

# **Appendix E: EN24 and TSS consumer engagement strategy**

Regulatory proposal for the ACT electricity  
distribution network 2024–29



Communication Link

FINAL

# Evoenergy Electricity Network 2024-2029 (EN24) and Tariff Structure Statement (TSS)

Consumer Engagement Strategy

FINAL

August 2021

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# Document Information

## Document location

This file is saved electronically in Sharepoint.

## Version history

Version	Drafted or edited	Date	Reviewed	Date
1	Ellen Samuels	June 2021	Alison Davis, Emily Brown, Gillian Symmans	23 June 2021
2	Ellen Samuels	21 July 2021	Alison Davis, Emily Brown, Gillian Symmans	
3	Ellen Samuels	29 July 2021	Alison Davis, Emily Brown, Gillian Symmans	
4/FINAL	Ellen Samuels	13 August 2021		

## Approvals

This document requires the following approvals.

Name	Title / Role	Signature	Date
Peter Billing	General Manager, Evoenergy Chair, EN24 Project Board		5 August 2021

Note that signed documents should be scanned and filed in the network filing system.



# 1. Introduction

This Strategy outlines the objectives, stakeholders and associated program of work to engage with and gather feedback from consumers as part of preparing the 2024-29 Electricity Network Regulatory Proposal (EN24) and proposed Tariff Structure Statement (TSS) for Evoenergy.

This Strategy presents the next evolution in consumer engagement for Evoenergy, building on the success of previous engagement initiatives such as the Gas Network Access Arrangement 2021-2026 Review (GN21) Citizens' Jury and Evoenergy's Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) which has been running continuously since 2014. Consumer engagement has become embedded across Evoenergy enabling engagement to operate as a 'business as usual' function.

The Strategy has been prepared by Communication Link on behalf of Evoenergy.

## 1.1 Background - strategy development

This Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Evoenergy Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) and EN24 stream leaders through the following engagement activities:

- ECRC - EN24 engagement strategy workshop held on 22 April 2021
- EN24 stream leaders engagement strategy workshop held on 17 May 2021
- ECRC Meeting – held on 3 June 2021

This Strategy considers lessons learnt from previous engagement work and reflects the unique characteristics of Canberra energy consumers.

The program of activities to be delivered as part of this Strategy has been developed with reference to the internal and external documents outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Evoenergy documentation used to inform the development of this Strategy

Internal reference documents	
2021 Evoenergy Stakeholder Engagement Strategy <sup>1</sup>	
Evoenergy 2019 Citizens' Jury, Evoenergy GN21 response to recommendations <sup>2</sup>	
Past Consumer Engagement Strategies for:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2014 - 19 Electricity Network Pricing Review</li> <li>• Gas Network Access Arrangement 2016 – 21</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2016 Electricity Network Tariff Structure Statement</li> <li>• Gas Network Access Arrangement 2021 – 26</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** External documentation used to inform the development of this Strategy

External reference documents
AER Consumer Engagement Guideline for network service providers <sup>3</sup>
AER DRAFT DECISION Jemena Distribution Determination 2021 to 2026 Overview, September 2020 <sup>4</sup>
Energy Networks Association Customer Engagement Handbook <sup>5</sup> .

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.evoenergy.com.au/consumer-engagement-program>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.evoenergy.com.au/about-us/about-our-network/gas-five-year-plan/gas-network-consultation-program#>

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.aer.gov.au/node/22552>

<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://www.aer.gov.au/system/files/AER%20-%20Draft%20decision%20-%20Jemena%20distribution%20determination%202021-26%20-%20Overview%20-%20September%202020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.energynetworks.com.au/customer-engagement-handbook/>



A desktop review of other network utilities' consumer engagement was also undertaken as part of developing this strategy. Key understandings from this review are summarised below and outputs are included in Appendix A:

- The National Electricity Market, includes 13 electricity distribution networks (or distributors) which are at relatively different stages of maturity in terms of their customer engagement strategies, a point recognised by Energy Networks Australia. Despite this complexity, a trend towards more customer-centric engagement seems common across different companies. In practice, this customer-centric approach can mean:
  - i. Partnering with local communities more effectively
  - ii. Consumers co-designing plans or future regulations
  - iii. Creating consumer committees for ongoing liaison with the network
  - iv. Conducting forums across a specific geographic area for consumer input.
- Community dissatisfaction about a perceived gap between network performance and consumer expectations about the cost–and security–of what is regarded as an essential service has resulted in a regulatory environment that has intensified since 2019 in response to a series of natural disasters, such as the Black Summer 2019-20 bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In the context of increasing grid decentralisation, micro networks and P2P energy trading in the context, there is increasing consumer consideration of who bears the costs - those with DER or those without.
- Recovery from bushfire events has seen an increase in the use of traditional communication and engagement methods and clearing away from digital platforms in areas that were without power.
- Covid-19 in particular raised concerns about the ability of consumers to afford energy bills and brought with it issues surrounding repayment, debt and fairness. Covid-19 has also increased the complexity of maintaining services to diverse community members including people on life support, people with disabilities, the socially isolated and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).
- The events of Covid-19 and other natural disasters is resulting in distribution businesses needing to redefine who is considered vulnerable and consider vulnerable customers on a more individualistic level as opposed to a holistic group. Historically, accountability for individual customer situations has remained with the retailer.
- Community awareness of the transition to a net zero emissions economy remains low. Amongst those who are aware, there is concerns over who in the future will bear the costs of the networks' transition. That transition is expected to bring higher investment costs that may be passed on to consumers. Consumer interest amongst those already engaged is high.

## 1.2 Consultation objectives

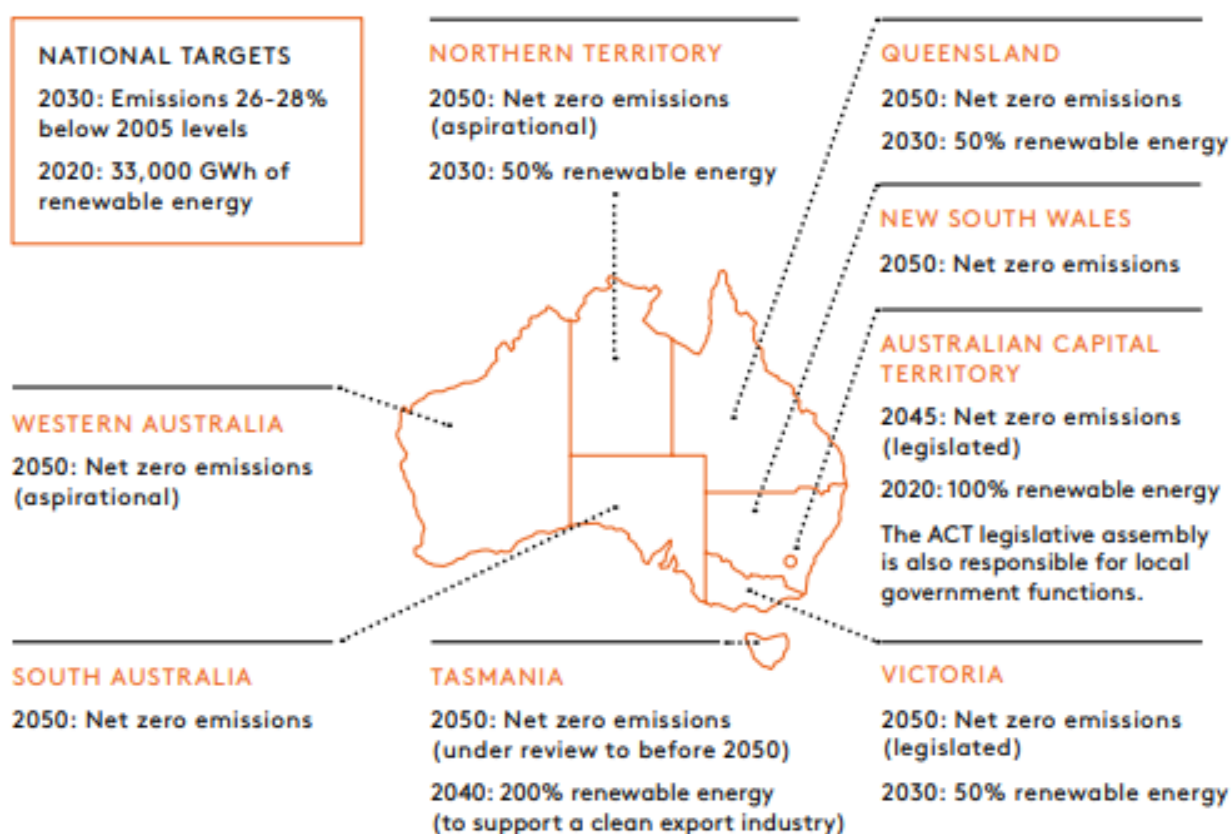
The objectives of engagement under this Consumer Engagement Strategy are to:

- **Inform, consult, involve and collaborate** with electricity consumers, key stakeholders and other members of the Canberra community about the future of the electricity network.
- Gather **diverse consumer input to inform** the development of the EN24 regulatory proposal and proposed TSS.
- Further enhance consumer knowledge of Evoenergy and its business through **active engagement from Evoenergy business** during engagement delivery.

