ENERGY CONSUMERS AUSTRALIA

Foresighting Forum 2027



Leading the charge

Forum Program

Sofitel Sydney Wentworth
24 - 25 February 2027

Foresighting Forum 2027: Leading the charge!

Energy Consumers Australia's Foresighting Forum is the only national energy conference built around the people whose decisions matter most to Australia's energy future: households and small businesses. The everyday choices they make about how they use, save, generate and pay for energy will decide whether the transition succeeds.

This year's theme is *Leading the Charge!* It asks how consumers, communities, industry and policymakers can work together to deliver a transition that is affordable, reliable and equitable for everyone, not just for those who can afford to move first.

Over two days, the program moves from evidence to action. You will hear the economic case for electrifying everything, drawn from the households and small businesses already making the switch and saving money today. You will hear from real consumers before the policy conversation begins, because the people living with these decisions belong at the centre of them, not on the sidelines. The program takes on the hard questions too: the future of gas, a fair deal for regional communities, First Nations energy equity, and what it actually takes to move people on energy rather than leave them behind.

The Forum also makes space for the practical. A Solutions Gallery and Research Showcase runs across all days, networking functions bring the sector together, and sessions throughout are built to send you home with ideas you can use, not just notes you will file away.

This is not a conference about consumers. It is a conference led by what they need.

Forum MC



Rae Johnston

Multi-Award-Winning Journalist and Broadcaster

Rae is a Wiradjuri journalist, broadcaster and MC with a career spanning every major television and radio network in Australia. She hosts ABC Radio National's Download This Show and ABC Radio Sydney's Saturday Mornings, and travels the country as a TV host on NITV, ABC and SBS. A former Science and Technology Editor at NITV and the first female editor of Gizmodo Australia, she now sits on the boards of the Telstra Foundation and Swinburne University of Technology. Warm, highly professional and backed by a strong events and stage management background, Rae keeps every event running smoothly from start to finish.

Keynote Speaker



Mike Casey

Chief Executive Officer | Rewiring Aotearoa

Mike Casey is an entrepreneur and cherry orchardist from Central Otago who has electrified every machine on his farm, showing how moving off diesel can save farmers tens of thousands of dollars a year while cutting emissions. He is CEO of Rewiring Aotearoa, a New Zealand charity working to electrify millions of fossil fuel machines across the motu as fast as possible, and was named Kiwibank Sustainability Leader of the Year in 2026. His organisation's research proved New Zealand has reached the tipping point where electric appliances and vehicles now cost less than fossil fuel equivalents over their lifetime. For Mike, electrification is no longer just the right environmental decision, it is the right economic one.

Speakers



Cathy McGowan AO

Former Member for Indi | Community Independents Project

Cathy McGowan AO is a former Independent federal MP who held the seat of Indi in north-east Victoria from 2013 to 2019, winning it through a grassroots, community-led campaign that became known as the "Indi way." A farmer and rural consultant by background, she has spent decades working on regional development, agriculture and women's leadership. Since leaving Parliament she has mentored a wave of community independents and championed local voice in national decision-making. In the energy debate she brings a regional lens, focused on how communities hosting the transition can share fairly in its benefits and help shape the projects around them.



Tony Mahar

Commissioner | Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

Tony Mahar is Australia's Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, appointed in 2024 to help communities, landholders and developers work through concerns about large-scale renewable energy and transmission projects. He spent close to a decade as Chief Executive of the National Farmers' Federation, leading national advocacy on agriculture, trade, drought and land use, and working at the intersection of farming and the energy transition. With a career grounded in rural policy and stakeholder negotiation, he focuses on building trust between regional communities and the infrastructure reshaping the grid. He offers a practical, on-the-ground view of how the transition actually lands in the regions.

Speakers



Clare Savage

Chair | Australian Energy Regulator

Clare Savage is Chair of the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), the body that regulates energy networks and retail markets across most of Australia and sets the Default Market Offer. Appointed in 2020 and since reappointed, she leads the AER's work on network revenue determinations, consumer protections and the move to a cleaner grid. Her earlier career spans senior energy and public policy roles, including as Deputy Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia and advisory work on retail electricity pricing. She is a consistent advocate for putting consumer interests and affordability at the centre of the energy transition.



