



## **GN21 Energy Consumer Advocacy Workshop Outcomes Report**

Building capacity for people on low incomes, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship to actively engage in the Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-26  
Access Arrangement Review

**October 2019**

# About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice and represents not-for-profit community organisations in the ACT.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS Network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' vision is for Canberra to be a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community-based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

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This report was commissioned by Evoenergy.

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## Acronyms

ACAT	ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
AEMC	Australian Energy Market Commission
AER	Australian Energy Regulator
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CAPaD	Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy
CCP	Consumer Challenge Panel
ECRC	(Evoenergy) Energy Consumer Reference Council
EWON	Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW
GN21	Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-26 Access Arrangement Review
RAB	regulatory asset base
PIAC	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
VRI	Volume Residential Individual (tariff)
WACC	weighted average cost of capital

## Introduction

This report provides a summary of the outcomes of an Energy Consumer Advocacy Workshop on the Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-26 Access Arrangement Review (GN21) held on 27 August 2019. The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) was commissioned by Evoenergy to run this workshop as part of ensuring that energy consumers in the ACT and Queanbeyan-Palerang region who are on low incomes, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship are able to actively contribute to the GN21 process.

Evoenergy is the gas distribution network service provider for the ACT and Queanbeyan-Palerang region – it owns and operates the network delivering gas to homes and businesses in the region. Evoenergy's network charges for transporting gas through the network are levied on gas retailers and form part of the costs in a retail gas bill. The National Gas Law and National Gas Rules provide the regulatory framework governing gas networks. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) determines the revenue Evoenergy can raise through tariffs from network users (i.e. gas retailers) to operate and maintain the network and to fund network growth, refurbishment and replacement under an approved access arrangement. Evoenergy is required to submit its gas access arrangement proposal for the 2021-26 period to the AER for approval by 1 July 2020. The AER plans to publish its final decision in April 2021.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Identify key issues that consumers and their representatives need to understand in order to actively contribute to the GN21 process
- Clarify what further information and/or opportunities will be needed for consumers and their representatives to actively contribute to the GN21 process
- Develop local consumer advocacy capacity to engage in the GN21 process.

As a first step in building the capacity of consumers to actively engage in the GN21 process, the workshop brought together Evoenergy representatives, energy consumer experts and representatives from a range of community organisations that work with and/or represent people within the region who are living on low incomes, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship (see Attachments for the workshop agenda, list of attendees and their organisations). This provided an initial opportunity to learn about the GN21 process and gain insights from experts with extensive experience as energy consumer advocates, including experience in engaging in other energy network planning processes. Workshop participants from the local community were able to engage in dialogue with Evoenergy and the expert panel through a question and answer session and a World Café session.

In order to inform Evoenergy's GN21 consumer engagement, this report presents the outcomes of the workshop in terms of the information and

processes needed to build vulnerable consumers' capacity to actively engage and contribute.

## Key issues and information needs

This section outlines key issues that were raised during the workshop related to identified information needs by workshop participants.

### Impacts on gas prices and affordability

A key issue that participants wanted to get clarity about was how the GN21 outcome would impact on low-income households' gas bills.

Evoenergy's consumer guide to engaging in the GN21 process provides the following breakdown of ACT retail gas bills, highlighting that their distribution network makes up 25% of the typical annual household gas bill.<sup>1</sup>

ACT retail gas bill breakdown	
Production	42%
Transmission	9%
<b>Distribution - Evoenergy</b>	<b>25%</b>
Retailer	22%
Other*	2%
Typical annual household gas bill** * Other costs include costs associated with storage and the costs of participating in AEMO-operated Wholesale markets ** based on ActewAGL Retail and Evoenergy pricing for 2019/20 and gas usage of 44.3 gigajoules per year	

It is this distribution component of household gas bills that will be impacted by what is included in the final Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-26 Access Arrangement.

