



Backing bright ideas

Grants Program Annual Report Supplementary Information

2020-21





Introduction

The purpose of the Energy Consumers Australia Grants Program is to build knowledge and capacity to support energy policy development that will benefit the long-term interests of consumers.



Poster promoting COVID-19 Energy Bill Support Education for Aboriginal Households.

In 2020-21, the grant sub-programs that support a range of activities were:

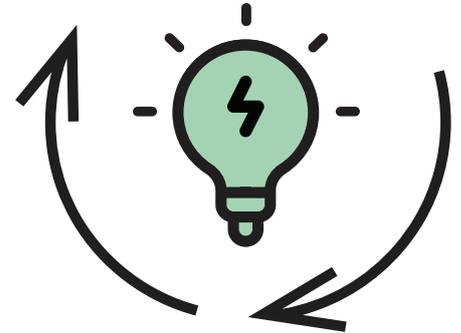
- **Advocacy grants** support a consumer voice in decision-making, allowing consumer organisations to engage with policy or regulatory decisions or with industry directly on problems and their proposed solutions. This includes our support for advocates to engage in network revenue resets.
- **Research grants** enable a better understanding of consumers' experience and needs, helping government, regulators and industry understand the impacts of existing or proposed policies and processes.
- **CEO grants** help advocates to engage in government, regulatory or industry processes.
- **Gill Owen Scholarship:** Gill was an inaugural Board member and a tireless advocate for consumers. This

scholarship is named in honour of her work and supports one individual each year to travel overseas to research innovative ideas and initiatives that are of relevance to the Australian energy market.

This year was unique and significant for a number of reasons.

The pandemic had a major impact on many of the organisations that might usually seek funding through the Grants Program, and they accordingly focussed on the immediate issues of their constituencies. This resulted in a drop in the number of applications received - from 75 in 2018-19 (pre-COVID) to 39 in 2020-21 - with fewer grants approved. We intend to make up for lost time in this respect by proactively reaching out to potential applicants next year, with the intention of investing at a higher level in 2021-22 than we have this year.





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One of the positive consequences of a lower number of applications was that it gave us an opportunity to use our human resources to address some of the broader strategic and technological issues for the Grants Program.

Six years into its life, this was the appropriate time to review how the program is working. We also undertook to review the Grants Program in response to the statutory review of Energy Consumers Australia.

Review of Grants Program

The Grants review was aimed at improving the sustainability, transparency and the overall impact of the Grants Program, while also finding ways to better communicate the insights and impact of the Program.

The review has resulted in an evolution of the current program, to provide more timely and strategic support to consumer voices. The new structure comprises four sub-programs which are:

- **Participation Grants (formerly CEO Grants)** – enabling residential or small business consumer advocacy by participation in current or forthcoming government, regulatory, or industry decision-making processes.
- **Influence Grants (formerly Advocacy and Research)** – supporting advocacy initiatives with a purpose of immediate influence on a specific and achievable goal on matters of material significance to residential and small business consumers.
- **Collaboration Grants** – supporting complex, multi-year projects put forward by a group of organisations aiming to collaborate, with the aim to drive energy systems change. Collaborative research projects will have an intent to contribute to a policy or advocacy outcome and will involve working with advocates and other stakeholders.
- **Gill Owen Scholarship** – supporting an individual to travel internationally to research innovative ideas and initiatives that are relevant to improving outcomes for consumers in the Australian energy market.





The review was undertaken in consultation with stakeholders which included one-on-one briefings with over 70 organisations and individuals, including advocacy organisations and a wide range of past and current grant recipients.