Tegan Miller

Fellow | Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity

Tegan Miller is a 2024 Fellow with Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity and a leading advocate for First Nations participation in the clean energy transition. Based in Narrm (Melbourne), she works to reshape the energy sector so Aboriginal communities share in its benefits through employment, procurement and genuine partnership. She helped design Victoria's First Peoples Adoption of Renewable Energy Program and the Traditional Owner Renewable Energy Program, and is a policy member of the First Nations Clean Energy Network. Her work spans reconciliation, cultural safety and truth-telling, pushing utilities and government to put First Peoples' rights at the centre of the transition.

Speakers



Dr Cassandra Goldie AO

Chief Executive Officer | Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)

Dr Cassandra Goldie AO is Chief Executive of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), the national peak body for the community sector and for people affected by poverty and inequality. A lawyer with a doctorate in human rights, she has led ACOSS since 2010 and is one of the country's most influential voices on income support, cost of living and economic fairness. Energy affordability sits at the core of this work: she has pressed consistently for stronger protections for low-income households facing rising bills, and has served on the Energy Charter's Independent Accountability Panel. She brings a sharp equity lens to the transitio



Andrew Bray

National Director | RE-Alliance

Andrew Bray is National Director of RE-Alliance, a community-based organisation working to ensure Australia's shift to renewable energy delivers lasting benefits for the regional communities that host it. Formerly head of the Australian Wind Alliance, he has spent years bridging the gap between energy developers, farmers and local residents, pushing for genuine community engagement, fair benefit-sharing and sound planning. Based in regional Victoria, he is a leading voice on building social licence for wind, solar and transmission. His work centres on making the energy transition something regional Australia chooses and shares in, rather than something done to it.

"POWER MOVES" NETWORKING FUNCTION

Wentworth Bar, Sofitel Sydney Wentworth

Tuesday, 23 February 2027

6:00 - 9:00pm	Solutions Gallery and Research Showcase Open *Discover community achievement and consumer-facing innovation. Our solutions showcase features projects and research shaping a fairer energy future.*
6:30pm	Forum Open Dr Brendan French | *Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia*
6:40pm	Three Bold Ideas: From Evidence to Action *Three quick-fire stories from ECA grant recipients and community projects: what worked, what it took, and what should scale. Straight from the people on the ground.*
7:10pm	The Great Energy Quiz *Grab your phone and put your knowledge to the test in a fast, stand-up-friendly quiz. Five quick questions cover energy myths, the facts behind your bill, and the story of the transition so far, with fun prizes up for grabs for the sharpest players in the room.*
7:30pm	Networking
9:00pm	Event close

Forum Program

The following program is subject to change without notice.

DAY ONE: Wednesday, 24 February 2027

8:00am	Registration Open
8:00am	Solutions Gallery and Research Showcase Open
9:00am	Welcome to Country Brendan Kerin | *Cultural Representative, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council*
9:10am	Welcome and Housekeeping Rae Johnston | *Forum MC, Multi-Award-Winning Journalist and Broadcaster*
9:20am	Chair Address Dr Michael Schaper | *Chair, Energy Consumers Australia*
9:30am	Keynote Presentation *To be confirmed*
10:10am	The State of the Consumer *Two lived-experience stories: one household and one small business owner. Grounds the day in real consumers before the policy talk begins.*
10:30am	Consumer Pulse Check Dr Elham Hajhashemi | *Executive Manager, Analysis and Advocacy, Energy Consumers Australia*

10:40am	Morning Tea and Networking Break
11:10am	[PLACEHOLDER] Fireside: The Minister • The Hon Chris Bowen MP | *Minister for Climate Change and Energy* • Dr Brendan French | *Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia* *Delivers the government's consumer side of the transition: the consumer duty, default-offer reform, and delivery of the National First Nations Clean Energy Strategy.*
11:40am	Powering the Corner Store • Dan van Holst Pellekaan | *South Australia's Small Business Commissioner* • Skye Cappuccio | *Chief Executive Officer, Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA)* • *More to be announced* *Small businesses power our economy. But is the energy system working for them? Drawing on ECA's 2026 Small Business Survey, this session explores the Small Business Energy Blueprint; a practical reform agenda to reduce energy costs, remove barriers and help small businesses thrive.*
12:20pm	Details to come
12:45pm	Lunch and Networking Break
1:45pm	No More Next Year: First Nations Equity • Tegan Miller | *Fellow, Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity* • *More to be announced* *First Nations communities have waited too long for reliable, affordable power. This session will put delivery of the National First Nations Clean Energy Strategy front and centre, tackling the remote reliability gaps that keep slipping. It then turns to Original Power's Right to Power prepayment work and the new report on QLD card-operated meters and disconnections.*