With production making up the largest component of household gas bills, participants were interested to know what is expected to happen to wholesale gas prices in the future. Evoenergy noted that costs in the supply chain outside of distribution are outside of their control.

1 Evoenergy, *A consumer guide to engaging on our 2021 gas plan – Evoenergy gas network 2021-26 access arrangement review*, Evoenergy, Canberra, August 2019, p. 7, viewed 31 October 2019, <<https://www.evoenergy.com.au/-/media/evoenergy/documents/gas/consumer-guide-to-engaging-on-our-2021-gas-plan.pdf?la=en&hash=F250FC5AB3EE7654EC8153F7E7FE5D7A546D8373>>.

## Gas vs electricity: cost and customer preferences

Participants were interested to find out whether low-income households that are currently connected to gas would generally be better off switching to 100% electricity. While there are believed to be savings (e.g. not having two supply charges), it was also understood that there would be costs in terms of purchasing new appliances. Participants noted that these costs could be eased through subsidies or other programs, e.g. no-interest loans.

There was concern that there may be a high proportion of household connections in new development areas without consideration of whether having two energy sources would result in higher overall energy costs. There was also concern that some low-income households may be 'stuck' with gas due to being unable to switch appliances easily and/or affordably.

The Evoenergy attendees noted that answers to questions of cost versus benefit for a household in moving from gas to electric are unlikely to be straightforward. They noted the influence of factors such as relative costs of the energy sources and appliances; size and composition of the household; and individual preferences.

Participants also noted that some households may have a preference to stay connected to gas due to cultural or other factors.

### Participant questions: costs and customer preferences for gas and electricity

- Is there data on the costs and benefits for dual fuel households switching to 100% electricity?
- Does the community understand the options and the related costs and benefits?
- What is the cost-benefit in terms of appliances when switching from gas to electricity?
- Has electricity changed to become more useable and comparable to gas? e.g. induction stove tops.
- Is there a risk/cost of low-income households being unable to transition from the gas network due to the inability to switch appliances easily and/or affordably?
- Why do some households prefer gas? e.g. aesthetic, heating/comfort, and cooking (including for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds where some foods need a flame for cooking properly).
- Are CALD or other groups within the community more likely to use and/or prefer gas?
- Note: the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Inc. undertook consultation around the move to zero emissions which found a preference among some CALD communities for gas cooking, including generational differences in preferences.

## Connection fees for low-income households

Participants raised the question of whether gas connection fees could be waived for low-income households.

Evoenergy advised that they levy a charge on retailers for meter reads requested when customers change address. Retailers determine how to pass this charge through to consumers. The National Gas Rules encourage distributors to be cost reflective in their charging, that is, where feasible, to ensure that customers bear costs which they cause in order to avoid cross-subsidies between individuals and groups of customers.

Evoenergy noted that it is unclear whether vulnerable customers as a group are subject to these fees more often than other customers. One method to reduce their effect on vulnerable customers is through targeted assistance such as the ACT Government's Utilities Concession covering electricity, natural gas, water and sewerage to eligible concession card holders.

## Energy hardship data

Workshop participants were interested in finding out whether Evoenergy has data on gas customers experiencing hardship in the region, including data from the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) and the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON).

## The access arrangement review

Workshop participants were interested in better understanding elements of the AER's review of Evoenergy's access arrangement proposal.

## How network charges are calculated: AER building block model

Network charges are calculated based on what the regulatory framework refers to as *building blocks*. The building blocks represent costs that businesses need to recover through sales to remain economically sustainable.

The Evoenergy consultation paper identified these building blocks and their relative sizes in the current Evoenergy decision as per the table below.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, pp. 14-15.



Building block component	Relative size
Operating costs (including Revenue adjustments (incentive schemes))	56%
Return on capital	31%
Depreciation	12%
Tax allowance	1%
Total	100%

## Operating and capital expenditure

The key elements of the GN21 proposal will be Evoenergy's planned operating expenditure (opex) and capital expenditure (capex).

