

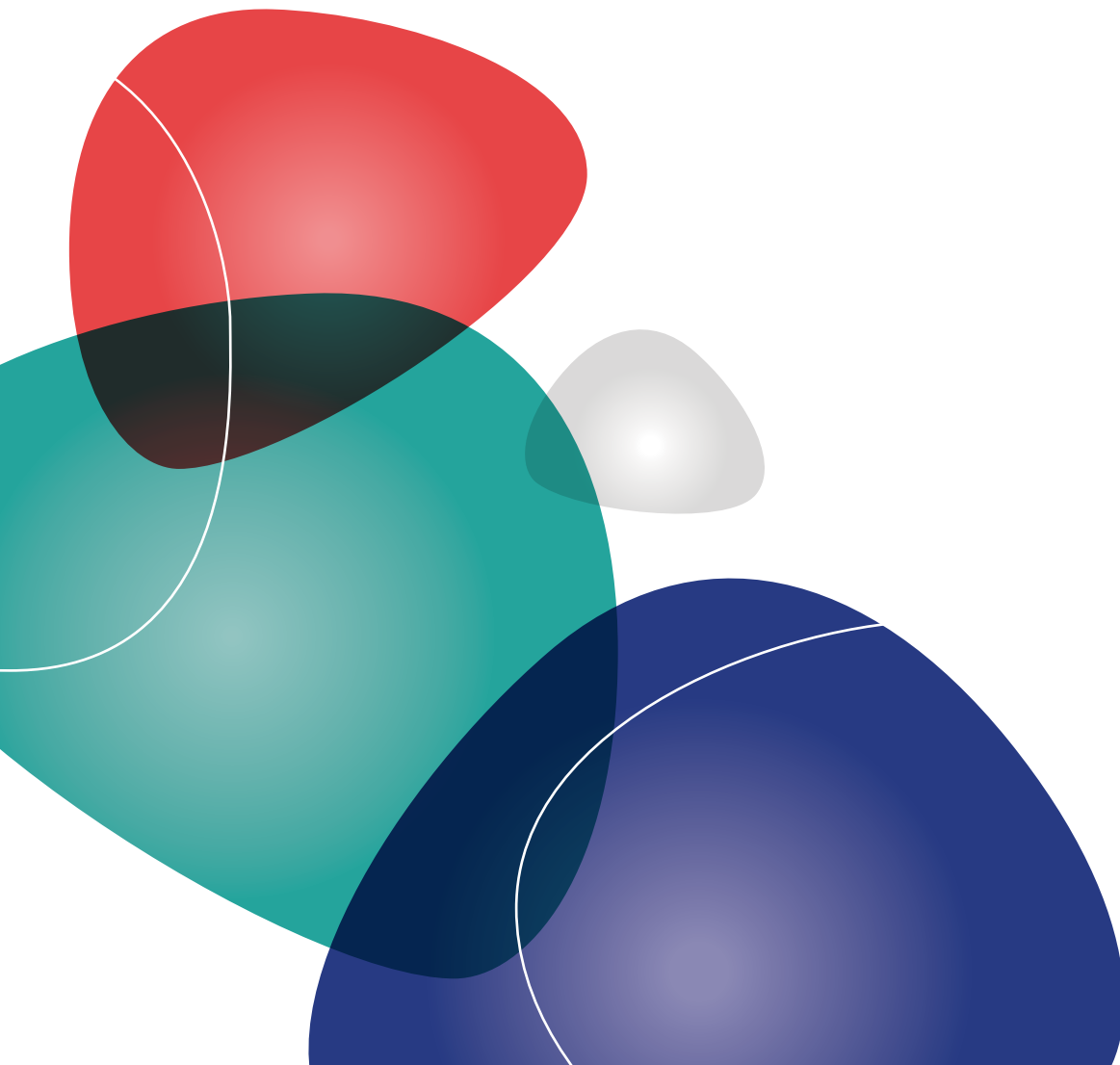


# Consumer Engagement report

2022 Report

This report details case studies that were submitted to Energy Networks Australia for the 2022 Consumer Engagement Award.

Energy Networks Australia is the national industry body representing Australia's electricity transmission and distribution and gas distribution networks. Our members provide more than 16 million electricity and gas connections to almost every home and business across Australia.





**Andrew Dillon**  
CEO, Energy Networks  
Australia

## INTRODUCTION

**Now in its sixth year, entries to the Energy Consumers Australia and Energy Networks Australia Consumer Engagement Awards demonstrate the increased commitment and maturity of approach energy network businesses have developed for engagement with their customers and communities.**

This report highlights how all nominating businesses are pushing their organisations, and the energy network industry more broadly, to engage meaningfully with customers and use that information to deliver outcomes that customers really want.

Seven entries of extremely high standard were received this year. Nominating companies included AusNet Services, Australian Gas Networks, MultiNet Gas Networks, Endeavour Energy, Ergon Energy Networks, Essential Energy, TasNetworks and Western Power.

The independent judging panel comprised members from Energy Consumers Australia, St Vincent de Paul Society, Uniting Communities, Council on the Ageing, the Australian Energy Market Commission, the Australian Energy Regulator, and the Australian Energy Market Operator.