## 1.3 Engagement environment

The energy landscape in the ACT has changed significantly in recent years largely in response to the ACT Government's legislative commitment to Net Zero by 2045. This is an ambitious program of change with the ACT having one of the shortest decarbonisation timeframes across all Australian jurisdictions.





**Figure 1.** Summary of Australian national, state and territory decarbonisation commitments (source: [Decarbonisation Futures, Climate Works Australia, March 2020](#))

The ACT Government's Climate Change Strategy 2019-2025 targets the phasing out of natural gas as an early priority, and this is already occurring with respect to new housing developments in the ACT. Phasing out natural gas presents an uncertain landscape that will need to either be filled with a renewable gas alternative or require increased electricity infrastructure to provide continued energy to Canberra's 450,000+ inhabitants. Evoenergy has a significant role in community discussion as the Government progresses towards this goal. This was highlighted in the community discussion around jurisdictional charges passed onto energy users as a result of the ACT Government's ongoing commitment to source 100 per cent of ACT's electricity from renewable sources.

The increasing role of consumers as energy producers is having a significant impact on the engagement environment. Increased investment in new household energy technologies such as solar panels, battery storage technologies, and home energy management systems has meant that the conversation with some consumers has changed, as they no longer just consume energy but also produce it. Adding complexity to this conversation are the varying overall levels of understanding of the complex energy market amongst this group. There is often a high level of localised understanding around their desire to control their energy but a low overall understanding of the broader energy market and subsequent impacts.

The discourse surrounding the export charges has also become highly topical recently and is challenging on a number of fronts. There is low level of understanding of the motivations behind the charge and a perception that this is a 'tax' to raise revenue and discourage the uptake of DER.

Canberra's population is growing and with that comes greater diversity and engagement needs to reflect a broader diversity of needs and aspirations. The ability to reach all sectors of the community has been increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as digital engagement has become more commonplace and provides opportunities that were not as accessible previously.

We have also seen an increased dialogue about what these changes mean for vulnerable consumers and the social impacts of ensuring a 'just transition' to a net zero environment is ever present on the minds of vulnerable customers and those that advocate for them.



The role of energy retailers in the conversation continues to change as customer offerings are reshaped to reflect changing energy requirements from customers - electric vehicles, solar panels, batter storage etc, as well as adapting to roles of intermediaries and third-party service providers.

It is in this environment that Evoenergy is establishing this engagement program and is committed to ensuring that engagement is genuine and reflective of our Canberra community.

### 1.3.1 Evoenergy strategic context

To ensure Evoenergy continues to be a sustainable business and adapt to the evolving energy landscape, Evoenergy has developed a range of strategies and strategic initiatives to plan to achieve net zero emissions across the energy networks, increase uptake of distributed energy resources, and meet the needs and expectations of their evolving community.

This Strategy aligns with, and will draw from, various Evoenergy strategies and strategic initiatives, including:

- Evoenergy Business Strategy
- ActewAGL Joint Venture Net Zero by 2045 Strategy
- Evoenergy's Net Zero by 2045 modelling initiative
- 2021 Evoenergy Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
- Evoenergy's Distribution System Operator (DSO) Strategy and DSO communication and engagement strategy.





## 2. Engagement approach

### 2.1 Principled engagement

The approach outlined in this Strategy is underpinned by Evoenergy's Engagement Principles identified in Figure 2, which have been adopted across the organisation and reflect the AER's Consumer Engagement Guidelines. The principles underpin Evoenergy's behaviour and how engagement is approached in all situations.

We are	What this means to us	What it means to stakeholders
<b>Adaptive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tailored approaches (not one-size-fits-all)</li> <li>Moving with the times</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible and tailored engagement and communication to meet stakeholder needs</li> <li>Engagement on your terms</li> </ul>
<b>Curious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eagerness to learn and discover new things</li> <li>Welcoming multiple perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will listen to you—you will be heard</li> <li>Inclusive engagement practices</li> </ul>
<b>Brave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating our engagement practices</li> <li>Having courageous conversations and seeking feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can hold us accountable</li> <li>We will ask you for feedback on our engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Honest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing information that is clear, accurate, relevant and timely</li> <li>Transparency around the purpose, scope and outcomes of our engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will use plain language that helps you make informed contributions</li> <li>You will be able to read reports on our engagement activities, and their effectiveness, on our website</li> </ul>
<b>Committed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicating time and resources to engagement</li> <li>Acting with integrity - doing what we say we'll do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We are around for the long haul – our engagement is ongoing</li> <li>We will explain how your input impacts our work and your experiences</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.** Evoenergy Engagement Principles as defined in the 2021 Evoenergy Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

### 2.2 Consumer and stakeholder engagement throughout

The Evoenergy ECRC has been consistently operating since 2014 and brings with it a detailed and nuanced understanding of Evoenergy from the organisations represented in its membership. One of the hallmarks of this Strategy is a marked change in the role of the ECRC. This Strategy strengthens the role of the ECRC from a key stakeholder to a delivery advisor, providing insight and advice throughout the implementation of the engagement program. This has already been adopted in the role of the ECRC in the development of this Strategy.

Another hallmark of this Strategy is the length of the engagement proposed. Commencing with engagement to inform the development of this Strategy in April 2021 and continuing through to when the AER publishes its final decision in April 2024 – engagement to inform this regulatory proposal will take place over a three-year period.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the engagement phases to be undertaken for this Strategy.