Opex is incurred in operating and maintaining the network assets and is reflected in the operating costs building block.

Capex is incurred on refurbishing and replacing assets, and building new assets. In contrast to opex, which is recovered from gas customers in the year it is spent, capex is recovered over the life of assets. It is reflected in the building blocks via the capex being added to a regulatory asset base (RAB) with the value of asset depreciation being subtracted. The return on capital building block is equal to the RAB multiplied by the cost of capital.

Under the National Gas Rules, Evoenergy must justify all proposed spending in its plan to AER. The AER assesses proposed spending on the basis that it meets the National Gas Objective as stated in the National Gas Law which is 'to promote efficient investment in, and efficient operation and use of, natural gas services for the long term interests of consumers of natural gas with respect to price, quality, safety, reliability and security of supply of natural gas'.<sup>3</sup>

## Return on capital

Workshop participants raised some specific questions around return on capital.

Evoenergy's consultation paper discusses the return on capital building block and how it is calculated. It is equal to the RAB (discussed above, in relation to capital expenditure) times the rate of return.

All elements of the rate of return are now set such that both Evoenergy and the AER are bound by predetermined parameter values (or methods of calculation from publicly available data). As such, the rate of return will not be determined by the AER as part of the Evoenergy's 2021-26 Access Arrangement Review.

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<sup>3</sup> AEMC website, visited 31 October 2019, <<https://www.aemc.gov.au/regulation/regulation#ngo>>.

## **Incentive schemes**

The workshop discussion of operating and capital expenditure also identified the need for consumers to understand how incentive schemes work for gas distributors, including what penalties or rewards are available. It will be important for consumers and their representatives to understand how incentives operate in relation to service levels.

For consumers and their representatives engaging in access arrangement processes, it is important to understand what incentive there may be for the distributor to over- or under-estimate expenditure, demand, and other items in the proposal. As this is likely to be beyond the capacity of individual gas consumers, it is important to ensure that there is also engagement with consumer representatives who are able to undertake a 'deep dive' utilising energy policy advocacy expertise.

## **Distribution of costs among consumers: tariffs**

A key question for Evoenergy to address in relation to operating and capital expenditure is how the costs and benefits will be distributed, and in particular how much of the costs and benefits will flow to residential consumers.

The amount a customer is charged under the contract with their retailer includes the network tariff levied for the carriage of gas through Evoenergy's gas distribution network and associated services.

Key to this will be explaining to consumers and their representatives how network charges will be distributed among tariff categories. For residential gas consumers, a key concern will be the impact on the Volume Residential Individual (VRI) tariff.

## **Distribution of costs over time: glide path and seasonality**

As well as understanding how costs will be distributed across tariff or customer categories, it will also be important for consumers and their representatives to know how costs will be distributed over the 5-year plan, and perhaps even longer – some participants suggested a 15-year glide path being needed. During the discussions the term 'glide path' was used to describe a way of balancing price changes over the life of the plan. A longer-term glide path would also require longer-term forecasting based on different scenarios, e.g. continue current arrangement; or continue using gas in specific limited places; or transition to another gas fuel that is carbon neutral.

As well as this longer-term distribution, the option of seasonal pricing was also raised during discussions.

## Current and future demand for gas

Workshop participants were interested in finding out about the current demand for gas in the region and forecasts of future demand. There was interest in knowing how the level of demand might impact on gas prices and affordability.

There was also interest in knowing more about the current and expected expansion (or otherwise) of the gas network to new suburbs and residential developments. There was particular interest in understanding what the status of the gas network will be in relation to the development of Ginninderry where, in agreement with the developers, the mandatory requirement for gas reticulation in new subdivisions has been suspended.