There were four shortlisted finalists:

- » AGN, AusNet Services and MGN - Three Businesses, One Engagement Program for Victorians
- » Endeavour Energy - Community Engagement Beyond a Bushfire
- » Essential Energy - Customer Journey Mapping
- » Western Power - Access Arrangement 5 - Community Engagement Program

This year's winning entry was a joint submission from AGN, AusNet Services and MGN - Three Businesses, One Engagement Program for Victorians. The three companies came together to design and deliver a single, integrated, statewide consumer and stakeholder engagement program. The joint engagement program was designed to inform and shape the submission of the businesses' final plans to the AER on 1 July 2022, engaging with Victorians on gas services and prices today as well as the future of gas.

Congratulations to all entrants. I'm extremely proud of our members and the sector generally for challenging its approach to working with customers in recent years and genuinely placing their interests at the forefront of decision making for the future of the grid.

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# JUDGES REPORT

**Consumer engagement is about building an understanding of energy consumers' diverse values and needs, and carefully embedding this into a network business' culture and practices. By working closely with consumers in a respectful and genuine way, networks can understand instead of assume consumer preferences, to deliver the services that consumers want. Meaningful consumer engagement also builds consumers' trust and confidence in the energy sector.**

The independent Judging Panel recognises that how networks engage with consumers continues to evolve. Each year, the standard for best practice advances higher, and the Consumer Engagement Awards are an opportunity to commend businesses who show outstanding leadership in consumer engagement and share sector learnings to continue this trend.

The Judging Panel thanks all networks that submitted applications to this year's Consumer Engagement Awards. The high standard of consumer engagement was reflected in the diversity of projects, with strong efforts by all to understand and deliver the services consumers want. While this made the judging particularly challenging this year, ultimately consumers are the winners.

The Judging Panel 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 (COTA) Queensland
- » Merryn York, Executive General Manager, System Design, Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO)
- » Michelle Shepherd, Commissioner, Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

They brought a diverse range of understandings and experiences to the judging process. Their perspectives on what constitutes superior consumer engagement was carefully reflected on the judging assessment criteria, and any potential conflicts relating to a judging panel member's involvement in submitted projects were disclosed to ensure openness and transparency.

The Judging Panel considered how projects achieved the following:

- » **Accessibility:** Did the network ensure the process was fit-for-purpose?
- » **Inclusiveness:** Was the network proactive in seeking out and empowering the diversity of consumer perspectives?
- » **Responsiveness and Transparency:** Did the network facilitate and respond to constructive consumer feedback, such that consumers influenced the project's evolution?
- » **Measurability:** Did the network measure the effectiveness of the engagement, and did the consumer engagement lead to better consumer outcomes?
- » **Leadership and Transferability:** Was leadership actively involved in the consumer engagement process, and will project learnings enable better consumer engagement in the business and industry?

Further, the Judging Panel spoke directly to shortlisted applicants about their projects. This year, questions included hearing more about the real outcomes for consumers, how the engagement process impacted the outcomes achieved, how senior leadership was involved, and how learnings are being incorporated into the broader business and sector.

[Please note the assessment by the Judging Panel does not reflect whether a particular revenue outcome is in the long-term interests of consumers, either in a revenue proposal or as determined by the Australian Energy Regulator].

### Judging Panel Insights for Best Practice Consumer Engagement

As this award is an opportunity to share valuable sector learnings, the Judging Panel would like to share strong consumer engagement principles which emerged from projects this year, to inspire network businesses to continue sincere engagement that drives business culture and better outcomes for consumers.

The Judging Panel notes that the [Judging Panel Insights 2021 report](#) remains relevant to appreciate best practice consumer engagement. This year's insights complement well the principles outlined last year. For example, the 2021 report highlights the importance of senior leadership involvement to further a culture of sustained and effective consumer engagement, and of ensuring that the impact of the engagement is evident (or that the intended impact can be tangibly articulated and measured where the initiative is not yet completed).

### Consider the diversity of engagement efforts

The range of projects this year revealed the diverse approaches that network businesses can take to engage with consumers. They showed that there is value both in projects addressing broad issues, and ones narrower in scope. Impressive consumer engagement projects of either type demonstrated how learnings had been operationalised, to contribute to a business culture that has a consumer-focused mindset and delivers better outcomes for consumers.

For example, Western Power's *Access Arrangement 5 - Community Engagement Program* undertook a broad and comprehensive approach to ensure their fifth access arrangement proposal was shaped by consumer feedback and their forecast investments aligned with achieving outcomes that met their consumers' expectations. They went beyond the scale and nature required of them for the AA5 process, to build an understanding of consumer concerns and deliver impact for their consumers.

Alternatively, while Endeavour's *Community Engagement Beyond a Bushfire* project was narrower in scope, it successfully turned community concerns into an opportunity, engaging with consumers to shape a program that reflected their needs and delivered positive outcomes for the community. It went beyond stakeholder management, to listen and codesign with consumers to deliver tangible results. The learnings from their project were also fed into their broader Sustainability Strategy, to ensure this engagement-first approach would become business-as-usual.