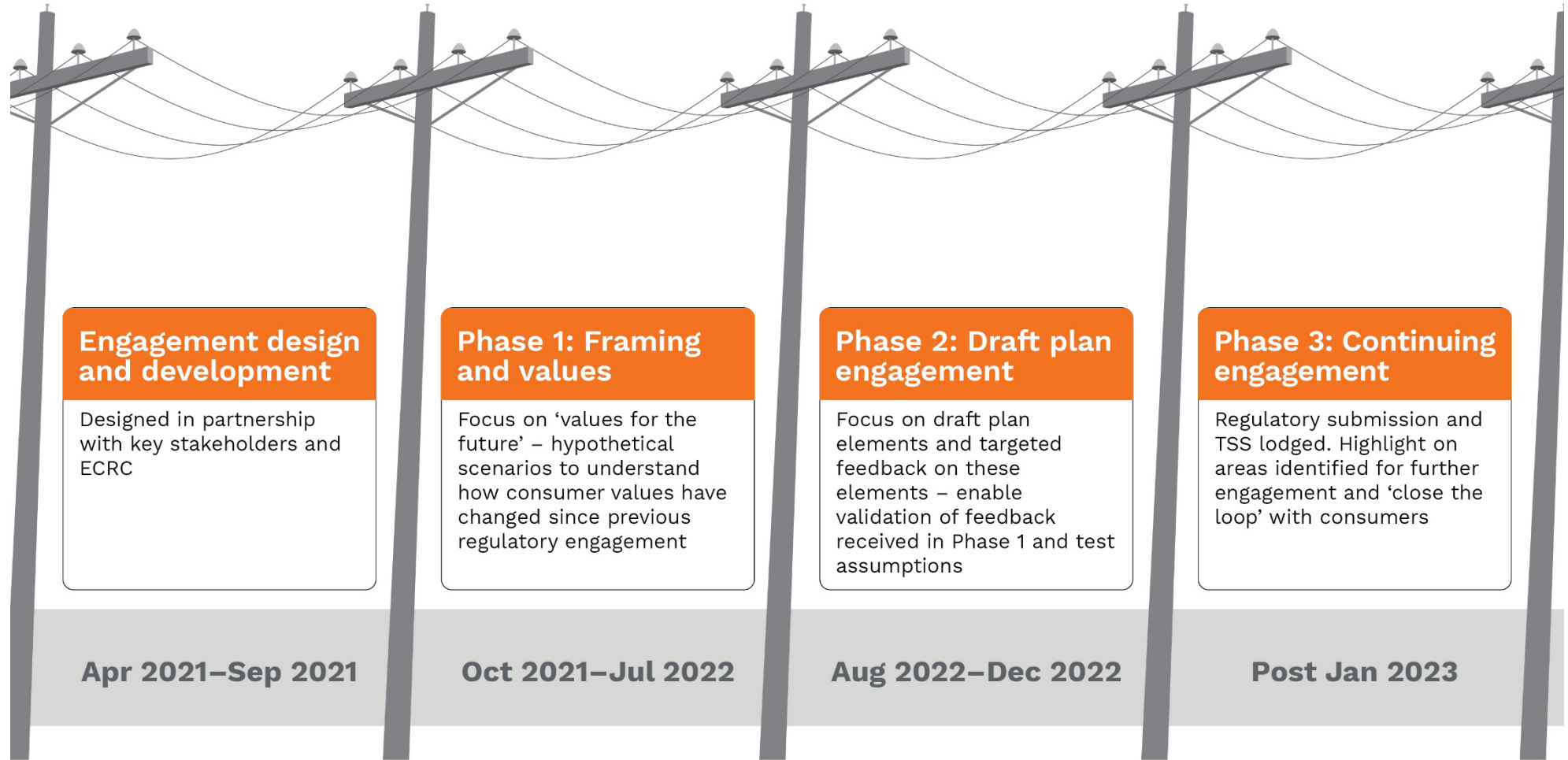


Figure 3. EN24 and TSS engagement phases



## 2.3 International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation

Evoenergy aligns its consumer engagement activities to the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum and the spectrum (shown in Figure 4) will underpin the variety of activities outlined in this Strategy. The spectrum is used internationally, and designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Figure 4. Engagement spectrum endorsed by the AER

## 2.4 Continuous improvement in consumer engagement

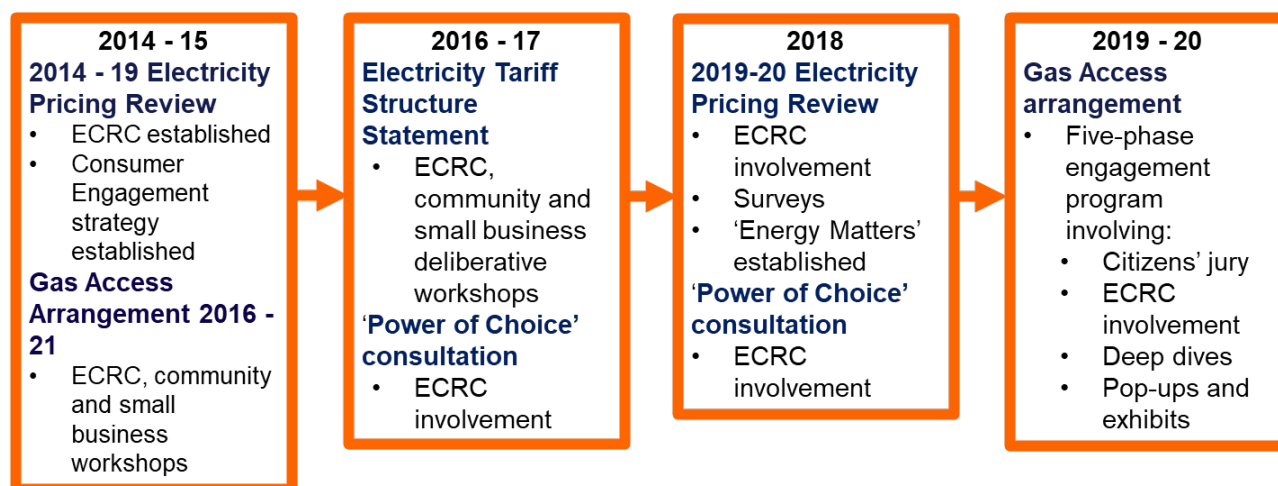
Evoenergy is committed to ensuring continuous improvement of the organisation’s consumer engagement.

Evoenergy’s commitment to continuous improvement in consumer engagement is summarised by the following pillars:

- **Accessible** – ensuring consumers are given the opportunity to engage in a format and a time that is suited to them
- **All of us** – ensuring participants reflect the diversity in our community through inclusive engagement opportunities
- **Authentic** – having a plan for how consumer feedback will shape of the regulatory submission
- **Adaptive** – reflecting and learning from past engagements, seeking to validate and build on previous knowledge.



Evoenergy's regulatory consumer engagement journey from 2014 to today is summarised in Figure 5 along with key highlights from each engagement. Over this time, Evoenergy has continued to explore new and different ways of engaging whilst simultaneously embedding consumer engagement at 'business as usual' enabling consumer feedback to impact on business processes and service delivery.



**Figure 5.** Evoenergy regulatory consumer engagement timeline

## 2.5 Integrated engagement approach for EN24 and TSS

The engagement approach outlined in this Strategy covers both the EN24 proposal and the TSS. The approach is integrated to maximise efficiencies in delivering engagement processes to audiences and across subject matter that overlaps. The tools and activities included in this Strategy will be used to gather feedback to inform both the EN24 proposal and the TSS.

This type of integrated approach acknowledges that for many stakeholder groups, it will be equally desirable to provide feedback to both the EN24 proposal and the TSS. By putting stakeholders at the forefront of the engagement planning, the number of activities stakeholders need to be involved in to give feedback on both proposals is minimised and it also increases the potential pool of participants as it is easier to get involved.

The integrated approach also ensures consistency and clarity of message across different formats and minimises confusion that can occur from different activities occurring concurrently.

This approach also acknowledges that the subject matter being considered in the development of the EN24 submission and the TSS is often complex and there is crossover and intertwined issues, such as decarbonisation and the changing energy sector. An integrated engagement approach enables subject matter to be fully explored even if it crosses into other areas of interest. Through detailed recording of feedback and analysis of data gathered, the feedback will be utilised to inform the development of both submissions.

While this integrated approach will underpin our program, at times it will be necessary for us to drill deeper into specific focus areas of the EN24 proposal or TSS. We will plan engagement activities which provide opportunities to explore these areas in detail. Information on specific engagement activities and where these focus on specific topics is provided in Section 5 of this Strategy.



### 3. Stakeholders





Through implementation of this Strategy, Evoenergy will seek to engage diverse representatives from all customer segments as well as targeted engagement with retailers, government and industry.

Evoenergy has identified the customer segments outlined in Table 3 which will be engaged during EN24 and whose feedback will influence the regulatory proposal and tariff structure statement.

A full stakeholder list including contact details and identifying stakeholder grouping is being maintained separately to this strategy.

For the purposes of the Strategy, the Australian Energy Regulator, including the Consumer Challenge Panel, The Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), and The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) are not considered stakeholders but end recipients and approval parties.

**Table 3.** Stakeholder groups and descriptions

Stakeholder group	Description
 Residential	Evoenergy currently supplies electricity to over 200,000 customers and gas to over 160,000 customers. Energy consumers are diverse, including individuals and families in owned and rented properties, representative community groups, community councils and resident groups and progress associations.
 Small-medium business	The majority of Canberra's over 30,000 registered businesses are small-medium sized. These organisations have a different viewpoint to larger businesses or residential customers and the events of 2020 including bushfires, hail and the COVID pandemic <sup>678</sup> have had significant impacts on operations, mental health <sup>9</sup> and finances.
 Vulnerable communities	The term 'vulnerable' is broad. It may refer to someone with low education or literacy levels, it may be a person with a disability, or someone experiencing financial hardship. It may apply to someone who has experienced domestic violence or is socially isolated or someone who relies on a continuous energy supply for health, quality of life or survival. This stakeholder group includes those receiving ACT Government's Utilities Concession and relates to both individuals and advocacy groups.
 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities	This stakeholder group comprises individuals and representative groups from CALD communities. The Canberra community is diverse and represents people from a range of different countries, with different cultural backgrounds, and who may speak other languages besides English, and follow different religions, traditions, values and beliefs.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7003967/small-firms-feel-greater-impact-from-covid/>







<sup>7</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/third-businesses-will-face-challenges-paying-bills>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-australia-business-economic-fallout-facebook-report-oecd-covid19/5a7e08a0-034d-444c-a479-633421282f2b>

<sup>9</sup> <https://indaily.com.au/opinion/2020/09/15/pandemic-taxes-small-business-and-mental-health/>