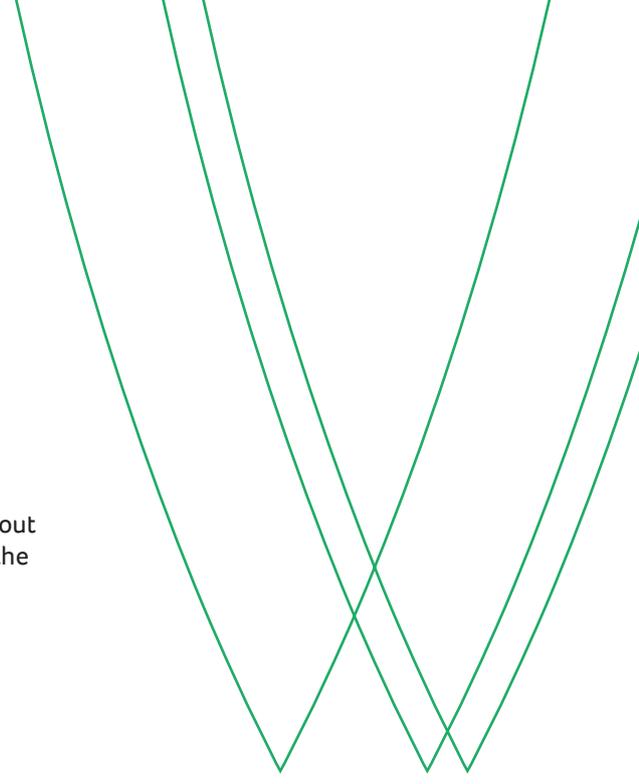
We heard a clear message from advocates that the demand for their engagement in policy and regulatory decisions is increasing, and it can be difficult to prioritise time and effort.

We also reflected on our experience over the past 6 years of managing the program - that projects which drive system change are typically based on a clear 'theory of change' combined with a strong 'constituency for change' - a coalition of stakeholders working for a common outcome.

More broadly, the key changes to the program aim to enable demonstration of impact, both through individual projects and across the Grants Program as a whole; increase transparency and early, open communications about project eligibility; and provide a more responsive and efficient process for application and assessment.

The review also identified the opportunity for greater collaboration and support to facilitate the development of clear Theory of Change models for projects, as well as policy and communications support.

More detail about the review and changes to the Grants Program are available on our website.



Modernising our grant assessment processes

As part of implementing the review findings, we also turned our attention to improving the technical side of the grant application and assessment process, with several upgrades for greater accessibility, transparency and efficiency.

Most significantly, we adopted the SmartyGrants platform, which is best practice for grants and commonly used by governments and NFPs, to enable a smoother, online application process – with 12 applications already

successfully lodged through the new platform. This shift followed consultation with stakeholders about duplications and inefficiencies in the earlier grants process.

Adoption of SmartyGrants has improved the speed and ease of applying for and assessing grant applications.

At this stage, progress reports, acquittal process, funding agreements and accounting processes have all moved online, with forms now being created for processing. Stakeholders have so far welcomed the changes,

ENERGY CONSUMERS AUSTRALIA
Grants
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Energy Consumers Australia

Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) promotes the long term interests of energy consumers in terms of the price, quality, safety, quality, reliability and security of supply of energy services by providing and enabling consumer advocacy on National Energy Market Matters.

The purpose of ECA's Grants Program is to build knowledge and capacity to support energy policy development that will benefit the long-term interests of consumers.

Grants types

The Energy Consumers Australia Grants Program offers three types of grants:

- Advocacy Grants
- Research Grants
- CEO Grants and Gill Owen Scholarship for grants of up to \$15,000 to enable:
 - Consumer engagement and advocacy in government, regulatory, or industry decision-making processes
 - Advocates to research relevant international programs, policies or initiatives that advance the long-term interests of consumers.

All Grants Program applicants are strongly encouraged to read our [Grant Guidelines](#) and [Eligibility and Selection Criteria](#) before applying.

Applying for a grant

Advocacy and Research Grants have application rounds that are shown below. Successful applicants for Advocacy and Research Grants will be contacted within three weeks after the decision date.

CEO Grant applications may be submitted at any time throughout the year, and successful applicants will be notified up to three weeks after submission.

Start your Grants Program application submission below.



39
APPLICATIONS
TOTALLING
\$4.5m

In 2020-21, Energy Consumers Australia received 39 applications for new grants - about half the number received in 2018-19 (pre-pandemic) - of which 13 were approved.



GRANTS
EXPENDITURE
TOTAL VALUE
\$1.9m

The total approved expenditure of grants in 2020-21 was \$1.9 million (grants funding is committed to the year in which it is expended, as per Figure 5). This figure was significantly down from previous years as previously discussed, with plans to increase next year's investment in response.



Jawad Shamsi - Grants Manager



Alexandra Bishop - Manager, Insights and Impact

which allow them to focus on the most pertinent information required to make grant decisions with less time required overall for lodging their applications.

The shift to this digital platform allows us to spend less time on administration and invest more time working with stakeholders and potential applicants, identifying potential initiatives and projects and marketing the program. It also enables greater transparency around the application and assessment process, which was raised in the review of Energy Consumers Australia.

