



Communique

WA ACE Forum

20 February 2024 meeting

Meeting 19 of the Western Australian Advocacy for Consumers of Energy (WA ACE) Forum was held on 20 February 2024.

Energy Consumers Australia - Household Energy Consumer Information Research

Members were provided a briefing on the work that Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) has undertaken to better understand the information needs of households to help support them to reduce energy costs and participate in the energy transition. ECA outlined:

- the level and complexity of available energy-related information from a range of sources is resulting in information overload and confusion;
- the best times to provide appliance or home energy efficiency retrofit information is when a household is undertaking renovations, when there are climate extremes or when an appliance breaks down and the consumer is purchasing a new appliance; and
- ECA is of the opinion that Australia needs a 'One Stop Shop'/advice service for households and small business customers as a single place where small business and households can source required information.

Project Symphony Social Research Report

Project Symphony is a pilot project designed to 'orchestrate' approximately 900 distributed energy resources assets across 500 homes and businesses in parts of Atwell, Harrisdale and Piara Waters into a Virtual Power Plant. As part of the trial Synergy and the Australian National University undertook social research to better understand how participants felt about the pilot, including what they valued from it, the aspects of the trial which worked well, versus those that did not.

Members were advised that the main finding from the social research is that individual benefit motivated many participants to sign up, but environmental considerations and care for the community also played a role. This means that future offerings should consider both tangible and intangible aspects of benefits and costs to participants.

Members also noted that at times some participants were unsure when and how their devices were being used as part of the trial, which could be improved with better communication.

Alternative Electricity Services update

Members were informed that Energy Policy WA would soon be releasing a Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (CRIS) concerning embedded network regulation, along with a CRIS for On-site power supply (OPS) systems. An OPS covers electricity generation or storage assets owned by a company but located at the customer's (household and small business) premises, and the customer can use energy from the system, including subscription and membership-based models.

The CRIS documents seek feedback from the community on a range of options, to determine which option is best for the Western Australian public. The options include:

- there being no change, and the services either have a licence exemption or each service provider obtains an electricity retailer licence;
- that all providers of these services require electricity retail licences; or
- That the Alternative Electricity Services registration framework apply to embedded network and OPS system operators, where these service providers need to register with the regulator and then adhere to enforceable customer protection measures, however these measures would be tailored to the service and the regulatory oversight will be lighter-handed than under an electricity retail licence.

Discussion centred on the potential financial risks to commercial landlords that may result if a large electricity user(s) within commercial centres (e.g. shopping centre/office block) that are currently on sold electricity through an embedded network operator are able to obtain their electricity supply directly from an electricity retailer instead.

Electricity Outage to Kalgoorlie (and surrounding areas)

Energy Policy WA outlined that on Tuesday 16 January 2024, severe storms impacted the Wheatbelt, Northern Great Southern and Perth Hills regions resulting in about 34,000 customers being impacted by electricity network outages at the peak of the outage event.

After it was discovered that five network towers on the transmission line that supplies Kalgoorlie had been destroyed and the West Kalgoorlie Power Station failed, Western Power created an alternative circuit via Northam to Merredin, to allow partial re-energisation of Kalgoorlie and surrounds, while it restored the main transmission line supplying Kalgoorlie.

Following the outage event the State Government has announced the procurement of new backup power supplies for the Kalgoorlie region. Energy Policy WA has also been tasked with leading an investigation into the circumstances surrounding, and performance of, the West Kalgoorlie Power Station and encouraged consumer advocate feedback on the direction of the investigation.

Expert Consumer Panel update

Expert Consumer Panel members provided an overview of recent activities, including:

- Panel members now sit on Energy Policy WA's Power System Security and Reliability Standards Working Group and the Economic Regulation Authority's (ERA) Benchmark Reserve Capacity Price WEM Procedure Review Working Group.
- That since the last Forum meeting, the Panel has provided submissions in response to:
 - the Demand Side Response Review (Wholesale Electricity Market) - Consultation Paper;
 - the ERA's Issue Paper on the ATCO Access Arrangement for period commencing 2025;
 - the Cost Allocation Review Wholesale Electricity Market Amending Rules – Exposure Draft; and
 - the Benchmark Reserve Capacity Price Reference Technology Review – Consultation Paper.

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.