

# National Consumer Roundtable on Energy Communique

## Adelaide January 2020

The National Consumer Roundtable on Energy (Roundtable) is an informal coalition of national and jurisdictional energy consumer advocates primarily focussed on policy dialogue and strategic collaboration. The Roundtable meets twice a year to consider priority consumer issues across the National Electricity Market (NEM). Over two days in Adelaide (30 - 31 January), the Roundtable meeting welcomed representatives from the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), the Energy Security Board (ESB), the Energy Charter and Charter Signatories.

Key issues that were considered included:

### Future Market Design

- A 'Wholesale Market Fundamentals' Masterclass of Roundtable participants was held on 29 January 2020 to develop a shared understanding of wholesale market components of the National Electricity Market (NEM). There was commitment to progress a 'Future Market Design' enabling group to build the capacity of members to engage in wholesale market and related reforms.
- The Roundtable also welcomed a presentation from AEMO and the ESB, including an update on the ESB Post 2025 Market Design process and the Integrated System Plan (ISP).

***Members of the Roundtable expressed their desire to engage meaningfully in these processes and committed to compiling a guide for market bodies and institutions for optimising consumer engagement.***

### Climate and energy policy

- The Roundtable heard from the AEMC about responding to climate risks and challenges in the energy system.
- Members acknowledged the need to get the right investment signals in place to ensure the challenge of emissions reductions is addressed.

***Roundtable members welcomed initial thinking by Market Institutions to consider climate risks and collectively encouraged all States and Federal Governments to act in a coordinated way to resolve the significant consumer priority of a future energy system that is both affordable and sustainable.***

### Bushfires

- Members reflected on the substantial impact of recent bushfires and appreciated the prompt response by networks, retailers and governments to both the needs of people impacted and to restoration of electricity supply.
- Members reinforced the need for government, regulators and businesses to support the building and rebuilding of resilient communities.

- Consideration was given to the implications for consumers (both household and business), in terms of rebuilding and the costs and risk allocation of future policies related to bushfire risk and energy supply.

## **The Energy Charter**

- The Director of the Energy Charter and representatives from Charter Signatories reflected on learnings from the first year of the Energy Charter and the Disclosure process. Roundtable members welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on the collective experiences and expectations of the Energy Charter.

***Roundtable members encouraged the Energy Charter and Charter Signatories to work closely with consumers and consumer advocates to build on the foundation created in year one and to activate the ambition of the Charter.***

The Roundtable has established a number of “Enabling Groups” which operate to progress collective action on agreed issues. The following updates were given by the respective Enabling Group Leads.

## **Opportunities and Challenges of Distributed Energy Resources (DER)**

- The DER Enabling Group Leads (from the Australian Council of Social Services; ACOSS and the Total Environment Centre; TEC) gave an update on key work areas including the development of a ‘New Energy Compact’ around setting a user centred vision and principles to guide energy reform processes needed to deal with a rapidly changing energy system.

***The DER Enabling Group welcomed further consultation and collaboration in their various work streams.***

## **Payment Difficulties**

- The Payment Difficulties / Hardship Enabling Group Lead (from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre; PIAC) gave an update on the development of a ‘Best Practice Framework for Payment Support’.
- There is also work on drafting an Advocacy Guide as an explainer for community organisations to assist people experiencing energy debt issues, and collection of longitudinal data and case studies to monitor the performance of both the Victorian and national payment support frameworks.

***The Payment Difficulties Enabling Group will be continuing collective action in this space to ensure that all residential consumers are entitled to, and can readily access, the forms of assistance they need to avoid arrears, address debt, and enable them to afford the ongoing energy use they need to sustain household health and wellbeing.***

## **Energy Concessions Reform**

- An Energy Concessions Workshop was held on the morning of the 29 January 2020 prior to the Roundtable to explore how members of the Roundtable can jointly improve the effectiveness of energy concessions across all jurisdictions.

***Participants at the Workshop noted that the Finkel Review recommendation on reform of concessions had not progressed and committed to advancing this work via the creation of a Concessions Enabling Group.***

### **Australian Energy Regulator**

- Members of the Roundtable welcomed the Chair of the AER to provide an update on the reliability standard review, the Value of Consumer Reliability and the impact for consumers. There was also discussion relating to transmission investments relating to ISP implementation

### **Jurisdictional Mapping:**

- A separate document was prepared, discussed and circulated by Roundtable Members and accompanies this communique.

The next Roundtable will be held in June 2020.