The Grants Program is a central tool in building constituencies for change regarding solutions to energy market problems on behalf of consumers. We are making the Grants Program a strategic and stronger force for change through partnership and collaboration, with the intention of making it easier to provide a consumer voice to regulatory and policy decisions and encourage appropriate systems change.

We have recently appointed a new Grants Manager and a Manager, Insights and Impact, to our team, strengthening our capacity for this important work.

Extending our grants' reach

The Grants Program has been an integral part of Energy Consumers Australia's work since the organisation was first conceived – building knowledge and sectoral capacity supporting policy development and consumer education in the National Energy Market.

We work closely with grant recipients to help them share the results of their research through effective communication including, where appropriate, using our resources.

In 2020/21, those activities included:

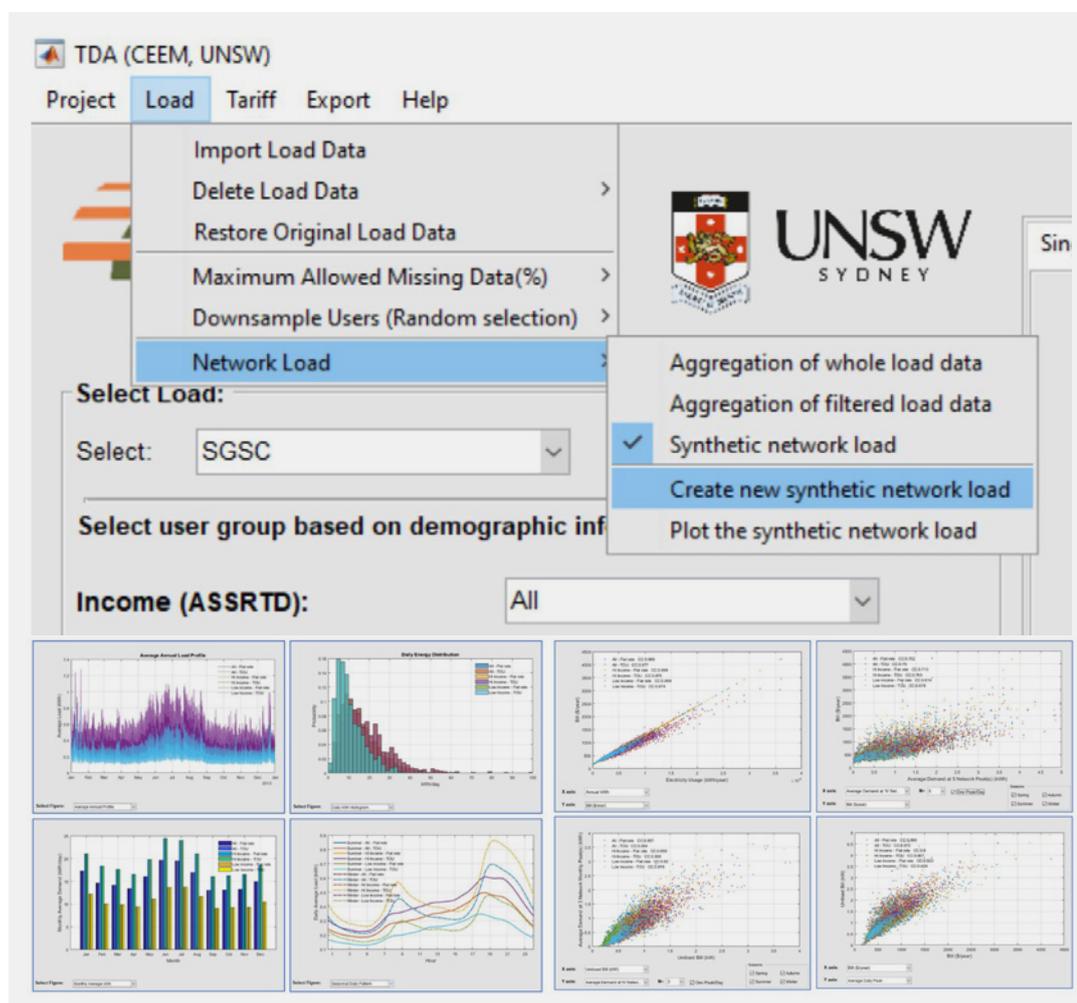
- Workshops with grant recipients to help develop their communications strategies
- Webinars to disseminate report findings and recommendations
- Using our digital channels to showcase grant decisions and results

Grants helped inform our regular briefings to government and industry in 2020/21, with grant project outcomes providing valuable material for our submissions and presentations.