### Prepare for the future now

In the energy transitions underway, it is crucial that consumers are involved in the processes of creating a future that provides the services that they want. Some strong applications this year acknowledged this future uncertainty, proactively engaging with consumers to inform business plans.

For example, AGN, AusNet Services and MGN's project *Three Businesses, One Engagement Program for Victorians* acknowledged the increasing complexity and uncertainty facing the sector in Victoria, collaborating to engage with Victorians on the future of gas and their networks. This collaboration recognised that there are competing demands on participation by consumer organisations and the community in these processes, and that poor outcomes can result if there is insufficient time or capability able to be dedicated by those being engaged. Through their mutual collaboration in engagement, these businesses allowed for learnings to be shared and lifted the engagement for each network. Going forward, this framework may be replicated by the sector, to demonstrate the value of the businesses coming together when addressing complex issues such as the energy transitions.

Essential Energy's *Social Science Research Project* and Ergon Energy's *Reliably supplying fringe-of-grid customers* project also demonstrated the value of engaging with consumers to understand their needs and expectations around new technologies, including solar system connections and Stand-Alone Power Systems (SAPS). SAPS are an alternative to supply electricity to consumers in rural and remote regions that may be more reliable and resilient, but consumer perspectives are vital to understand and to shape their design, for successful adoption.

### Hold yourself accountable

The Judging Panel notes that measurability metrics are a useful tool for holding projects accountable to the purpose of consumer engagement, namely the importance of incorporating consumer values and opportunities into a network's business to deliver the services that consumers want. They can be used to measure and ensure that there is tangible impact for consumers because of the engagement process.

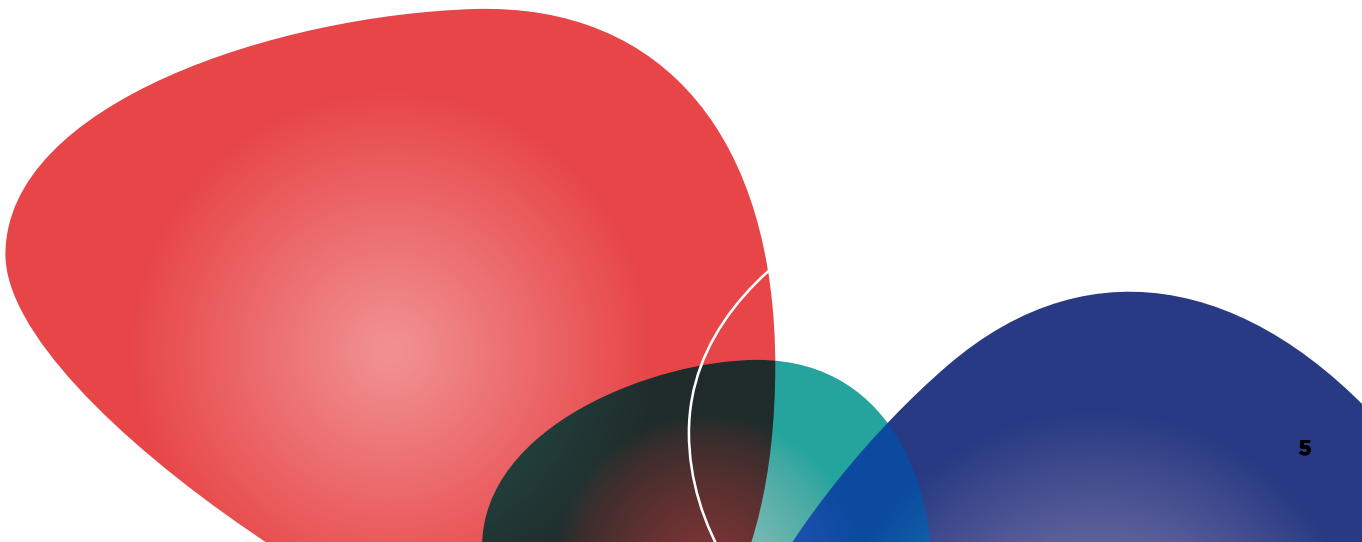
For example, AGN, AusNet Services and MGN's *Three Businesses, One Engagement Program for Victorians* project design had key performance indicators for successful engagement (including those of being genuine and committed, and integrated and accountable), to ensure the engagement was meaningful and that consumer values were embedded into project processes.

Another strong example of this was *TasCollab*, submitted by TasNetworks, where the experiences of involved partners (lived experience advocates) were repeatedly measured throughout the project to assess the efficacy of their collaborative processes.

### Ally research into engagement processes

Strong consumer engagement projects this year were supported by robust consumer research (which is distinct from market research). Consumer research allows consumers to tell the network business what their needs and preferences are, such that this informs the design, process, and delivery of the project. Such an iterative approach allows for generative thinking, that is, non-judgemental and creative input wherein consumers set the agenda on their own terms, which then builds back the service.

This was evident in Essential Energy's *Customer Journey Mapping* project, which focused on better understanding the end-to-end consumer experience through actively listening to their consumers and capturing learnings to inform and improve the customer experience holistically. Their approach to follow consumer research from data to results, allowed for outcomes to better deliver what consumers want while also improving business processes and outcomes.



