtable on Energy - Charter of Principles for Energy Supply

The application of competition principles and the creation of markets for electricity and gas have reshaped these industries, especially their relationships with governments and consumers.

When beginning these processes of change, federal, state and territory governments mandated the following:

“The national electricity market objective is to promote efficient investment in, and efficient operation and use of, electricity services for the long term interests of consumers of electricity with respect to price, quality, reliability and security of supply of electricity and the reliability, safety and security of the national electricity system.”

The roundtable supports this objective but to recognise the industry’s importance and complexity suggests the use of the following caveat:

1. In meeting the objective of the national electricity market, all market participants (including governments and regulators) shall have regard to the essential nature of the service, the pecuniary interests of industry, diversity amongst consumers, and long-term environmental sustainability.
2. Energy should be generated, distributed and consumed in a sustainable manner, to meet the needs of consumers whilst affording effective protection of the environment and the prudent use of natural resources. Demand should be minimised and the use of renewable energy maximised to conserve and enhance environmental and social assets.

Electricity is an essential domestic service

Electricity supports fundamental human needs including safe food (storage, preparation) and safe shelter (hygiene, lighting, temperature control).

What is the Roundtable?

The National Consumers Roundtable on Energy is an informal coalition of advocates for energy consumers. The Roundtable is interested mostly in households and small business.

We consider that the supply of electricity should be regarded as an essential service, on par with water supply and emergency services such as police and ambulance.

We aim to engage with energy market reform and to ensure as far as possible that it does not produce deleterious results for consumers.

Electricity supports equipment that is critical to wellbeing and independence (health, communication).

Beyond these fundamentals, electricity supports community engagement and family life (social interactions, employment, education).

Except in rare and exceptional circumstances, a regular connection to electricity supply is not discretionary or optional. In most instances there is no alternative to electricity.

A reliable, safe, affordable supply of electricity is a right rather than privilege and access must be guaranteed as far as reasonably possible.

This document is specific to electricity, but much of its content is applicable to gas, and some to the provision of water.

Energy supply should be:

Sustainable

Sustainability Energy supplies should be derived from a secure mix of sources, including renewable energy sources. Energy should be produced, distributed and consumed in an efficient manner so that energy demand is minimised and energy supply provides beneficial social and environmental outcomes.

Accessible

Equity Energy services should be provided to all people equitably so that pricing and service standards do not discriminate against people according to their geographic location.

Affordable

Affordability Energy should be affordable for all consumers. Energy supply should not be denied to any consumer on the basis of financial hardship or other circumstances of vulnerability.

Appropriate

Quality Energy supply should be of a high quality appropriate to the intended purpose at its point of consumption.

Safety Energy consumers should be protected from any dangers in the provision of energy services.

Reliability Energy supply should be reliable and aim to ensure an uninterrupted delivery of supply, as far as practicably possible.

Accountable

Respect Energy services should be delivered in a way that respects all consumers and their diversity of needs and capacity to participate in an energy market.

Information Energy consumers should have access to information about energy services that empowers them to make informed choices and to negotiate their interests with service providers.

Rights Energy consumers have rights to use energy for ensuring adequate standards of living and social participation. These rights are recognised in international human rights standards.

Privacy Information about consumers held by service providers should be treated with care and shared only with prior permission.

Redress Energy consumers should have access to free, fair and independent services for complaints resolution.

Representation Energy consumers ought to be supported to have their interests represented and be able to participate in consultation and decision-making processes.



Appendix B: National Consumer Roundtable on Energy, Steering Committee Terms of Reference

1. Role

The Steering Committee provides the executive function of the Roundtable through the delivery of agreed strategic priorities, set the strategic scanning themes for meetings and organise Roundtable gatherings. The Steering Committee will be mindful at all time of the Charter of Principles for Energy Supply under which the Roundtable operates.

2. Values

The Steering Committee will endeavour to enhance the skills and capacities of Members and their representatives, to manifest high standards of cooperation, and to encourage teamwork and open communication among and between Members. When performing their work, the Steering Committee will adhere to transparency, fairness, integrity, objectivity, inclusiveness and proficiency.

3. Membership

The Steering Committee will consist of Members of the Roundtable. Membership of the Steering Committee consists of up to seven in total, comprised of a representative of the host organisation, and six other members which will include representatives from both the smaller and larger jurisdictions as well as members who cover both national and state/territory perspectives. Committee members who are unable to attend meetings can nominate an alternative (see item 10).

4. Term of Office

The Steering Committee will be appointed by the Members for a period of one year, with the option to renominate for a second year. Appointment terms will commence on 1st July and terminate on the 30th June. For the inaugural year 50 percent of the Steering



Committee will nominate for only one year, to enable 50 percent turnover of Committee members each year. Committee members who have reached the end of their term of office may renominate.