Due to ongoing uncertainty around travel and gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Foresighting Forum for 2021 was delivered as a series of three webinars. This format will allow us to share insights from our grants with a larger audience than ever before.

This report is an addendum to our Annual Report to highlight the Grants Program outcomes in 2020-21. The full list of applications – and all grant outputs including reports, submissions, presentations and other resources – can be viewed on our website at energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/grants.

Tariff Assessment Tool - an expanded open source tool for network and retail tariffs





Key Themes 2020-21

The Grants Program supported a diverse range of advocacy and research projects over this reporting period; not surprisingly, the majority of funding went to projects that focused on affordability. There was a focus on the post-2025 market design and energy transition as well as initiatives designed to respond to urgent affordability issues during the pandemic. Grants also supported advocacy and research to improve the energy performance of rental housing, as well as to facilitate a strong consumer voice in key decisions about energy pricing in Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria.

We have broken 2020-21 funding into segments in Figure 2 as recommended in the review of Energy Consumers Australia. There were fewer grant applications focusing on network determinations than in previous years, reflecting the current regulatory cycle. We anticipate more applications next year, as the next round of electricity network determinations kicks off.

While our applications always cover a diverse range of areas and this year was a particularly unusual one for the program, it is useful to look at trends over the life of the program.

Figure 1: Grant funding by major theme 2020/21

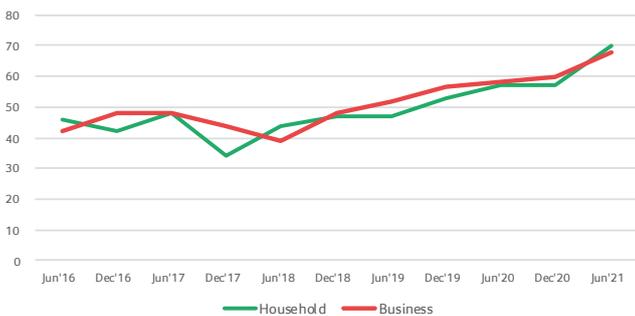


Figure 2: Grant funding by segment 2020/21

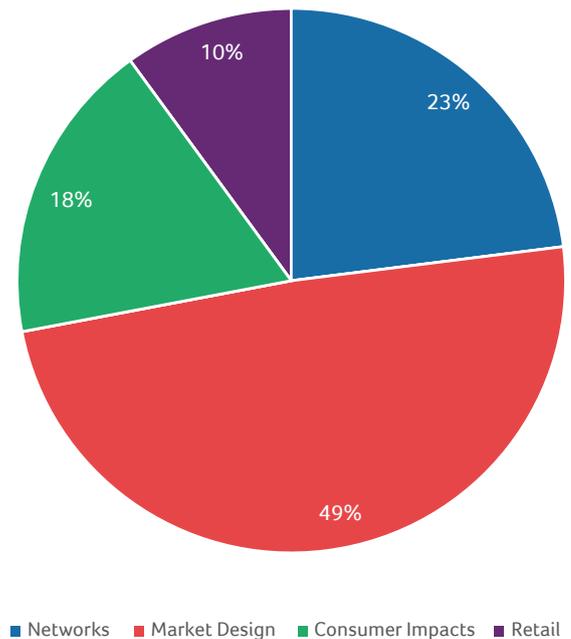
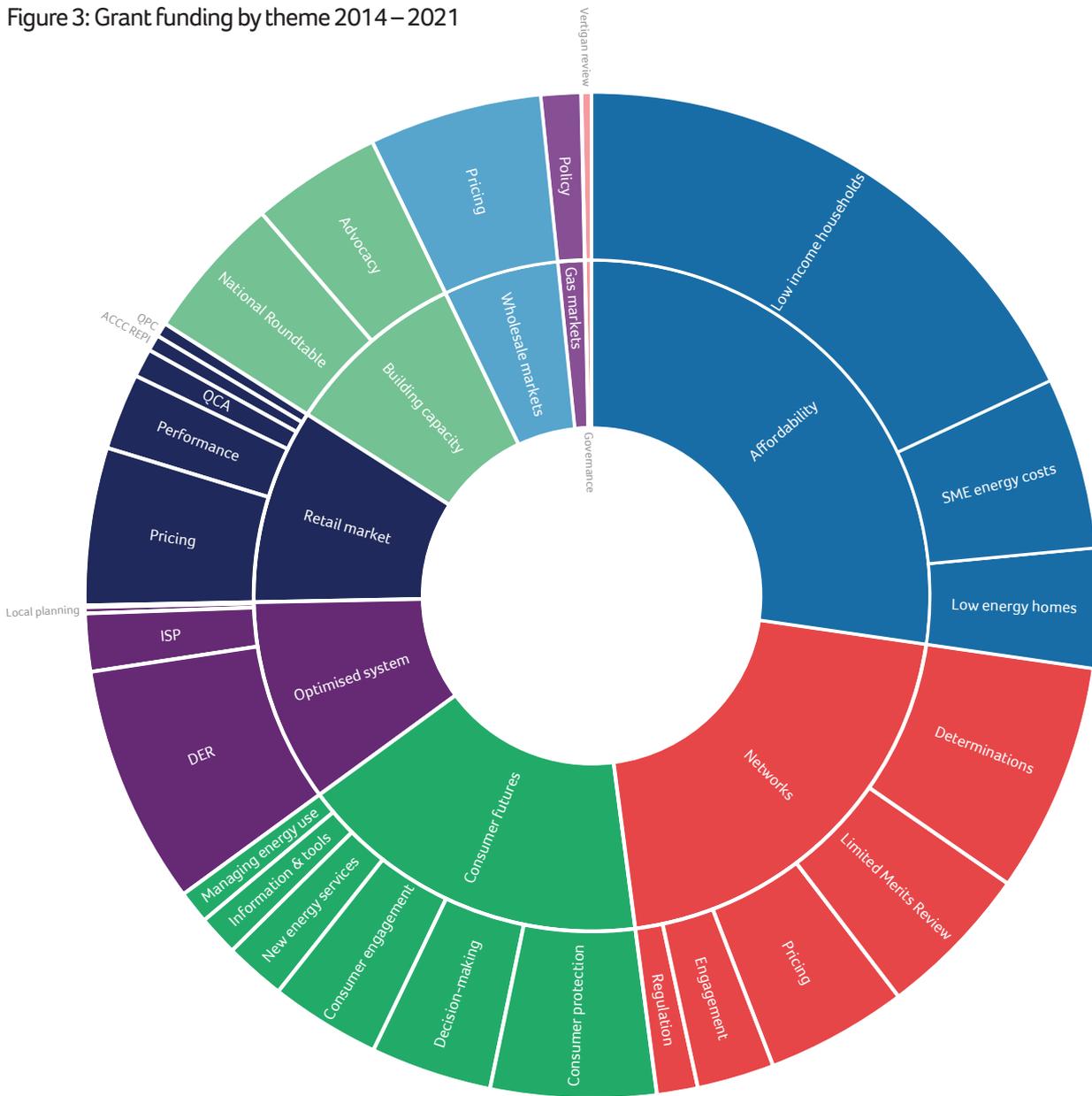


Figure 3: Grant funding by theme 2014–2021





Grant program trends

Of grant funding approved in 2020/21, 88% supported advocacy grants which reflects the program's focus on projects that improve outcomes for energy consumers. The ECA Board approved grants that could demonstrate a clear advocacy outcome and strategy.

In 2017, we agreed to commit part of the Grants Program budget to consumer engagement, through the CEO Grants program. This was to support advocates for travel, enabling them to engage in post-2025 market design consultations and engagement, regardless of where they were based in Australia.

The pandemic meant that these face-to-face meetings did not take place, which led to an underspend in this area.

This year, 60% of grants funding went to projects that had a national focus compared with 40% with a jurisdictional focus, reflecting the number of national vs local market development processes, including fewer network determinations. We intend to prioritise outreach to consumer organisations in jurisdictions where we have seen few or no applications, to ensure they are aware of the potential support through the Grants Program.

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic altered the focus of our stakeholders' work for most of the 2020-21 financial year.

Some advocates and small business organisations shifted their focus from future focussed advocacy and research work to immediate priorities for their constituency and clients.