Stakeholder group	Description
 <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities</p>	<p>This stakeholder group comprises individuals and representative groups from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Canberra sits on the lands of the Ngunnawal people and they are the traditional custodians of this land.</p>
 <p>Young people</p>	<p>As future energy consumers, the voices and expectations of young people is essential in this dynamic environment. There are over 10,000 secondary college students (years 11 and 12) in Canberra and during the 2024-2029 regulatory period they will have graduated and likely be paying their own utility bills.</p>
 <p>Retailers</p>	<p>Retailers are the important intermediaries between the network operators and the consumers. They are also facing a changing energy market and responding accordingly. There are currently eight retailers serving Canberra.</p>
 <p>Large customers</p>	<p>Evoenergy actively maintains relationships with large customers. Large customers represent a range of businesses including commercial business owners or critical customers that access large amounts of energy and may have special infrastructure to support their needs. These include hospitals, large government departments, data centres, universities and land or property developers.</p> <p>This group also includes large scale battery owners and operators. This represents a group that hasn't previously been engaged with extensively.</p>
 <p>ACT Government</p>	<p>The ACT Government has many interactions and interests that intersect with this consultation proposal. Most of the stakeholder engagement with this cohort is managed at a functional, relationship-based level, however the ACT Government has provided previous contributions to engagement programs by providing subject matter experts and participating in forums.</p>
 <p>Industry</p>	<p>The industry cohort is broad and includes consumer and other advocacy groups, 'new energy' providers and peak industry groups. This group is likely to include emerging stakeholders in the renewable energy industry who may not have engaged previously such as the Zero Emission Transportation Association (ZETA).</p> <p>This group sometimes contributes to consultations as subject matter experts, such as through the ANU's Distributed Energy Resources Laboratory (DER Lab), a state-of-the-art facility that mirrors the electricity grid.</p>



## 4. Engagement approach, key messages and consultation topics

### 4.1 Key consultation messages

The following key messages apply to the consultation program outlined in this Strategy, whether related to EN24, TSS or both.

1. At Evoenergy we have a long-standing commitment to the local community and strive to operate with our customers' interests at the heart of all we do.
2. The energy sector is changing rapidly and so are our stakeholders. Stakeholders needs, levels of understanding, influence and desire for how manage their energy and their level of involvement are just some of these changes. We want to ensure the services we provide continue to meet the changing needs of all stakeholders.
3. We want to provide opportunities for our consumers and stakeholders to understand more about Evoenergy and energy networks more broadly so that they can provide clear advice on what they value and their priorities.
4. We will be engaging with the community between now and June 2022 to understand their values in a changing energy landscape. Then in mid-2022 we will produce a draft proposal that has been shaped by this feedback and undertake another round of engagement to ensure it reflects community sentiment.
5. The understanding and perspectives we gain from our engagement program will help us shape and refine our 2024-2029 regulatory proposal and tariff structure statement (EN24) to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) in January 2023. In turn, this proposal will outline our strategic priorities for the next five years.
6. There are many ways to get involved, visit our website at <INSERT LINK> to find out more.

### 4.2 Consultation topics

During development of this Strategy, members of the ECRC advised that the level of flexibility observed in the rollout of engagement programs by Evoenergy was a strength. Flexibility has therefore been prioritised in this Strategy with agile tools and tactics proposed that can respond to areas of increased customer focus or requiring additional clarity or understanding. This flexibility sits within a context of ensuring that the feedback gathered can actively impact the shape of the regulatory proposal and tariff structure statement, making it equally important to ensure feedback requested is structured against areas that are relevant to the proposal or shape its design.

Table 4 provides an overview of the key consultation topics that will guide engagement and provides indicative questions which will be applied across the different engagement platforms. However, these are likely to evolve as Evoenergy's plans develop and it responds to feedback throughout the program.

**Table 4.** Consultation topic areas and impacts on regulatory development design and content

Topic area	Indicative consultation questions	Impact on regulatory proposal
Pricing structures (including tariff options and trade-offs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there features of existing or proposed tariffs that you think are working well or require changing?</li> </ul>	Used to inform the Tariff Structure Statement



Topic area	Indicative consultation questions	Impact on regulatory proposal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What issues are the most important when considering the addition of new network tariffs?</li> <li>• How quickly should we transition to tariff structures that reflect the changes in the energy sector?</li> <li>• Would you be happy to pay more if it means you can export to the grid at all times or would you prefer to control export times to reduce costs?</li> </ul>	
Network expansion, pathway towards net zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How should we support customers as more and more are producing their own energy (e.g. Solar)?</li> <li>• How much are you willing to pay (examples given) to support network expansion?</li> <li>• What changes do you see occurring to the energy mix in your house over the next 5-20 years as we head towards a net zero emissions future?</li> <li>• How do we manage the risk that people who cannot afford the infrastructure to produce and store their own energy may end up covering a larger share of the cost of maintaining the network?</li> <li>• How quickly should we invest in new infrastructure to support the phasing out of natural gas?</li> </ul>	Used to inform capital investment (capex) decisions Used to inform aspects of the TSS
Safety and reliability, response times, service levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you pay more for your electricity to improve areas of the network that are less reliable or constrained in other ways?</li> <li>• Would you prefer to pay less for your electricity with a more reactive maintenance program but potentially reduced reliability in the future?</li> <li>• Are there particular areas of network operations and maintenance that you think are important?</li> </ul>	Used to inform operational expenditure (opex) decisions
Customer service incentive scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noting that Evoenergy is required to provide a base-level of service to all its customers, are there particular areas of customer service that you would like to see improved?</li> <li>• How would you define good service in these areas, what does success look like? – is it about ease of access to information, timeliness, expectations etc?</li> </ul>	Used to inform the decision to pursue a Customer Service Incentive Scheme and the design of the scheme





Topic area	Indicative consultation questions	Impact on regulatory proposal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think good customer service should be measured? Are their specific targets Evoenergy we should aim for?</li> <li>• Do you support Evoenergy adopting a new incentive scheme for customer service improvements?</li> </ul>	
Consumer priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What electricity network related topics are most important to you?</li> </ul>	Used to inform other areas of consultation and communication
Connection policy options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What improvements could be made to Evoenergy's connection policy?</li> <li>• Do you consider Evoenergy's proposed changes to the connection policy to be fair?</li> </ul>	Used to inform proposed changes to connection policy
Changing energy sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much do you see the energy sector changing in the next 5 years and beyond?</li> <li>• As the energy sector changes, what are your priority areas in terms of your electricity supply?</li> </ul>	Used to inform capital investment (capex) decisions



## 5. Engagement tools and activities

Similar to engagement topics, during development of this Strategy, ECRC members noted that the level of flexibility offered in previous consumer engagement activities enabled Evoenergy to respond quickly to unforeseen events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The tools and activities outlined in this section have an in-built level of flexibility to ensure that they can be altered or refocused to consider topic areas or changed format needs.

As outlined in Section 2, there is significant overlap in the tools and activities used for the TSS and EN24 engagement and this is by-design.

The approach outlined provides multiple opportunities for consumer segments to provide feedback in different ways and in different contexts. Through detailed data recording and analysis, and feedback, trends and key themes will be understood to guide development of the regulatory submission.

These tools and activities are further explored in the remainder of this section.

### 5.1 Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) health check-up

The ECRC is a key vehicle for seeking consumer input into EN24 and TSS as the members of the ECRC are representatives of a broad cross-section of consumers and will be provided with detailed presentations to facilitate collaboration in the development of the regulatory proposal and tariff structure statement.

The ECRC meets every two months and EN24 and TSS will be a regular item on the agenda, with topics to be presented and discussed to reflect both the priorities of the regulatory proposal and tariff structure statement but also the areas of interest and concern to the members of the ECRC.

A new feature of this consultation for EN24 and TSS is the introduction of a Consultation Health Check and development of a Report Card. The Consultation Health Checks will be undertaken by the ECRC at approximately six-monthly intervals. Timing may vary slightly to align to key program milestones and ECRC meeting dates.

An example of how the Report Card might look is provided in Figure 6.



EN24 engagement health check report card		Overall rating: Traffic light / grade	Eg. <b>B+</b>	
<b>Are we staying true to our continuous improvement pillars?</b>		<b>What are we doing well?</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Accessible</b> – ensuring all people are given the opportunity to engage in a format and a time that is suitable to them</li> </ul>	Example			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>All of us</b> – ensuring inclusive, engagement participants reflect the diversity in our community</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Authentic</b> – having a plan for how the feedback received will influence outcomes and the shape of the regulatory submission</li> </ul>				<b>What can we improve on?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Adaptive</b> – reflecting and learning from past engagements, seeking to build on the knowledge you have and validating it.</li> </ul>				
<b>Are we on track to achieve our EN24 engagement objectives?</b>				
Inform, consult, involve and collaborate with electricity consumers, key stakeholders and other members of the Canberra community about the future of the electricity network.	<b>On track</b>	<b>How do we improve? What resources would be required?</b>		
Gather diverse consumer input to inform the development of the EN24 and TSS Regulatory Submission.	<b>Area requiring work</b>			
Further enhance consumer knowledge of Evoenergy and its business through active engagement from Evoenergy business during engagement delivery.	<b>Area of concern</b>			

Figure 6. Example health check report card for ECRC

## 5.2 Community Panel

Recognising the complexity of the engagement landscape, Evoenergy will establish a Community Panel to enable a more flexible focus across a wider range of issues over a longer period of time.