# JUDGING PANEL



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

Lynne Gallagher is the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Consumers Australia, the national advocacy organisation contributing to shaping Australia's energy future for households and small businesses.

Lynne has been with Energy Consumers Australia for seven years and has more than 20 years' experience in the energy sector in strategy, policy and research roles. Prior to working in the energy sector, Lynne held senior executive roles in business and in the public sector, where she delivered major reforms that contributed to improving the financial and economic wellbeing of many Australians.



**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 several 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, sustainability, and good governance.



**Michelle Shepherd**  
**Commissioner,**  
**Australian Energy Market**  
**Commission**

Michelle has over 20 years' experience in energy policy and regulation in both private and public sectors and has been at the forefront of the markets' development across Australia.

Prior to joining the AEMC, Michelle was General Manager Regulatory and Government Affairs at Alinta Energy and spent nearly 10 years at AGL. Michelle has also worked for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, UK Competition Commission and the Federal Department of Finance.

She is a former board member of the YMCA WA and the Retail Energy Market Company. Michelle is a Graduate of the AICD Company Directors Course and holds a Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Applied Economics.



**Robyn Robinson**  
**Non-Executive Director,**  
**Council on the Ageing**

Robyn has 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 AER's Consumer Challenge Panel and was re-appointed to the panel in 2016 and 2021. Robyn is currently a member of the board of two not-for-profit organisations concerned with the wellbeing 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 AICD.





**Mark Henley**  
**Manager Advocacy and Energy Advocate, Uniting Communities**

Mark is an economist and is a member of the AER's Consumer Challenge Panel. He is an inaugural member of the national Small Energy Consumers Roundtable, President of the Economics Society - SA Branch and board member of the Energy and Water Ombudsman scheme in SA and the SA Financial Counsellors Association.

He is a member of several utility focused consumer reference groups. Mark has worked in community services for 45 years and is a Life Member of SACOSS and the Youth Affairs Council of SA, for whom he was the inaugural President. Mark has recently retired from the role of Manager of Advocacy with Uniting Communities.



**Merryn York**  
**Executive General Manager, System Design, Australian Energy Market Operator**

Merryn is Executive General Manager System Design at AEMO. Her previous role was one of five AEMC Commissioners overseeing development of the national electricity and gas rules and advising governments on energy market development policy.

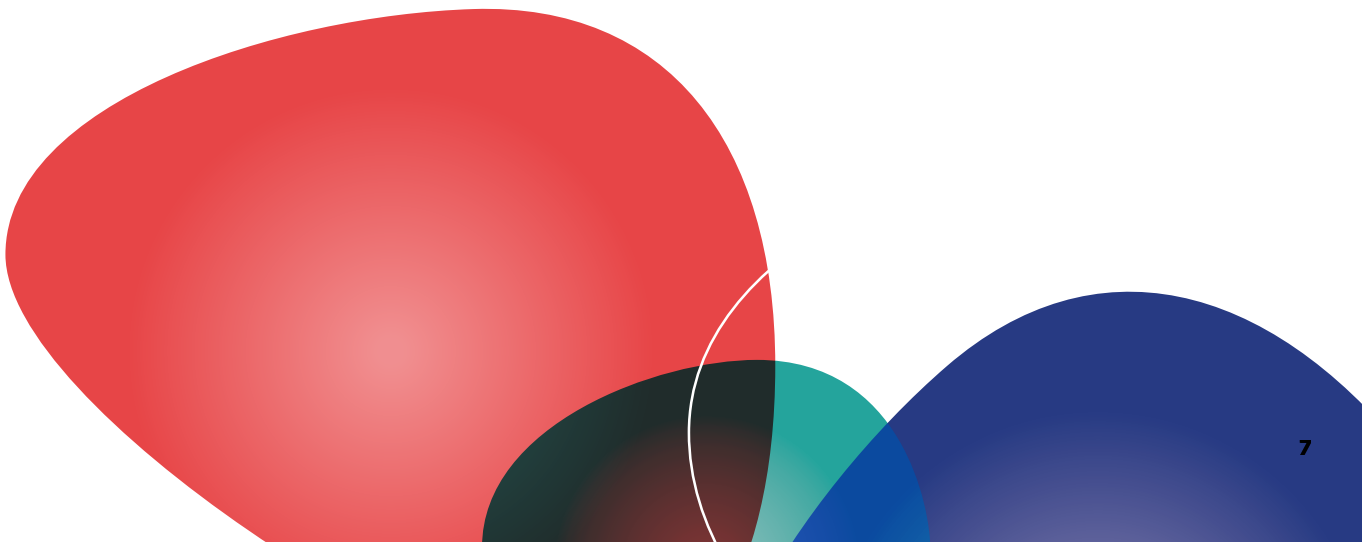
Merryn also worked in the Queensland electricity industry, including eight years as Chief Executive of Powerlink Queensland. An electrical engineer, Merryn has long held an interest in the broader energy 'ecosystem'; the crucial role collaboration with industry and consumers plays in its development; and, incorporating technology developments as part of the transition to net zero.



**Gavin Dufty**  
**Manager Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society**

Gavin has been as a consumer representative in the energy sector for more than 25 years. During this time, he has undertaken research on 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 a representative on a number of industry and government committees including: gas and electricity distribution companies customer consultative committees; the AER's customer consultative group; and, an Energy Consumers Australia board member.