### Participant questions: current and future demand for gas

- What is the benefit to existing gas consumers of having more households added to the gas network?
- What is Evoenergy proposing to build the network to in terms of future demand, geographic areas, and number of households?
- What are the demand forecasts? Are they accurate? What are the assumptions? What are the alternative scenarios?
- What is the forecast for the next 15 years for gas and electricity?
- How has fuel switching been addressed in the demand forecasts?
- How has the rate of disconnections been determined?
- How many new gas connections are forecast and where?
- What is happening in Ginninderry in relation to gas supply to residential and business customers? And, what is and will be happening in new developments generally?
- Does climate change play into demand forecasting?

## The future of gas in a zero net greenhouse gas emissions ACT

One of the most significant issues raised at the workshop was how the gas network would be impacted by the ACT Government's target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

### Participant questions: zero net emissions by 2045

- How firm is the ACT Government's target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045?
- What is Evoenergy doing to improve energy efficiency?

## Alternative energy sources

During the workshop two key alternative paths were discussed in relation to moving towards zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045: transitioning to hydrogen and/or other renewable gas; and transitioning to 100% electricity.

### *Hydrogen and other renewable gas*

Evoenergy noted that hydrogen and bio-methane are being explored as renewable forms of gas that would also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The potential of hydrogen in particular was identified as a key issue in relation to GN21, including what would be the impact of such a transition be on low-income households.

#### **Participant questions: hydrogen and other renewable gas**

- What does the roadmap to hydrogen look like?
- How realistic is it to move to hydrogen technology?
- What do we know about the cost, risk, and potential of having a hydrogen gas network?
- Who will carry the cost of exploring hydrogen as an alternative – what risk/cost flows to consumers? What will be spent on research?
- How would gas leakage/losses be managed with hydrogen?
- What is happening elsewhere with renewable gas?
- What would this mean in terms of household appliances?

### *100% electricity*

The prospect of a future without gas was identified during the workshop. This raised questions in relation to the cost of retrofitting households for electric appliances. There are also implications in relation to those households that have a preference for gas for cultural or other reasons. The impact on businesses was also a concern.

This also raised questions about what costs would be associated with increasing the capacity of the electricity network. It was noted that there would also be implications in terms of loss of income to the ACT Government and potentially paying out Jemena (as 50% owner of Evoenergy with ACT Government).

#### **Participant questions: cost to transition to 100% electricity**

- What would be the costs of shutting down the gas network in favour of 100% electricity?
- What would be the cost of retrofitting households to electric appliances?
- What would be the cost of upgrading the electricity network?

## Safety and reliability

While the majority of the workshop discussion focused on affordability and the future of gas in a zero emissions environment, participants also raised questions about safety and reliability. This included the question of whether a move away from gas – to hydrogen or to 100% electricity – or increasing frequency of climate events could potentially have a negative impact on safety and reliability. Evoenergy noted that the effect of climate change on asset management planning is being considered across all networks.

## Key consumer engagement needs

This section outlines key issues and needs identified in terms of Evoenergy's consumer engagement for GN21.

The expectations for consumer engagement by gas and electricity distribution network service providers has increased. The expectation is that engagement will involve meaningful and influential conversations rather than one-way information flows. Engagement is expected to occur directly with consumers as well as with consumer representatives.

Energy Consumer Expert Panel members noted that many networks were doing a very good consumer engagement. Evoenergy's Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) was mentioned as an example of good practice in terms of its structure and working relationship.

The AER has produced a consumer engagement guideline for network service providers which includes the following best practice principles:

- Clear, accurate and timely communication
- Accessible and inclusive
- Transparent
- Measurable.<sup>4</sup>

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) has developed a consumer engagement evaluation framework that adopts the AER principles outlined above while adding:

- Culture of engagement
- Approach to engagement.<sup>5</sup>

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4 AER, *Better regulation: consumer engagement guideline for network service providers*, AER, Melbourne, 2013.