The Community Panel will be no larger than 30 participants and members will be asked to commit to the process over an extended period. Panel members will be recruited using random stratified sampling to reflect the diversity in the Canberra community and participation will be incentivised.

Stratification will include gender, age, location, cultural background, housing status, and business ownership status and aligned to demographic information about the Canberra region.

The Community Panel will meet about five times during the consultation program in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. The Community Panel participants will be offered detailed information on Evoenergy operations and the regulatory environment. The Community Panel will be able to consider feedback gathered through other engagement activities, such as the Engagement Website and similarly to a Citizens' Jury, the Community Panel will have access to experts and data from outside Evoenergy to validate claims and ensure transparency.

Indicative focus areas for Community Panel meetings are outlined in Table 5. NB, these topics will be reviewed to adapt to evolving issues and specific areas of interest nominated by the Community Panel.



**Table 5.** Proposed Community Panel meeting focus areas

Meeting	Focus area	Objective
Meeting 1	Orientation Customer Service Incentive Scheme	Build base knowledge and understanding of Evoenergy, engagement environment and consumer values. Help to inform Customer Service Incentive Scheme and operational considerations.
Meeting 2	TSS	Understand consumer views related to proposed tariffs and tariff trials, solar export charges and equity in transition.
Meeting 3	Supporting vulnerable customers Energy transition considerations	Continue building on previous meetings to explore consumer views on energy transition to net zero environment, tariff structures, infrastructure and operational investment in changing times.
Meeting 4	Draft proposal consideration	Presentation of draft proposal and consideration of elements within.
Meeting 5	TBD	Identified focus area or may be replaced with a Deep Dive to which the Community Panel would be invited.

## 5.3 Engagement Website

The Engagement Website consists of two main elements:

- Landing page and supporting content
- Interactive online experience

The website's success will rely on the effectiveness of supporting promotional undertakings. This is explored further in Section 6 of this Strategy.

Participation will also be incentivised through an entry to win a gift card or similar by participating.

The Engagement Website will meet WCAG 2.1 and W3C accessibility requirements, such as using transcripts and closed captions.

### 5.3.1 Landing page and supporting content

The website will set out the engagement program, timeframes, avenues to get involved and reporting. This will ensure transparency on engagement efforts and outcomes and provide a single source of truth about all aspects of the engagement program.

It will also provide background information to provide context to the consultation. This is the range of material and information that will be used through the website to ensure that information presented is clear and accessible to all website visitors. This content may utilise diagrams, images, infographics, video, or other mediums.

### 5.3.2 Interactive online experience

This will be an interactive online experience that seeks to understand consumer views and priorities across the range of topics identified in Section 4 across EN24 and TSS. The experience provides a quantitative insight into a broader range of consumer views. This will be supplemented by qualitative feedback received through other activities.



The interactive element will be refreshed between Phase 1 and Phase 2 to align to the objectives of each phase.

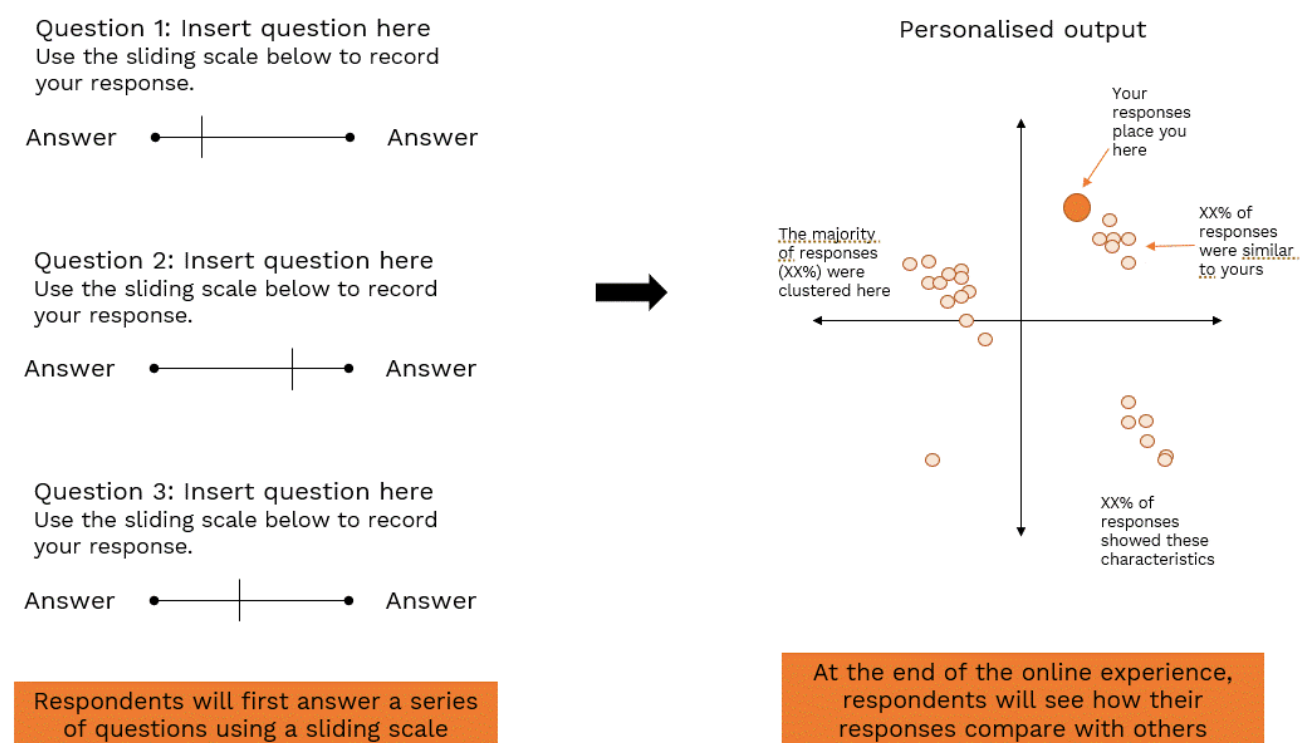
In Phase 1, the interactive content will seek to understand consumer values and interest across a range of areas. In Phase 2, questions will be focused on the content of the draft proposal.

Participants will be asked to answer some simple demographic questions that will help to understand who is responding and what spread of demographics are represented.

Participant contact information will also be requested to enable them to be contacted for the next phase of consultation to provide additional feedback.

Using a sliding scale, participants will be asked to place themselves along a scale for each question. Their answers will be aggregated and anonymised. They will then be presented back to them at the end showing where their responses sit alongside everyone else who has completed the interactive element.

The process for the interactive element is outlined in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** Interactive element process

The sliding scales would be applied to no more than 10 questions and would cover a range of areas to reflect the key consultation areas. It will be essential that all questions have relevance to whomever participates, and final questions will be carefully curated to ensure this.

Figure 8 provides example content that could be used when asking about service delivery. This example content would be used to assist in shaping operational expenditure and the Customer Service Incentive Scheme.





- Partnering through ACTCOSS or similar organisation to take the online experience to specific locations, such as shelters, soup kitchens, and community service providers. Using iPads, participants will be assisted to complete the online experience and their time will be incentivised through a gift card or similar incentive. This will likely occur during Phase 1.
- Undertaking a workshop with a range of representatives from advocacy and peak groups focused on the Draft Proposal (see Section 5.12). This workshop will occur in Phase 2.

### 5.5.2 Canberra Business Chamber partnership

Using a similar model to the vulnerable consumer partnership, Evoenergy will seek to partner with the Canberra Business Chamber to understand perspectives and feedback from Canberra's small-medium business community.

The partnership will aim to achieve two outputs:

- Distribution and promotion of online experience to Canberra Business Chamber networks and promotion through member organisation networks.
- Small-medium business workshop drawing together representatives to share their experiences and views as small-medium business owners and operators.

### 5.5.3 Culturally and linguistically diverse partnership

Using a similar model to the other partnership, these partnerships would seek to help understand perspectives from Canberrans from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through workshops and surveys. Partnering with an organisation like Canberra Multicultural Forum will enable participation from a broad range of different cultural groups to understand perspectives relating to electricity usage, including impacts for new migrants, linguistically diverse Canberrans accessing information, as well as understanding energy use and future needs.

## 5.6 One-on-one meetings

One-on-one meetings with stakeholders will be used to gather direct feedback from particular interest groups.