# Australian Gas Networks (AGN), AusNet and Multinet Gas Networks (MGN)

**2022  
Winner**  
Consumer  
Engagement  
Award



**AusNet**



## Principal companies:

Australian Gas Networks (AGN), AusNet and Multinet Gas Networks (MGN)

## Name of project:

Three businesses, one engagement program for Victorians

## Project timeline:

July 2020 to present

## Location:

Victoria

**Description:** AGN, AusNet and MGN came together to design and deliver a single, integrated, statewide consumer and stakeholder engagement program for the benefit of all Victorians.

**Approach:** In mid-2020, all three networks and their stakeholders discussed the feasibility of working more collaboratively on regulatory reset engagement. The result of these discussions was a joint engagement program involving all three Victorian gas distribution businesses. The partners identified the opportunity to design and deliver a joint program with key activities delivered in partnership featuring:

- » A consistent customer engagement methodology for all Victorian gas customers
- » One engagement plan, with shared objectives, timelines, and key milestones
- » A single customer and stakeholder roundtable to provide one forum for consumer advocates to engage with three businesses at once
- » Joint engagement projects allowing more time for meaningful engagement on key issues shared across network
- » Streamlined engagement KPIs and reporting providing greater transparency
- » A "one stop shop" online engagement portal with resources for all three businesses

**Benefit, results, and outcomes:** The joint engagement approach delivered benefits in the breadth, depth, and delivery of the engagement activities:

- » Improved quality of engagement
- » Pooled engagement expertise and experience across multiple businesses
- » Reduced engagement program delivery costs estimated to be 10-20 per cent
- » Improved industry collaboration

## Better outcomes for customers and stakeholders:

- » Presenting information consistently across businesses enabled stakeholders to compare and contrast where businesses were different
- » Greater accessibility and depth of engagement with hard-to-reach customer cohorts including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) customers and major energy users
- » The single process made it easier to get quality participation from key stakeholders
- » Promoting consistency for customers and stakeholders across Victoria in key areas where it made sense to be consistent
- » Using multiple businesses' languages for communicating key concepts meant more opportunities for stakeholders and customers to understand them

**Leadership and transferability:** Given the increasing complexity facing the energy sector in Victoria, working together, and leveraging respective expertise in engagement, research and regulation was not only beneficial to the program, but it also gave AGN, AusNet and MGN executives and staff unparalleled opportunities to collaborate and discuss critical issues. Successfully undertaking joint consultation depended on a few key factors. The key learnings for future engagement activities, and the broader energy sector include:

- » Stakeholders are very supportive of joint engagement
- » Joint engagement requires close working relationships between the businesses and a lot of trust and flexibility
- » Setting up regular coordination meetings and file-sharing systems was important
- » Not all topics are well-suited to joint engagement
- » Joint engagement is much easier if businesses are committed to stakeholder and customer-led engagement

# Endeavour Energy – Community Engagement Beyond a Bushfire

**2022  
Finalist**  
Consumer  
Engagement  
Award



## Principal company:

Endeavour Energy

## Name of project:

Community Engagement  
Beyond a Bushfire

## Project partners:

Shoalhaven City Council,  
Manyana Matters Community  
Association, Lake Conjola  
Community Association,  
Redhead Villages Association,  
and Greening Australia

## Project timeline:

Commencing in January  
2020 and culminating with a  
community planting event  
22 April 2022

## Location:

Conjola and Bendalong on the  
South Coast of NSW

**Description:** Communities on the NSW South Coast were devastated by the 2019-2020 megafires, which burned across 45 percent of Endeavour Energy's network area. After power was safely restored, approximately 170,000 bushfire affected trees required removal to keep motorists and residents safe.

Endeavour Energy engaged with the community to create a planting day in April 2022 where staff and their families joined the community to plant 1,000 trees.

**Approach:** While the removal of bushfire devastated trees was driven by safety requirements, Endeavour Energy engaged with Resilience NSW, Rural Fire Service, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, local councils and members of Parliament to understand and respond to concerns about tree removals. After one community expressed deep concern, Endeavour Energy's senior staff met with them to explain the dangers of retaining certain trees.

During these conversations, the idea of Endeavour Energy leading a community planting project to give back to this community was formed. First Nations staff from Council were engaged to ensure plantings were conducted in a culturally sensitive way, without disturbance to Aboriginal heritage sites.

While some planting was undertaken during COVID-19 lockdowns by Greening Australia, the engagement culminated in a community planting day.

**Benefit, results and outcomes:** Initially, the community did not trust Endeavour Energy to deliver on its promises. This lack of trust was evident in social media campaigns run against Endeavour Energy, and in direct correspondence received after the fires.

From the first meeting, Endeavour Energy's collaborative approach led to a significant shift in understanding on both sides, and, after working together, former critics became Endeavour Energy's voice within the community. The company was told that the community wanted:

- » to be involved in the process
- » have regular communication with senior staff
- » a clear understanding of the criteria for tree removal

**Leadership and transferability:** As a business, **engagement-first** and **always-on-engagement** were new principles that arose from an organisation wanting to do the right thing for a community that had been traumatised.