5 PIAC, *Attachment A: PIAC evaluation of consumer engagement by NSW DNSPs 2017-18*, PIAC, Sydney, 2018.

PIAC have also outlined what good engagement is and isn't.<sup>6</sup>

Good engagement is...	Good engagement is not...
Ongoing	Quick or one-off
Detailed	Survey or research
Deliberative	One-way
Strategy driven	Tick-the-box
Tailored	Cookie cutter

The consumer engagement by Jemena Gas Network for their 2020-25 access arrangement in NSW was discussed as a good example of engagement both with consumer representatives and directly with consumers.

## Engaging with consumer representatives

In terms of engagement with consumer representatives, this included 'deep dives' with consumer advocates on the draft plan and on a specific component of the proposal (i.e. incentive scheme design).<sup>7</sup> As noted above, it is not realistic to expect individual consumers to engage in the significant amount of detail included in the GN21 proposal. It is important to ensure that there is engagement with consumer representatives who can undertake a 'deep dive' utilising energy policy advocacy expertise.

Given the amount of detail, the level of complexity, and the need to engage with a lot of new and unfamiliar material, it is also important that engagement occurs early and regularly over the GN21 process.

## Engaging directly with consumers

Direct engagement with consumers involved multiple rounds of deliberative engagement with a broad, representative group of households. Multiple sessions with increasing levels of detail helped to build understanding and elicit informed consumer input and also allowed Jemena to confirm it had correctly understood and applied consumer feedback. The process also included external perspectives and observers.

Of particular relevance for Evoenergy in wanting to engage effectively with people living in low-income households, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship, Jemena's work in NSW and Victoria is seen to provide some useful guidance. This includes having targeted sessions with CALD, over-55, and low-

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<sup>6</sup> M Ediriweera, *Giving the people what they want*, PIAC presentation to GN21 Energy Consumer Advocacy Workshop, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 27 August 2019.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

income households. In Victoria, Jemena Electricity ensured that its engagement was accessible by:

- Providing an interpreter for a member of its People's Panel so that they could participate in the workshops
- Providing transport solutions
- Providing child-minding solutions
- Meeting consumers in their neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup>

The examples provided also highlighted the role of consumer representatives in facilitating, informing, observing, and evaluating such direct consumer engagement. During the GN21 workshop, this was highlighted particularly in relation to engaging with CALD consumers. As one workshop participant noted:

It is absolutely necessary to engage with the multicultural communities, to make them aware of their options and to understand what they want. The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) is the peak body for these organisations. CMCF is the peak body and runs consultation forums and events and have social media and ways of connecting with people. It's not all about online, and links, and links, it's about the human touch.

Community service providers might also be able to facilitate direct consumer engagement, as another workshop participant noted:

...we can target the groups we work with. We have the community centre, the food hub, and we work with families, young people, over 55s. We provided services where you could do that targeted engagement.

It was also noted that there are people who don't use mobile phones or the internet, and also people who may need support to engage in consultations. As was noted by another workshop participant:

A lot of the people I work with have mental health, or language, or substance abuse issues. Some of these people cannot actively contribute, how will Evoenergy engage with them? What might be required is for Evoenergy to come and sit alongside me and my clients.

## Citizens' jury

Workshop participants raised a number of questions in relation to Evoenergy's plans to conduct a citizens' jury as part of their GN21 consumer engagement. Issues raised included:

- Recruitment of jurors and incentives to participate
- Identification of participants' housing tenure
- Involvement of observers to build external confidence in the process.

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<sup>8</sup> S Ashe (Energy Consumers Australia), email, 27 August 2019.



In 2017, ACTCOSS and the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD) developed a set of principles to ensure that the ACT Government's trial of citizens' juries was robust, respectful and informed.