This will be the main mechanism used for retailer engagement due to ringfencing and competition restrictions.

This will be the key mechanism used for ACT Government engagement drawing on existing stakeholder business relationships across Evoenergy.

Evoenergy will seek to use existing regular meetings with retailers and industry associations including those managed by the Customer Connections team, to highlight engagement opportunities and gather feedback.

## 5.7 Energy Matters

Energy Matters is Evoenergy's premier event for its large customers. The event provides an opportunity for a focus on large customer audiences that may have unique perspectives and provides an opportunity to share experiences with other large customers.

During previous regulatory consultation periods, the Energy Matters event format has been used as a forum to present case studies, workshop values and ambitions and help shape the regulatory submission. This will be repeated during EN24.



## 5.8 Future consumer forum

During Phase 1 Evoenergy will partner with local colleges and the ACT Education Directorate to host a forum with Year 11 and 12 students to understand their views as future energy bill payers. Students who are currently in Year 11 and 12 have a unique perspective to share and will provide interesting insights about their expectations in the future energy space.

The forum will seek to include students from a range of learning environments including private and public schools. Areas to explore will include:

- Their expectations for the future
- The changing energy sector and use of technology in energy
- Supporting vulnerable customers.

The forum would take place during Phase 1 of engagement.

## 5.9 Tariff trial engagement outcomes

Running parallel to the broader EN24 and TSS engagement will be two tariff trials, one for residential battery users and one for large scale battery users.

These trials will produce a range of valuable engagement data both relating to usage of the products and consumer preference.

This trial engagement data will be utilised to inform the TSS and EN24 proposal.

## 5.10 Draft EN24 proposal and TSS

The Draft EN24 proposal and tariff structure statement provide consumers with visibility of our plans to seek feedback before we finalise our proposal for submission to the AER. The Draft proposal is written and presented in an easy-to-read and visually appealing way and accompanied by direct questions that guide the reader and focus their responses.

The Draft proposal also reflects on how it had been shaped by consultation-to-date.

## 5.11 Deep Dives

As part of the delivery of the program, we expect the Deep Dive engagement format will be used on a few occasions, and we will adapt these to address topics that emerge as requiring in depth discussion.

For example, during Phase 1 engagement, a Deep Dive may be undertaken with large scale battery owners and operators to further explore their feedback. As a relatively new stakeholder group in the ACT, the information gathered from this forum will help to shape potential new tariff structures for the TSS.

It is anticipated that a Deep Dive may be undertaken in lieu of a 5<sup>th</sup> Community Panel meeting if deemed necessary. Participation invitations would be sent to ECRC members, Community Panel members, large customers and other key stakeholders. The focus topic of the Deep Dive will be left undecided and will enable flexibility in the program rollout to provide a forum for in-depth consideration of a topic determined during the consultation.

Additional Deep Dives will be undertaken as needed in response to areas that have high level of interest or focus during the consultation.





## 5.12 Draft EN24 proposal and TSS workshop

This workshop will align with the launch of the Draft proposal and TSS and will step through the Plan enabling an opportunity for interested stakeholders to understand in more detail the Draft EN24 proposal and TSS and their contents.

There is an opportunity for this to be presented online to maximise attendance and accessibility.

## 5.13 Covid-safe engagement

Engagement activities will be COVID-safe utilising protocols to manage work health and safety and meet requirements for contact tracing, physical space use and hygiene. In the event of changes to COVID-19 restrictions, engagement activities can be pivoted to virtual environments utilising the digital platforms already proposed and enhancing them further to ensure they still provide opportunities for meaningful engagement.



Opportunities for hybrid online and virtual engagement options will also be explored and incorporated into activities to maximise participation.

A range of engagement tools have been developed with reference to providing a platform to involve and collaborate with consumers. This section identifies the recommended tools and activities to guide communication and engagement.






## 5.14 Stakeholder involvement in consultation activities

Consultation activities are mapped against their targeted stakeholder groups in Table 6 showing the primary stakeholder groups for each activity. This only maps the primary groups for each activity, there will likely be overlaps with other groups not explicitly identified in this table.

**Table 6.** Consultation activity by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Consultation tools and activities											
	ECRC health check	Community Panel	Engagement Website	Community roadshow	Consumer group partnership	One-on-one meetings	Energy Matters	Future consumer forum	Tariff trial engagement outcomes	Draft EN24 proposal and TSS	Deep dives	Draft proposal workshop
 Residential	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
 Small-medium business	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	✓
 Vulnerable communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓



 Young people		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓
 Retailers						✓				✓		✓
 Large customers	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
 ACT Government						✓			✓	✓		✓
 Industry	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓



## 6. Promotion

The effectiveness of many of the activities outlined in Section 5 of this Strategy will rely upon them being effectively underpinned by promotional activities that encourage as many people as possible to participate.

Whilst promotion of many of the activities will be managed through direct invitation or through targeted partnerships (such as through the vulnerable customer or the Canberra Business Chamber partnership), there will be requirements for some of the activities to be supported by promotional activity to achieve the best results.

A dedicated Communications Strategy will be developed to support this Consumer Engagement Strategy. Detailed promotional planning will be undertaken with Evoenergy's Strategic Communications Advisor. Table 7 outlines a range of tools that can be used, however this does not present an exhaustive list.

**Table 7.** Promotional tools

Tool	Approach
Existing Evoenergy newsletters such as major customer newsletter	Utilise existing channels to promote the engagement program more generally and specifically events like Energy Matters and large customer specific forums
Retailer promotion	Approach retailers to seek their assistance to promote the Engagement Website
Social media	Utilising Evoenergy's existing social media accounts to maximise the reach of engagement opportunities. This may be through organic reach or paid promotion and geotargeting.
Evoenergy website	Carousel images or similar promoting the Engagement Website on the Evoenergy website.
ECRC Member networks	Creating content and materials that can easily be shared through ECRC member networks.
Presentations to Community Councils	Presentations to Community Councils outlining engagement program and opportunities for participation.
Media release	Utilising media at key milestones to further the reach of engagement opportunities.



## 7. KPIs, monitoring and evaluation

### 7.1 Consumer impact on the EN24 Submission

As detailed in Section 2.4, one of the main consultation objectives of this Strategy is to gather diverse consumer input to inform the development of the EN24 and TSS Regulatory Submission.

The following steps will be taken to ensure consumer feedback is addressed in the preparation of the revenue proposal:

- **Careful and accurate collection of data** – this will include minutes, reports and data analysis of feedback from all interactions with consumers and stakeholder groups.
- **Public release of feedback** – through the web-based release of regular reports on consultation activities and a final consultation report, consumers will be able to challenge Evoenergy if stakeholder feedback has not been accurately recorded or adequately considered in the Regulatory Submission.
- **Draft proposal** – this Plan will show where consumer feedback has shaped the Plan to date.
- **ECRC Consultation Health Check Report Card** – the ECRC will be advising as to whether we are achieving our consultation objectives through their Consultation Health Checks and resulting Report Card.
- **Direct input to management structure** – feedback from consumers will be regularly reported to the Project Board and associated project team responsible for preparing the regulatory proposal
- **Demonstrate resulting changes to strategies** – in the regulatory proposal changes resulting from consumer feedback will be clearly identified. Where consumer feedback differed to the final position in the submission the reasons for this difference will be clearly explained.

A Consultation Report will be produced at the end of Phase 1 and Phase 2 that summarises activities undertaken, feedback received and response to that feedback. The Consultation Report will be presented to and, if appropriate, endorsed by the ECRC prior to being finalised.

### 7.2 Key performance indicators

Based on the objectives of this Strategy, and aligned to the continuous improvement pillars, the following KPIs will be reported on at the conclusion of Phase 1 and Phase 2.

A number of these KPI measurements will rely on exit surveys of participants in workshops and other interpersonal activities. This will be supported by quantitative data to determine diversity and participation.

**Table 8.** Key performance indicators and measures

KPI goal	Measurement tools/mechanisms	Target
Inform, consult, involve and collaborate with electricity consumers, key stakeholders and other members of the Canberra community about the future of the electricity network.	Participant surveys at events including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy Matters</li> <li>• Future Consumer Forum</li> <li>• Community panel (baseline and final evaluation)</li> </ul> Questions will seek to understand if participation fulfilled the 'promise to	80% of participants indicate they feel they were engaged in the development of the key aspects of the regulatory submission at the identified participation level as defined by the IAP2 Spectrum of engagement.