5. Casual Vacancies

Should a Committee member vacate their position, a replacement shall be sought from that demographic to serve for the remainder of the vacating member's term of office. The Steering Committee will appoint the replacement member/s.

6. Meetings

Meetings will be held as needed and the Committee will meet a minimum of three times a year. The Committee's schedule for the year may include:

- One face to face meeting to be held over a one or two day period to allow annual planning.
- Face to face meetings to occur immediately following Roundtable meetings.
- Phone meetings as required.

Steering Committee members will share administrative tasks such as drafting and distribution of agendas, recording minutes for Steering Committee meetings and reporting back to Members.

7. Responsibilities of the Steering Committee

- Set Roundtable meeting agendas on an annual schedule, acknowledging that agenda priorities may change according to sector needs and industry developments.
- Set strategic scanning themes for Roundtable gatherings.
- Develop an operational plan to give effect to agreed strategic priorities.
- Develop Roundtable annual budget, propose priorities for funding applications for approval by members, and monitor delivery and acquittal of donor funds.

- Report back to Members at meetings and otherwise as required.
- Establish protocols and procedures for the Roundtable.
- At times, the Steering Committee may assist with aspects of the Roundtable co-ordination: for example, with facilitator and speaker liaison.
- The host organisation together with Committee members will ensure that consultation with Members of the Roundtable occurs before each Roundtable meeting.

8. Decisions of the Steering Committee

Decisions of the Steering Committee will be by consensus.

9. Quorum

A quorum shall be four of the Steering Committee members.

10. Alternates

A Committee member who is unable to attend a meeting may nominate an alternate to participate in their place. The alternate should be a regular alternate contact person who is able to quickly assume the responsibilities of the primary Committee member.

11. Changing the Steering Committee Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee Terms of Reference can be altered by a decision of the Roundtable.

Appendix C: Past and current Roundtable participants

Current

- ACT Council of Social Service
- Alternative Technology Association
- Anglicare Tasmania
- Australian Council of Social Service
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Consumer Action Law Centre
- Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre
- Council of Social Service of New South Wales
- Council on the Ageing Queensland
- Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW Inc
- Kildonan UnitingCare
- Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd
- Queensland Council of Social Service
- South Australian Council of Social Service
- St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
- Tasmanian Council of Social Service
- Total Environment Centre
- Uniting Communities
- Victorian Council of Social Service
- Western Australia Council of Social Service

Past

- Centre for Credit and Consumer Law (Griffith University Queensland)
- Choice
- Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW Inc
- Council on the Ageing NSW
- Council on the Ageing Tasmania
- Moreland Energy Foundation
- NorWest Lincs Incorporated
- Queensland Consumers' Association
- Queensland Financial Counsellors
- Tenants Union of Victoria
- St Vincent de Paul Society New South Wales
- Uniting Care Wesley (Adelaide)

Appendix D: Past Roundtable Guest Speakers

- **The Hon, Peter Garrett** MP, Minister for Environment, Heritage and Arts
- **The Hon Martin Ferguson** MP, Minister for Resources and Energy; Minister for Tourism
- **Julie Jarvis**, Manager, National Energy Market Reform
- **Erwin Jackson**, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, The Climate Institute
- **Michelle Groves**, CEO, AER
- **John Tamblyn**, Commissioner, AEMC
- **Steven Graham**, Chief Executive, AEMC
- **Martin Gill**, Principal Consultant, National Smart Meters Project
- **Bruce Wilson**, Energy White Paper (2012), Principal Advisor
- **Allan Asher**, CEO, ACCAN
- **Bruce Mountain**
- **Bev Hughson**
- **Brendan Morling**, Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism
- **Graham Brown**, Director Energy Division, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- **Peter Batchelor**, Victorian Minister for Energy
- **Kerry Connors**, Executive Director, Consumer Advocacy Panel
- **The Hon Mark McArdle** MP, Queensland Minister for Energy and Water
- **Andrew Reeves**, Chairman, AER
- **Clare Petre**, Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW
- **John Pierce**, Chairman AMEC
- **Brian Spalding**, Commissioner, AEMC
- **Paul Smith**, Chief Executive, AEMC
- **Andrew Dillon**, ESAA
- **Cameron O'Reilly**, ERAA
- **The Hon Matthew Groom** MP, Tasmanian Minister for Energy
- **Glen Appleyard**, Office of the Tasmanian Regulator
- **Richard Connock**, A/Ombudsman, Energy Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner Tasmania
- **Gary Richards**, Department of Industry
- **David Swift**, Executive General Manager Corporate Development, AEMO



As the peak non-government representative body for the health and community services sector in South Australia, the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) believes in justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all South Australians.

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