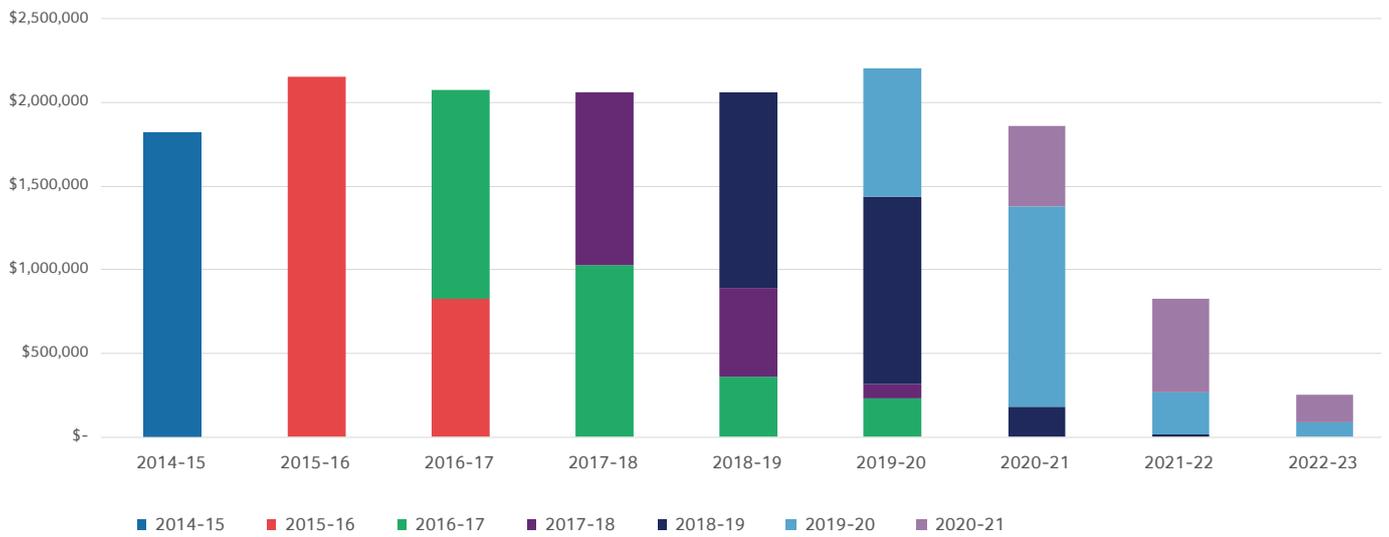
Government and industry shifted much of their engagement and consultation to online, with far fewer face to face meetings and public forums requiring travel.

Research organisations report that existing projects were postponed or altered, meaning there was less scope for new work.

This was also the case at the end of last financial year, and we flagged at the time that we anticipate greater calls on the Grants Program in the next 1-3 years particularly given the need to learn from the impact of the pandemic – what are the lessons for the energy sector? What changes were effective? What new pressures are people under?

We remain intent on increasing our commitment once we see an increase in eligible applications to select from and will be increasing our outward communications about the grant program in 2021-22 to encourage an increase in applications.

Figure 4: Annual Financial Commitments 2015- 2023





As in previous years, many of the projects supported in 2020-21 had a focus on all consumers, although low-income and vulnerable households remained a priority.

Two of the thirteen grants approved supported small business advocacy – the economic impact of the pandemic meant some SME advocates were not as active in energy as in previous years, so we intend to reach out to those