#### **ACTCOSS and CAPaD principles for the trial of citizens' juries in the ACT**

1. **The drivers, process, output/recommendations and response processes must be transparent and enable accountability.**  
*Indicator: Sponsors provide a public description of the purpose and process (including how the public will be kept informed and how recommendations will be considered and responded to), before the jury is convened so everyone knows what is proposed.*
2. **Commitment is made to build broad community confidence in the process.**  
*Indicator: The public is regularly updated on progress and receives prompt responses to questions about the process.*
3. **Sponsors/decision makers have not already made up their minds – they are open to advice and consider it seriously.**  
*Indicator: There are no fixed positions on the outcome on the public record from sponsors and decision makers. The public is kept informed, the jury is given access to available points of contesting advice and government includes the advice in their considerations and responds publicly.*
4. **Sponsors and decision makers back the process and commit to responding.**  
*Indicator: Sponsors provide a public description of the purpose and process (including how the public will be kept informed and how recommendations will be considered and responded to), before the jury is convened so everyone knows what is proposed.*
5. **Recruitment and facilitation are conducted by neutral actors with a transparent process.**  
*Indicator: Community feedback trusts the process.*
6. **A fair spread of evidence/information is provided and drawn upon, and sufficient time is allowed for deliberation.**  
*Indicator: Juror and community feedback confirms that a fair spread of information was provided, and sufficient time was allowed.*
7. **It is clear how the deep deliberative process relates to broader engagement.**  
*Indicator: Sponsors provide a public description of the purpose and process (including how the public will be kept informed and how recommendations will be considered and responded to), before the jury is convened so everyone knows what is proposed.*
8. **Evaluation, learning and feedback is demonstrated to the community to be used to continuously improve the process.**  
*Indicator: A public and transparent evaluation process is used to gather and share information about the success and failures of the trial.*



During the World Café discussion, participants raised a number of questions about the citizens' jury with the Evoenergy representatives.

### **World Café discussion: citizens' jury**

Q. In terms of the Citizens' Jury - how are we recruiting or incentivizing people to participate?

A. 10,000 invitations have been sent to randomly selected consumers from lists taken from NSW (approx 10%) and ACT (gas) and ACT electricity (no gas). They have been invited to express interest in participating in the Citizens' Jury (EOI closes September 25th) and those who express interest will go into another pool where we will stratify the sample and reflect our diverse population.

Q. Will the recruitment for the Citizens' Jury ask about the tenure in the ACT/NSW – is Evoenergy seeking this as well as age, sex, income? Who will you get to hear from?

A. We have a few ways of addressing this to make sure the Citizens' Jury hears from a range of perspectives. There will be a witness list from which the jury members can request to hear their input. We will also ask our Evoenergy Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) to submit input to the Citizens' Jury on behalf of their organisation so these perspectives and experiences are captured too.

Q. Will there be observers at the Citizens' Jury? It would add faith to the process if people can see what's going on and know it's fair, giving people a feel for the conversations and building external confidence in the process.

A. Yes we're not sure where we're landing on this but I will take that feedback away and consider. We know people will have the chance to look at some of what's going on via our website. Our governance framework considers technical and engagement elements to check our process.

## **Conclusion**

The GN21 Energy Consumer Advocacy Workshop was well received by participants and it highlighted the importance of early, direct, face-to-face engagement based on dialogue with consumers and their representatives rather than one-way, one-off communication. As one workshop participant said during the World Café discussions:

I wasn't sure why I was coming today at first and found the Evoenergy consultation paper really hard going. We're people-people which is why we can tell you what they're thinking and what they need. So I'm glad I came along and enjoyed the talking!

The workshop also highlighted the importance of providing consumers and their representatives with access to Evoenergy representatives as well as independent expert energy consumer advocates.

An important message from the Energy Consumer Expert Panel was that there is an opportunity for consumers and their advocates to influence the following elements of Evoenergy's GN21 proposal:

- Network pricing/tariffs
- Operating expenditure
- Capital expenditure
- Incentive arrangements
- Demand forecasts
- Stakeholder engagement.

As documented in this report, the workshop participants have provided valuable initial guidance for Evoenergy on the information and engagement needs of vulnerable energy consumers and their representatives to enable them to actively contribute to the GN21 process.