2:20pm	**No More Next Year: Regional Equity** • Cathy McGowan AO | *Rural community advocate, company director, and author* • Tony Mahar | *Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner* • Andrew Bray | *National Director, RE-Alliance* *Regional, rural and remote consumers carry real risks when the grid falls short, and they deserve enforceable protections rather than promises. This session drives at network resilience obligations and progress on the Regional Energy Accord, making the case for genuine benefit-sharing across the regions.*
2:45pm	The Future of Gas: A Fair Way Forward
3:30pm	Fair Returns, Fair Bills? Who Pays for Network Investment *Energy Consumers Australia* *The returns earned by energy networks are built into every consumer's bill. The Rate of Return Instrument: what is a fair return for investors, and how do we ensure consumers aren't paying more than they should?*
3:45pm	Afternoon Tea & Networking Break
4:15pm	[PLACEHOLDER] Fireside: The Shadow Minister • The Hon Dan Tehan MP | *Shadow Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction* • Natalie Collard | *General Manager - Community, Energy Consumers Australia* *The bipartisan counterpoint: what an alternative government would keep, change and guarantee for consumers.*
4:45pm	The Power and the Passion Kos Samaras | *Director, Strategy and Analytics, RedBridge Group* *What actually moves people on energy, and what leaves them cold? This session digs into how consumer advocates win and lose the politics of energy, pairing hard evidence from the polling with raw energy from the punters.*
5:25pm	Day 1 Wrap Up and Close Rae Johnston | *Forum MC, Multi-Award-Winning Journalist and Broadcaster*
5:30pm	Networking Function

DAY TWO: Thursday, 25 February 2027

7:30am	Advocate Networking Breakfast
8:00am	Registration Open
8:00am	Solutions Gallery and Research Showcase Open
9:00am	Day 2 Open and Welcome Rae Johnston | *Forum MC, Multi-Award-Winning Journalist and Broadcaster*
9:10am	Cheaper, Cleaner, Now: The Economic Case for Electrifying Everything Mike Casey | *Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Aotearoa* *Drawing on results from his own farm and from thousands of New Zealand households, Mike shows that electrification isn't a future promise; it's a here-and-now saving for families and small businesses. He brings a practical, optimistic take on how consumers, industry and government can accelerate the switch, and what's still getting in the way.*
9:50am	Home Ground: Electrification and the Communities We Live In • Francis Vierboom | *Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia (moderator)* • Alexi Lynch | *Chief Executive Officer, Footy for Climate* • *More to be announced* *Electrification gets real when it's told through the places we actually live: our homes, our rentals, and our local footy clubs. This session brings those stories to the stage, from grassroots club energy savings to household electrification, landing the rental-standards and EV-access asks along the way.*
10:30am	Putting Consumers First: From Promise to Practice
11:00am	Morning Tea & Networking Break

11:30am

Energising Australia for Good

- Clare Savage | *Chair, Australian Energy Regulator*
- Cassandra Goldie AO | *Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council of Social Service*
- *More to be announced*

What does energy in the public interest really demand of the people who regulate, run and reform the system? This session brings the regulator, the community sector and the networks into the same conversation, tested against a direct challenge from a scholar and the community.

12:10pm

Make It Make Sense: a transition meaningful to all Australians

- Ashley Bradshaw | *Executive Manager - Analysis & Advocacy, Energy Consumers Australia*
- Stephanie Tonkin | *Chief Executive Officer, Consumer Action Law Centre*
- *More to be announced*

The evidence is clear that consumers don't just feel they pay too much, they feel they aren't getting enough back: only 1 in 5 say the transition's impact on households like theirs has been clearly explained, just 1 in 4 are confident it's well planned, and only 30% know what their own household can do. This fast-moving session, a data opener followed by five lightning takes and 20 minutes of open audience input, asks the question that matters most: what would actually make it meaningful?

12:50pm

Closing: The Priorities Vote / The Power Moves List

This is where two days of debate become a mandate. Delegates vote live to rank the sector's priorities across the seven consumer asks, a leaders panel responds and names their own "Power Moves", and a community voice gets the final say. The result is a ranked, published agenda plus named commitments that ECA carries forward and reports back.

1:20pm

Forum Wrap Up and Close

- Rae Johnston | *Forum MC, Multi-Award-Winning Journalist and Broadcaster*
- Dr Brendan French | *Chief Executive Officer, Energy Consumers Australia*

1:30pm

Lunch & Networking Break

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