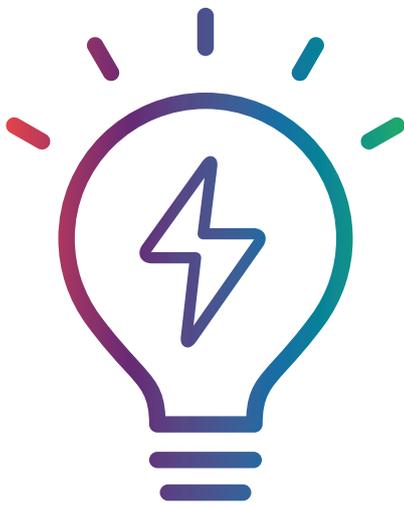


Figure 5: National & jurisdiction advocacy and research project funding 2015-21

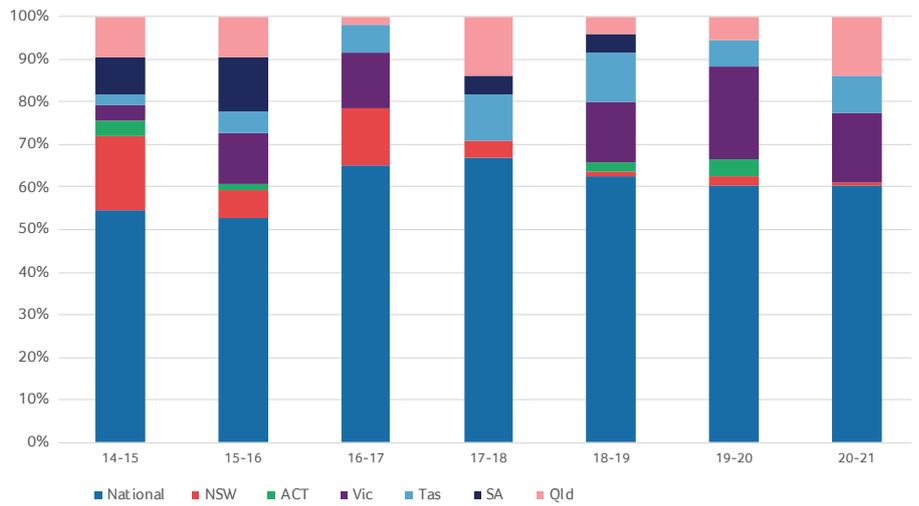
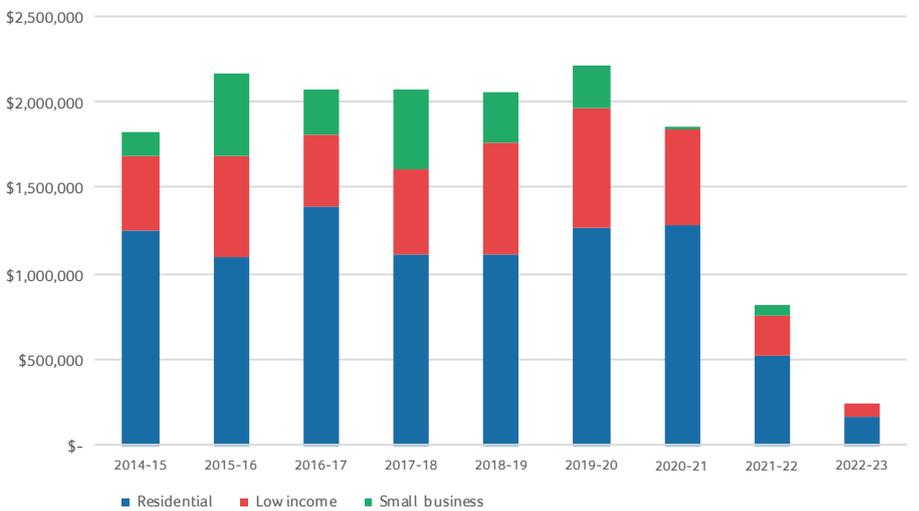


Figure 6: Trends – households and small businesses 2015-21



again in 2021/22 to remind them of the potential support available through the Grants Program.

We also envisage that the reforms to the Grants Program, specifically those which encourage greater collaboration, have the potential to draw greater involvement and work with small business organisations.

Particularly with the energy sector transition taking place, reform processes tend to run across multiple years and the Grants Program recognises this with scope for multi-year funding arrangements. This approach is about ensuring fit-for-purpose funding arrangements that provide the certainty organisations need to commit resources to their engagement.

Grants approved in 2020/21 include:

- Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to continue its representation of low-income and vulnerable households in the energy transition.
- Brotherhood of St Laurence's convening of a consumer coalition to input to the Victorian gas access arrangement.
- Total Environment Centre's work on grid resilience and community scale batteries.



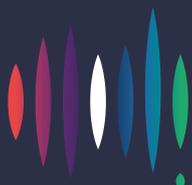


Great Grants 2014-21

The work undertaken by advocates and other organisations through the Grants Program is having influence, improving outcomes for energy consumers. The Great Grants listed here showcase important work that has built new evidence or demonstrated impact. A full list of our grants is available on our website.