While Endeavour Energy was able to achieve the required operational outcome to ensure the safety of the community and the network, its engagement with the community had the company reframe the tree removal program to take a more conservative approach to risk.

The project has resulted in Endeavour Energy placing greater importance on engagement with its community with an engagement-first process approach becoming business as usual.

# Ergon Energy – Remote Stand-alone Power Systems (SAPS) engagement – reliably supplying fringe-of-grid customers



**Principal company:**  
Ergon Energy

**Name of project:**  
Remote Stand-alone Power Systems (SAPS) engagement – reliably supplying fringe-of-grid customers

**Project timeline:**  
December 2020 – June 2022

**Location:**  
Remote and regional Queensland – two cattle stations near Mt Isa, and Bustard Head Lightstation near Gladstone

**Description:** Ergon Energy Network undertook an iterative engagement process to install SAPS as an alternate and more reliable supply for customers in remote Queensland. Trial outcomes included appropriate solutions to reduce network costs in the long term for other network customers.

**Approach:** Three customers were approached to gauge their interest and agreement to work with Ergon on the project. Front end engagement was critical for success, as customers' existing/future energy needs and usage patterns had to be catered for in the SAPS' design. Customers needed to be reassured they would still have a safe, secure and reliable electricity supply, and receive the same level of customer service and protections as grid-connected customers.

Through the initial engagement, and once customers indicated they were happy to participate in the trial, Ergon included a range of subject matter experts in customer discussions to ensure all questions were answered effectively. This also ensured the systems were sized appropriately and considered how frequently the backup generation should be utilised.

**Benefit, results, and outcomes:** Engagement with customers started before the approval of the project business cases and was ongoing as part of each project phase. Customers were consulted on the location and footprint of the SAPS as well as other design aspects.

SAPS Customer Engagement is new to the business. This meant any documentation necessary for engagement needed to be developed as the trial progressed.

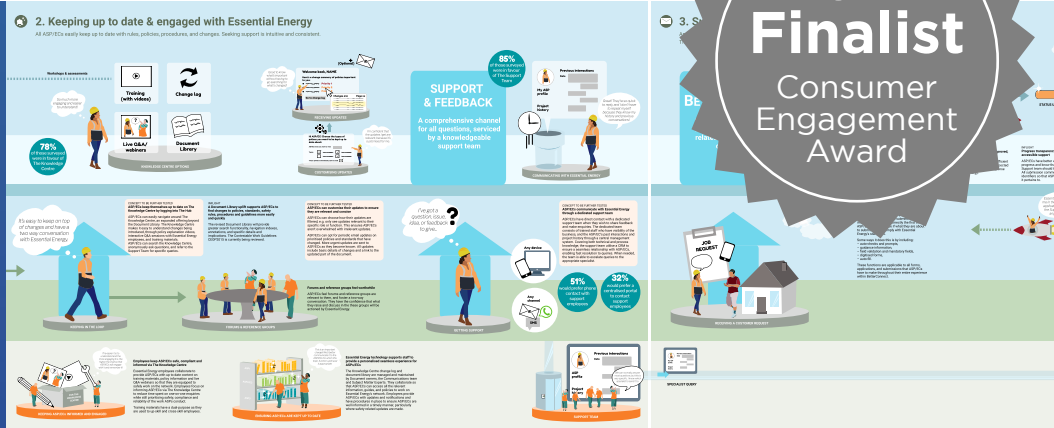
Ergon continues to conduct customer surveys to obtain feedback on the performance of the SAPS and how the SAPS supply compares to the existing supply technology. Overall, customers have been very positive about their SAPS supply and have noticed an improvement compared with the existing distribution technology.

**Leadership and transferability:** The SAPS Trials are championed by Ergon's senior executive and shareholder. There have been regular presentations and briefings on the progress of the projects to the senior executive team, the EQL board and state government.

Contributions to leadership and engagement across the energy network sector include:

- » seamless transition to SAPS for customers, with no decrease in service or reliability
- » Ergon's contribution to ENA National Guidelines for DNSP led SAPS Customer Engagement
- » AER in touch with SAPS customers
- » SAPS engagement discussions with other DNSPs, including those in other States
- » presentations to national conferences
- » government stakeholders kept informed of trial outcomes, and any Queensland-specific risks or issues and procedures developed as a result
- » understanding of what customers and the broader community expect from networks was deepened, as well as customer drivers for participating in these SAPS trials
- » information and education to participants / customers and the community in a timely and effective manner
- » transparent communications reducing concerns and complaints

# Essential Energy – Customer Journey Mapping



**Principal company:**

Essential Energy

**Name of project:**

Customer Journey Mapping

**Project partners:**

Woolcott Research

**Project timeline:**

October 2019 to April 2022

**Location:**

Essential Energy network area – regional, rural and remote New South Wales and parts of southern Queensland

**Description:** With the development of Essential Energy’s Customer Experience Strategy, the company required a deeper understanding of what customers feel and experience, to build an accurate internal view of the customer experience, and to align the organisation to the customer experience vision ‘Everyday excellence. Every customer. Every interaction.’