KPI goal	Measurement tools/mechanisms	Target
the public’ as outlined in Figure 4.		
<p>To <b>collaborate</b> with the ECRC</p>	<p>Consultation Health Check and Report Card.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report Card indicates a high level of success in the design and delivery of engagement activities.</li> <li>• ECRC feedback reports that members of the forum feel they were engaged in the development of the key aspects of EN24 submission at the ‘collaborate’ level as defined by the IAP2 Spectrum of engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>All of us</b> – ensuring inclusive engagement, participants reflect the diversity in our community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data gathered from participants in the engagement program.</li> <li>• Random stratified recruitment for community panel.</li> <li>• Communication and website materials are accessibility compliant.</li> </ul>	<p>Participation is representative of identified stakeholder groups as identified through ABS data and Evoenergy consumer data.</p>
<p><b>Accessible</b> - ensuring all Canberrans are given the opportunity to engage in a format and a time that is suitable to them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic and hard-copy information, venues and presentations will be accessible.</li> <li>• Consultation Health Check and Report Card.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% compliance with identified guidelines.</li> <li>• There are no substantiated instances of people expressing concern or dissatisfaction about accessibility or inclusiveness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Authentic</b> – having a plan for how the feedback received will influence outcomes and the shape of the regulatory submission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation Health Check and Report Card.</li> <li>• Participant survey.</li> <li>• Publishing of reports.</li> <li>• Explored further in Section 7.1.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report card indicates continuous improvement pillar is being met.</li> <li>• 80% of participants report they feel they are influencing the final outcome.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Adaptive</b> – reflecting and learning from past engagements, seeking to build on the knowledge you have and validating it.</p>	<p>Consultation Health Check and Report Card.</p>	<p>Report card indicates continuous improvement pillar is being met</p>



KPI goal	Measurement tools/mechanisms	Target
Clear, accurate and timely information	Participant surveys	80% of participants report that information is easy to understand.

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## 8. Reporting and resources

### 8.1 On-going insights

Regular communication, event reports and status updates will ensure that Evoenergy's EN24 project team and project board have access to continual insights gathered through engagement activities.

### 8.2 Consultation reports

A detailed consultation report will be produced at the ends of Phase 1 and Phase 2 enabling information gathered to be accurately analysed and synthesised to produce actionable feedback to shape the regulatory submission.

### 8.3 Resourcing

Approval of content and deliverables associated with this Strategy will be the responsibility of the Group Manager Regulatory Reviews, Economic Regulation in consultation with the Customer Delivery Group Manager.

Additional Evoenergy resources will be required as subject matter experts and senior leadership will be actively involved in the delivery of engagement activities.

Communication and promotional activity used to support the implementation of this Strategy will be delivered by Evoenergy through Evoenergy communications channels.

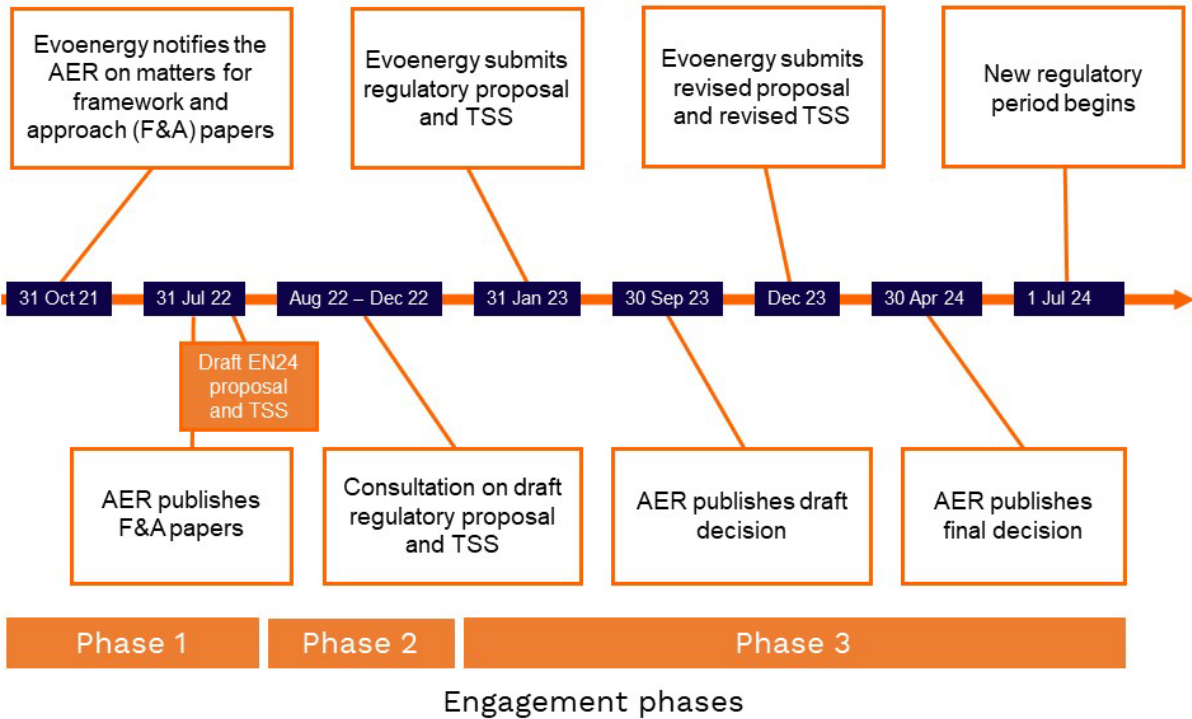
Communication Link will drive the delivery of the consultation program outlined in this Strategy, in consultation with Evoenergy. This will include:

- Coordinate engagement reporting
- Participate in regular meetings as required
- Facilitate key stakeholder meetings and workshops as required
- Maintain oversight of project delivery of the consumer engagement program
- Support development of communication and promotional approaches
- Manage the day-to-day community engagement activities, in consultation with Evoenergy, including:
  - Management of Strategy activities
  - Manage project establishment activities
  - Develop engagement content
  - Liaise with key stakeholder groups for logistics coordination
  - Coordinate stakeholder engagement events as required
  - Maintain consultation records and other reporting requirements.



# 9. Implementation program

Figure 9 provides an overview of the regulatory submission development timetable aligned with the identified consultation periods. Section 9.1 provides a more detailed implementation program.



**Figure 9.** Consumer engagement timeline against EN24 regulatory submission





### 9.1 Working implementation program

Engagement phase																							
Strategy and preparation							Phase 1: Framing and values									Phase 2: Draft proposal engagement					Phase 3: continuing engagement		
Engagement tool/tactic	May 2021	Jun 2021	Jul 2021	Aug 2021	Sep 2021	Oct 2021	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Feb 2022	Mar 2022	Apr 2022	May 2022	Jun 2022	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022	Jan 2023	Post Jan 2023	
Project milestones	Strategy preparation and approval			AER notified of F&A papers													F&A papers published by AER	Draft proposal created			Reg. sub and TSS submitted		
Energy Consumer Reference Council	Consult update		Consult update		Consult update Baseline Health check		Consult update		Consult update		Consult update	Health check		Consult update		Consult update	Health check		Consult update or Deep dive		Consult update		Consult update
Community panel	Panel design and recruitment			Meeting #1			Meeting #2			Meeting #3			Meeting #4			Meeting #5 or Deep dive							
Engagement website	Design and content			Launch			Focus on 'values for the future'									Focus on draft proposal element and targeted feedback on plan elements							
							Panel update			Panel update			Content update			Panel update			Panel update			Content update	
Community roadshow							Roadshow (shopping centres, Community councils)						Roadshow (shopping centres, Community councils)										
Consumer group partnerships	Establish partnerships						Workshop 1/ vulnerable consumer 1-1 engagement						Workshop 2										
One-on-one meetings							Retailers and ACT Government						Retailers and ACT Government										
Energy Matters							Energy Matters																
Future consumer forum							Future consumer forum																
Tarif trial engagement outcomes													Outcomes to be factored into engagement reporting										
Deep dives													Large scale battery			Deep dive							
Draft proposal workshop													All stakeholders invited										



## Appendix A – Desktop review across other network distributors

### Regulatory Forces Behind Customer Engagement

#### Introduction/overview

- The National Electricity Market (NEM) includes 13 electricity distribution networks (or distributors). The NEM connects all Australian jurisdictions except Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
- These companies have a varied structure ranging between private or public ownership or a combination of the two.
- There has been community dissatisfaction about a perceived gap between network performance and consumer expectations about the cost—and security—of what is regarded as an essential service.
- This perception has resulted in a regulatory environment that has intensified since 2019 because of a series of natural disasters, such as the Black Summer 2019-20 bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Covid-19, in particular, raised concerns about the ability of consumers to afford energy bills and brought with it issues surrounding repayment, debt and fairness. From an operational perspective, one of the major challenges brought about by Covid-19 was the challenge of managing a maintenance (planned outages) schedule and still meeting community expectations to keep power on whilst working/schooling from home.
- There are also community concerns over who in the future will bear the costs of the networks' likely transition to a net zero emissions economy, greatly increased use of distributed energy resources and ensuring the equitable distribution of distributed energy resource costs and unintended outcomes. That transition is expected to bring higher investment costs that may be passed on to consumers and may result in inequities for those who cannot afford changing resources.