	Project	Code/ Organisation
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconvenient guests – the consumer experience of administrative review for electricity pricing (consumer participation in limited merits review processes) 	752, 800, 801 Public Interest Advocacy Centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of SAPN tariff reforms through its proposed TSS in relation to impacts on small business 	787 Business South Australia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networks & batteries: what's best for consumers? 	795 TEC
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An evaluation of the role of accelerated depreciation in regulation of electricity and gas networks 	807 Engineroom Infrastructure Consulting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electricity pricing and managing heatwaves at home: mitigating health and financial risks for heat-vulnerable household consumers 	813 RMIT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing and improving consumer outcomes of network pricing reform 	840 Renew
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tariff Assessment Tool 	814, 944 UNSW
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living Deliberate Negotiate Agree (DNA) 	853 Uniting Communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AER TasNetworks Revenue Proposal - Small Business advocacy 	915 Tasmanian Small Business Council
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair outcomes for low income and vulnerable consumers – Queensland Electricity Networks Revenue Determination 2020-25 	946 QCOSS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tariff Reform workshop for consumer advocates 	987 COTA Queensland
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Households in the Dark: Mapping electricity disconnections in the NEM 	712 St Vincent de Paul Society
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction between energy supply and residential rental housing arrangements 	791 QCOSS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and Advocacy materials on the feasibility of rural electricity users in Queensland going off-grid and irrigators in particular 	832 Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photovoltaics on Apartment Buildings 	841 UNSW
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lived experience of Tasmanian consumers – energy consumer advocacy project 	849 TasCOSS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response to Queensland Competition Authority Scoping Paper 	862 QCOSS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating energy management options in community housing multi-unit dwellings to reduce energy costs for community housing tenants 	876 Q Shelter
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering irrigation consumers to improve their long-term electricity purchase arrangements 	892 National Irrigators Council
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of energy costs on the Australian agriculture sector 	910 Australian Farm Institute
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irrigators – the flow on benefits of regionally embedded generation 	942 Cotton Australia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future proofing small business energy bills 	964,1004 COSBOA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for low energy homes 	966 Renew
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 Energy Bill Support Education for Aboriginal Households 	1074 Fourth&Centre

Consumer futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smart home control: exploring the potential for enabling technologies in vulnerable and disadvantaged households 	788 RMIT Centre for Urban Research
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the changing needs of residential energy consumers in the information age and the implications for tariff reform 	821 CitySmart
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use your power – optimising the financial outcomes for consumers with solar systems 	883 Moreland Energy Foundation Ltd
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the nexus of energy use, ageing, health and wellbeing amongst older Australians 	887 Macquarie University
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our Grid - Concepts, strategies and relationships to engage energy consumers in the Future Grid 	935 RMIT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equitable, Affordable Inclusive Energy Transition Advocacy Project 	985 ACOSS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training materials for low-income energy affordability 	995 Fourth & Centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of DER in the equitable decarbonisation of the NEM 	1090 Total Environment Centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting CALD Australian to be empowered energy consumers 	1061 University of Sydney
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy Homes for Renters – minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties 	1088 Better Renting
Empowering advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voices for Power – a multicultural movement advocating for low income and migrant energy consumer needs 	865 Sydney Alliance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systemic advocacy training & support for representatives of older energy consumers 	870 COTA Australia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COTA Energy Advocacy National Workshop 	1034 COTA
Optimised system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning future grids together: improving engagement between network planners and local government 	815 Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of distributed energy resources in facilitating the equitable and efficient decarbonisation of the NEM 	904, 983 Total Environment Centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer Scrutiny of the proposed RiverLink Interconnector 	969 The Energy Project
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DER Export Management Advocacy Project 	1014 Renew
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of distributed energy resources in the equitable decarbonisation of the NEM 	1090 Total Environment Centre
Retail market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail Tariff Tracker project 	713, 794, 898 St Vincent de Paul Society
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power Transformed: Understanding consumer decision making in the complex and transforming energy market 	758 CALC
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and analysis supporting irrigator submissions into the ACCC Retail Electricity Pricing Inquiry 	893 National Irrigators Council
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasmanian Small Business Advocacy to ACCC Inquiry into Retail Electricity Prices 	894 Tasmanian Small Business Council
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 Energy Bill support Education for Aboriginal Households 	1071 Fourth & Centre
Wholesale market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study of the Tasmanian wholesale market and its impact on small business 	873 Tasmanian Small Business Council
Gas market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response to the AEMC's gas pipeline review 	902 Major Energy Users



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