



Communique

WA ACE Forum

28 February 2023 meeting

Meeting 14 of the Western Australian Advocacy for Consumers of Energy (WA ACE) Forum was held on 28 February 2023.

Western Australian Council of Social Service briefing on its ‘Understanding Utility Hardship’ report

Members were provided an overview of the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) ‘Understanding Utility Hardship’ report, which was funded (in part) by a WA ACE grant, including the following:

- Certain life events can result in a household being more likely to end up in financial hardship, including households being impacted by a natural disaster, or a person in the household losing their job or suffering from a serious illness.
- There is a high co-dependence between a household not being able to pay electricity, water or gas bills and having difficulty in meeting mortgage payments.
- Proposed recommendations to address these issues include introducing a percentage based concessions framework (rather than using fixed concession amounts), a State Government gas transition roadmap and further customer empowerment measures being implemented by utilities.

Economic Regulation Authority briefing on the revised Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers

The Economic Regulation Authority (ERA) advised members that the *Electricity Industry Act 2004* requires the Electricity Code Consultative Committee (which includes consumer, industry and government representatives, and is chaired by the ERA) to review the Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers every two years.

The ERA outlined that the revised Code of Conduct took effect on 20 February 2023 with increased customer protections by introducing:

- New protections for customers experiencing family and domestic violence.
- A minimum bill debt of \$300 before a residential customer can be disconnected for non-payment.
- Extending of assistance measures offered to customers experiencing payment difficulties/financial hardship to all customers who request this assistance.

Household Energy Efficiency Scheme program update

Members were advised that the Household Energy Efficiency Scheme is an energy efficiency project for delivery over the period to 30 June 2025 that aims to assist 10,000 households to reduce their energy usage (where appropriate).

The small scale pilot phase for the Scheme is concluding and the scale phase will soon commence. Key findings from the pilot phase were presented to the Forum including the potential for significant

reductions in energy use and associated bills to be achieved through relatively modest changes in behaviour and energy appliances/equipment within the home.

Overview of the Western Australian Government's Sectoral Emissions Reduction Strategies

The Forum noted that the State Government is developing sectoral emissions reduction strategies to transition our economy to net zero emissions. Energy Policy WA is leading the development of the electricity sector component of these strategies. This work includes detailed modelling to provide robust and credible emissions reduction pathways for Western Australia with tangible actions for reducing emissions.

WA ACE Program and Expert Consumer Panel update

Members were informed that two additional members, being Jessie Parrish and Analena Gilhome, have been selected to join the Expert Consumer Panel (ECP). The Forum also noted that since October 2022 three WA ACE Small Grants have been awarded.

ECP members provided an overview of the submissions made by the Panel in response to:

- Stage One of the Reserve Capacity Mechanism review.
- Woodside Energy's Pilbara Rule Change proposal relating to network connections to the North West Interconnected System to facilitate energy transmission from a new solar PV facility to the Pluto LNG operations.
- Draft Statement of Policy Principles: Penalties for high emission technologies in the Wholesale Electricity Market.

ECP members outlined that upcoming work activities include participating in community consultation on ATCO access arrangements, responding to the Energy Policy WA Renewable Hydrogen Target Consultation Paper and the Review of Demand-side Participation in the Wholesale Electricity Market.

About the WA ACE Forum

The WA ACE Forum brings to together consumer representative bodies from across Western Australia to provide consumer insights to the energy sector, supporting informed, valuable contributions to the energy debate in Western Australia. The WA ACE Forum meets five times a year.

The WA ACE Forum is not a decision-making body, nor is it required to form consensus. Accordingly, this Communique does not reflect the views of Energy Policy WA or any particular member organisation, rather it seeks to share the key areas of discussion by the Forum.