**Approach:** Essential Energy has a proud history of listening to its customers and stakeholders and responding to feedback to improve processes, support and future directions. Aligned to this, and in consideration of its business values, specifically ‘being easy to do business with’, Essential Energy undertook the Customer Journey Mapping initiative to gain better insight on the customer experience across different interactions in its business.

**Benefit, results and outcomes:** The Customer Journey Mapping initiative provided clarity around customers’ desired experiences and inspired strategic change, evident in the current draft Regulatory Proposal, to develop a customer portal.

Importantly, the initiative has engendered cultural change within the business, bringing about stronger focus on customer experiences in the development and continuous improvement of business processes.

Due to the consultative approach of the initiative, listening, and receiving feedback and buy-in on possible solutions from Accredited Service Providers, Essential Energy was able to develop a fit-for-purpose tool that met the needs of the customer and business, added value and enhanced the customers’ experience when doing business with the company.

Additionally, the initiative produced a ‘final outcome tool’, which is used to help prioritise process improvements, future consultation and assist with refining understanding and alignment to customers’ needs. The tool has identified 16 high priority projects which have been co-designed with customers.

**Leadership and transferability:** A key factor in the success of the initiative was the level of sponsorship by both the executive and senior leadership teams. As part of multidisciplinary and cross organisational workshops, senior leaders exchanged ideas with frontline employees to understand the challenges in providing ‘Everyday excellence. Every customer. Every interaction.’ and aligning the corporate transformation priorities to customer needs.

Key learnings included the need for flexibility in delivering a project focused on customer needs in a dynamic environment. The project approach was changed on several occasions based on customer feedback to maximise results. At times, customer feedback was contradictory to the understanding of customer needs, reinforcing the requirement to consult customers to truly understand their requirements and ensure efforts align with what customers want.

Through a partnership with Woolcott Research, Essential Energy developed an innovative approach to follow customer research from data to results. This technique has been shared with its Customer Advocacy Group and can now be shared across the energy network sector to support customer mapping efforts as all networks remain committed to meeting the changing needs and expectations of their customers.

# Essential Energy – Stand Alone Power System (SAPS) Social Science Research Project



## Principal company:

Essential Energy

## Name of project:

Stand Alone Power System (SAPS) Social Science Research Project

## Project partners:

Taverner Research Group

## Project timeline:

August 2021 to June 2022

## Location:

Online research project with remote “fringe of grid” customers across Essential Energy’s network

**Description:** With the energy transition underway, SAPS is the first of many exciting solutions to provide practical and reliable power supply options for ‘fringe-of-grid,’ rural and remote customers. Noting customer hesitation around the technology, the type and format of information customers need to shift behavioural and attitudinal change towards SAPS is crucial to facilitating a customer-centred approach to opt-in SAPS deployment. This led to the undertaking of industry-first evidence-based social and behavioural research project to underpin SAPS customer engagement strategy and test preconceived views on the barriers to SAPS adoption.

**Approach:** The research methods were designed to identify opportunities and challenges, including fears and concerns customers had around energy being delivered in new ways. Importantly research was completed at a time convenient for the customer, ensuring strong engagement and willingness to assist. The result led to the initial customer engagement strategy being significantly revised, including identifying the need to consider a more compelling way to describe SAPs as a service/product offering. Overall, the research provided a strong foundation for a data-driven, engaging customer engagement campaign, focusing on education around perceived barriers and supported by attractive incentives.

**Benefit, results, and outcomes:** The research has provided important outcomes designed to facilitate a customer-centric approach to deploying SAPS at scale, in a way that is sensitive to the needs of individual customers. These include:

- » Understanding the significant concerns around SAPS conversion, such as installation, maintenance cost and reliability, were unfounded and easily addressed
- » Assisting Essential Energy employees to understand likely personas of potential SAPS customers and tailoring their approach to each customer
- » Understanding that rural and remote customers expect planned and unplanned outages and have positive perceptions of network reliability
- » Developing a value proposition and refocused engagement strategy for customers to adopt SAPS
- » Creating support materials for customers interested in or nervous about SAPS
- » Understanding the implications of commonly used words and which ones to avoid, for example “off-grid”, to maximise customer acceptance
- » Understanding what incentives are likely to attract new customers

**Leadership and transferability:** Creating a behavioural and social methodology to research customers’ needs, barriers and concerns with new technology will be key to placing customers at the centre of new energy solutions and unlocking value.

Essential Energy’s leadership team was highly supportive of the behavioural research approach, to better understand customers’ perceptions and biases towards SAPS. Importantly, leadership ensured alignment with the 2024-29 regulatory period consultation phase, guaranteeing the research learnings would transition into the next regulatory period.

Essential Energy has shared the findings with both Western Power and Endeavour Energy and will continue to share the research project and outcomes across the energy network sector to provide insights and understanding of how NSW customers respond to a SAPS transition.