## Attachment A: Workshop agenda

### **ENERGY CONSUMER ADVOCACY WORKSHOP: EVOENERGY GAS NETWORK 2021-2026 ACCESS ARRANGEMENT REVIEW (GN21)**

Tuesday 27th August 2019

12:45pm for 1:00pm-4:00pm

Venue: ACTCOSS Meeting Room, Weston Community Hub

1/6 Gritten St, Weston ACT 2611

#### **ISSUE**

How do we ensure that the needs of energy (gas) consumers who are on low incomes, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship are addressed in the Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-2026 Access Arrangement review (GN21) for the ACT and Queanbeyan-Palerang region?

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THIS WORKSHOP**

- Identify key issues that consumers and their representatives need to understand in order to actively contribute to the GN21 process
- Clarify what further information and/or opportunities will be needed for consumers and their representatives to actively contribute to the GN21 process
- Develop local consumer advocacy capacity to engage in the GN21 process.

#### **WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

12.45pm Participants to arrive

1.00pm Welcome, Acknowledgement, and Introduction: Susan Helyar, ACT Council of Social Service (15 min)

1.15pm Presentations (60 min), followed by Q&A (15 min)

- Evoenergy Gas Network 2021-2026 Access Arrangement (GN21): purpose, process, and consumer engagement: Chris Bell, Evoenergy (15 min)
- What are the factors that most impact gas customers - Networks and Bills: Gavin Dufty, St Vincent de Paul (15 min)
- The Australian Energy Regulator Consumer Challenge Panel – role and recommendations: Robyn Robinson and Mark Henley, AER Consumer Challenge Panel (15 min)
- Consumer engagement in network planning processes elsewhere – insights and recommendations: Shelley Ashe, Energy Consumers Australia and Miyuru Ediriweera, Public Interest Advocacy Centre (15 min)
- Q&A (15 min)

2.30pm Afternoon Tea (15 min)

2.45pm Workshop discussion (1 hr)

This session will involve dialogue with the Energy Consumer Expert Panel, with the opportunity for workshop participants to ask questions, identify issues and questions, and develop recommendations for Evoenergy's consumer engagement.

Topics for discussion include:

- What have consumer advocates been asking of industry and regulators in other jurisdictions as part of gas network planning processes?
- Are there any points raised in the Evoenergy consultation paper and presentation that need further clarification or raise further issues?
- What information should we seek from Evoenergy to further our understanding of the issues regarding the implications of gas network planning for consumers on low income, experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of hardship?

ACTCOSS will document the discussion to prepare a workshop report to inform Evoenergy's GN21 consumer engagement.

3.45pm Summary and Next Steps: Susan Helyar and Geoff Buchanan, ACTCOSS (15 min)

4.00pm Close

## Attachment B: Workshop attendees

Name	Organisation
Paula McGrady	ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
Joel Dignam	Better Renting
Madhumita Iyengar	Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Inc.
Tina Dowse	Care Financial Counselling Service
Louise Baker	Community Services #1
Helen Oakey	Conservation Council ACT Region
Jenny Mobbs	Council on the Ageing (ACT)
Cameron Pensini	Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council
Megan Andrews	St Vincent de Paul, Canberra-Goulburn
Toby Nicholls	UnitingCare Kippax
Pip Kovacs	Woden Community Service
Catherine Jones	YWCA Canberra
Katherine Higgins	YWCA Canberra
<b>Energy Consumer Expert Panel Members</b>	
Mark Henley	Australian Energy Regulator Consumer Challenge Panel
Robyn Robinson	Australian Energy Regulator Consumer Challenge Panel
Shelley Ashe (Apology – notes provided by email)	Energy Consumers Australia
Miyuru Ediriweera	Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd
Gavin Dufty	St Vincent de Paul Society
<b>Evoenergy Representatives</b>	
Chris Bell	Evoenergy
Giuliana Baggoley	Evoenergy
<b>Workshop Facilitators</b>	
Geoff Buchanan	ACTCOSS
Susan Helyar	ACTCOSS