#### Australian Energy Regulator (AER)

- The networks hold largely monopoly positions in their markets.
- They are regulated and policed by the AER, which approves their revenue and pricing, stipulates the need for appropriate customer engagement and reviews their performance on a regular basis.
- The AER currently has a Statement of Expectations which focusses on the obligations on energy companies to be responsive to the financial situation of consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- There is also the NewReg, which is a joint initiative between the AER, Energy Networks Australia (ENA) and Energy Consumers Australia (ECA).
- The NewReg is intended to explore ways to improve engagement with customers and identify opportunities for regulatory innovation.
- Its aim is to ensure that customers' preferences drive energy network businesses proposals and regulatory outcomes. Essentially the NewReg tries to include energy consumers in the planning and investment process before any applications go to the AER.
- This has an important bearing on the consumer engagement strategies of the individual network companies.



Consumer engagement strategies	
Regulations and Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To a degree, the forces at work in energy network regulation described above are currently reflected in customer engagement strategies. In other words, stakeholder engagement reflects the regulatory environment.</li> <li>• Networks have been working more openly to include customer preferences in planning and regulatory decisions. This reflects the shift to distributed energy resources where the consumer is an integrated part of the energy network as a generator.</li> </ul>
Customer-centric Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual energy network firms are at relatively different stages of maturity in terms of their customer engagement strategies, a point recognised by Energy Networks Australia, the peak body for the networks.</li> <li>• Despite this complexity, these trends towards more customer-centric engagement seem common across different companies.</li> <li>• In practice, this customer-centric approach can mean: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Partnering with local communities more effectively</li> <li>ii. Consumers co-designing plans or future regulations</li> <li>iii. Creating consumer committees to liaise with the networks</li> <li>iv. Conducting forums across a specific geographic area for consumer input</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Trendlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This trend is clearly apparent in the winner and finalists for the 2020 Consumer Engagement Award.</li> <li>• The winner, the Australian Gas Infrastructure Group (AGIG), set out to embed a genuine customer focus into all aspects of its future planning for the South Australian Gas Distribution Network (AGN).</li> <li>• To quote the report from Energy Networks Australia<sup>10</sup>, which co-hosts the Award: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>The program was based on genuine and effective engagement, with a focus on empowering staff to deliver the best outcomes for customers.</i></li> <li><i>AGN set a clear objective of developing a plan which delivers for current and future customers, is underpinned by effective stakeholder engagement and is capable of being accepted by customers and stakeholders.</i></li> <li><i>The project sought to ensure genuine and effective engagement which included 22 iterative customer workshops where customers could have open discussions with AGN about what was important to them. AGN discussed the key issues of most importance, and then tested and validated proposals with their customers. AGN tracked and documented all engagement activities, so any customer or stakeholder could easily see how feedback has informed plans.</i></li> <li><i>Customer feedback was used to develop and shape plans on key issues including price, future of gas, and education.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• A runner-up in the same Award, AusNet Services, is another good example of customer-centric engagement practice from the energy networks. This firm conducted a trial of the NewReg process (see</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.energynetworks.com.au/resources/reports/2021-reports-and-publications/consumer-engagement-report-2021/>



above) by setting up a Customer Forum to present the views of customers on price and services.

- Consistent with the NewReg “vision,” the views generated by the Customer Forum were incorporated into AusNet’s 2022-26 Revenue Proposal.
- The Energy Networks Australia report also identified Evoenergy’s Gas Network 2021-2026 Citizens’ Jury as another good example of a network seeking the views of its customers as the company considers the challenges of a zero-net emissions target for the ACT by 2045. The Citizens’ Jury was listed as a finalist in the Energy Networks Australia Consumer Engagement Awards in 2020.

#### Co-design

- A customer focus was also apparent in SA Power Networks’ attempt to mitigate the issue of excessive pruning of vegetation to make way for its power poles. The pruning had led to a lot of complaints from local councils and customers.
- SA Power Networks decided to co-design changes to the legislation, which was up for review, with community stakeholders and consumers.
- Noted in the Energy Networks Consumer Engagement Report 2021,
  - *The key objective of SAPN’s engagement was to work collaboratively with consultative groups and key stakeholders to reform the regulations. SA Power Networks developed its thinking on the 10-year review of the clearance regulations through a committed program of consultation with stakeholders including members of the public, local and state governments. The consultation program also included discussion papers, workshops, briefings, and a bus tour. The bus tour enabled stakeholders to view the current clearance requirements and the unsatisfactory result of over pruning. Attendees included Conservation Council, Native Vegetation Council and Department of Environment and Water as well as members of our consultative groups and the OTR. The aim was to foster an open discussion on the proposed amendments.*
- The co-design appears to have been a success. In 2013 vegetation clearance complaints were approximately 15 per cent of all complaints received by SA Power Networks; through a collaborative approach, complaints have fallen to around 3.9 per cent in 2020.

#### Bushfires

- Essential Energy carried out the largest network restoration program in Australia’s history during the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, and the impact on customer engagement was profound.
  - *Effective community engagement was at the heart of Essential Energy’s bushfire response. The widespread community impact of the bushfires required a whole-of-community approach to engagement, involving proactive and reactive communications, and engagement tailored to specific regions, towns and in some cases, individual customers. Comprehensive understanding of local communities and empathy for customers was at the heart of Essential’s approach. Underlining this commitment, many employees cut short holidays to return to the frontline. Some colleagues who lost their homes in the fires opted to come back to work to get the job done. It was vital Essential Energy has access to the latest information from multiple fire-fronts across the state to provide a tailored emergency response and keep the community informed.*



- During the crisis many communities lost power and their communication capability. This made modern customer engagement channels difficult to use. As a result, more traditional methods were used.
  - *Essential Energy held community meetings to provide up-to-date information about outages and safety. Advice needed to be printed out in hardcopy to ensure those without telecommunications or those unable to use social media or emails could access the information.*

## Covid-19

- Ausgrid faced many complaints when it started repairing its network following the storms of February 2019. Repairs required planned outages, but these came just as the impact of Covid-19 was being felt.
  - *Following a rapid spike in complaints and concerns from customers, stakeholders and media regarding planned outages still occurring while people and families were working from home, Ausgrid changed the way in which it prioritised critical maintenance and associated outages during the COVID19 lockdown. The ability to prioritise the business' focus on critical work, helped customers maintain confidence and trust in Ausgrid and highlighted why the work was critical.*
- To build trust with its customers but continue the repair process, Ausgrid launched a largely digital campaign, called “Give us a wave”. It turned into the most successful piece of customer engagement in Ausgrid’s history.
  - *Most importantly though, there was a noticeable change in customer complaints about planned critical outages. The campaign helped to positively promote the need for critical work and highlighted that customers are accepting and understanding of the role Ausgrid crews have to play in helping communities survive the global pandemic.*
- Ausgrid’s key discovery in the campaign was that customers are curious about the work the Ausgrid crews do to maintain the network. This allowed the network to humanise their staff and create empathy among its customers for the work they do and need to do to maintain supply.
- Jemena faced challenges to maintain services during Covid–19 to its diverse community in Melbourne and created a Community Response Group to communicate with people on life support, people with disabilities, the socially isolated and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).
- In forming the Response Group, Jemena enlisted a spectrum of partners like the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Electric&Water Ombudsman Victoria.
  - *The response group established three key principles to use appropriate communications channels, make it simple and take a joint industry approach. Jemena worked with key community advocacy and welfare groups, partners, local councils and industry associations to form a coalition to support the communities in which they operate. Jemena’s aim was to ensure that everyone in the community was aware of the support available to them and collaborated with community stakeholders to disseminate material via their channels to target the most vulnerable people through channels they’d trust.*



- The superior communication with customers resulting from the activities of the response Group meant that the impact of outages was minimised. Jemena even deployed portable batteries in some cases for life support customers during outages.

## Conclusion

- Current consumer engagement strategies of energy networks are a mix of traditional and modern techniques that highlight the increasing emphasis on customer-centric methods.
  - These in turn reflect the trendline of regulatory pressure on the networks from agencies like the Australian Energy Regulator and also from voluntary agreements like the Energy Charter.
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