# TasNetworks – TasCollab



## Principal company:

TasNetworks

## Name of project:

TasCollab

## Project partners:

- » Aurora Energy
- » Hydro Tasmania
- » Tasmanian Council for Social Service (TasCOSS)
- » CatholicCare Tasmania
- » Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Council Tasmania (ATDC)
- » Tagara lia
- » Community Voice Partners: Sajini Sumar, Kerry Dare, Ipshita Pratap, Adrian Chu

## Project timeline:

August 2021-June 2022

## Location:

lutruwita / trouwunna (Tasmania)

**Description:** Aurora, Hydro and TasNetworks funded an energy advocate role in TasCOSS to explore good practice approaches to cross-sector collaborations. After a feasibility study, TasCollab was formed. TasCollab brought together three energy companies, four community services organisations, and four Community Voice Partners (lived experience advocates) to build TasCollab from the ground up. TasCollab recognises that communities are best placed to identify and address the issues they face in partnership with the services which support them.

**Approach:** TasCollab was a co-design process. Corporate, community services, and community partners all contributed to TasCollab equally. Partners were supported to co-create resources and shared decision-making guidelines. Two evidence-based frameworks - co-design and democratic decision-making - were used to identify the broad focus area and goal of the pilot project:

Tasmanians who face challenges with the cost of living can be treated equally, inclusively, and respectfully, with a voice in decisions that affect them.

Backward design was then used to identify a root problem behind that goal which would be the specific focus for the pilot, and to develop a proposed solution. The resulting aim of the pilot was to:

Co-design a 'Community Voices Program'—a lived experience advocacy program for people living on low incomes to have a voice in processes, services, policies, and decisions which affect them in lutruwita / trouwunna (Tasmania).

**Benefit, results, and outcomes:** The pilot produced a framework for the Community Voices Program. The program will build empathy through understanding, address stigma through awareness, and ensure everyone can live a good life in lutruwita / trouwunna (Tasmania). The use of co-design and broad stakeholder consultation ensured the resulting program will be ethical, authentic, and fit-for-purpose.

**Leadership and transferability:** TasNetworks has grown to recognise that placing customers and stakeholders at the centre of its business planning - conducting genuine engagement with them on its plans and allowing them to shape them - is key to ensuring those plans are in their long-term interests. This shift has occurred because of a maturing in the business' internal thinking and processes, and is also being driven by the:

- » rapid transition occurring in Australia's NEM towards more renewable energy sources
- » increasing expectations of customers and the AER regarding the development of quality regulatory proposals

The engagement approach for the 2024-2029 revenue reset has been shaped from feedback received during the co-design process, including the lessons learned and experiences gained through TasNetwork's involvement in TasCollab.

Many of the network's customers face a range of challenges preventing them from participating in engagement programs including economic, cultural, knowledge and structural barriers. TasCollab is an example of how TasNetwork's has committed and taken action to remove barriers to engagement and develop a model that is sustainable for the future.

# Western Power – Access Arrangement 5 – Community Engagement Program

**2022  
Finalist**  
Consumer  
Engagement  
Award



**Principal company:**

Western Power

**Name of project:**

Access Arrangement 5 – Community Engagement Program

**Project partners:**

Kantar Public and Synergies Economic

**Project timeline:**

April 2021 – June 2022

**Location:**

Western Australia’s South West Interconnected System (SWIS) from Kalbarri to Albany, and inland to Kalgoorlie

**Description:** Every five years Western Power prepares an access arrangement to revise the services it offers. It’s an important milestone and a key enabler to ensure the community is centred in its strategic vision. Consultation is vital to understand the services customers want and value in the short and long-term.

The fifth access arrangement (AA5) proposal has been shaped by customer feedback and the network’s forecast investments are aligned to achieving outcomes that meet those expectations.

**Approach:** Western Power established a Community Reference Group (CRG) to gain insight into what its customers and the community prioritise and value in relation to the services provided now and in the future. Early engagement with the CRG helped identify additional groups that would be affected by the AA5 process and were therefore important to engage.

Data was collected from community forums, workshops, one-on-one interviews, focus groups (online and in person) and online surveys. Overall, more than 2,000 customers were engaged through the CEP, reflecting more than 800 hours of engagement.

**Benefit, results, and outcomes:** The key outcome was to ensure that Western Power’s investment and business objectives meet community needs, and they see their priorities clearly within the AA5 proposal. As most decisions are the responsibility of Western Power and the Economic Regulation Authority (ERA), showing where and how feedback was incorporated was essential to maintaining trust, and helping the regulator understand proposed investments.

Key findings of the CEP highlight while safety and service reliability must be maintained, there is strong support:

- » to accommodate new technologies into the network to prepare for the future
- » for further investment that increases renewable energy supply
- » for Western Power to prepare for and mitigate against climate change

**Leadership and transferability:** Customers and the community are at the centre of everything Western Power does as a critical service provider. Community engagement is a key priority and it has extensive community engagement programs underway. Engagement is driven by all parts of the business and the AA5 CEP was a significant extension of this.

The Executive Team played an important role in the engagement process by endorsing the approach early, attending and cascading information flows regarding the insights being received. Community insights were fed back through the leadership team to inform current business planning. This was shared at engagement milestones and through comprehensive briefings.

As one of the most comprehensive CEPs undertaken by an Australian electricity utility, this work contributes to growing best practice community engagement for the energy industry. The method and delivery was supported through a partnership with nationally renowned engagement and research experts.





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