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Media Release

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2020 Gill Owen Scholar Announced

Energy Consumers Australia is pleased to announce that the recipient of the 2020 Gill Owen Scholarship is Joel Dignam.

Joel's work honours the legacy of Dr Gill Owen who was a respected policy advocate, who brought her considerable expertise and insights to energy consumer issues in both Australia and the UK. Gill passed away in August 2016. She was also an inaugural Director of our Board and a guiding voice in the establishment of Energy Consumers Australia, and our early days as an organisation.

Joel is the Chief Executive Officer of Better Renting. He is an active and influential advocate for tenants, including calling for minimum energy performance standards in rental properties to help tenants live in healthy and affordable homes.

Lynne Gallagher, CEO Energy Consumers Australia, said the research would look at the potential implications for residential consumers from phasing out the use of natural gas for cooking, heating or hot water in Australian homes.

"Joel's research is particularly timely, given the ACT Government's aim to phase out gas as a fuel for household and business energy consumers, announced recently through its Sustainable Energy Policy," said Ms Gallagher.

"Joel intends to explore approaches to managing energy transitions in the United States, with a focus on California. The research will inform the research and policy agenda in the ACT, as well as other Australian States and Territories.

"Joel's focus on health and affordability outcomes for consumers grappling with change in energy systems and markets is very much in the spirit of Gill's work and legacy."

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis means that Joel will defer the travel component of the scholarship, until things return to a more normal footing.

Ms Gallagher said that there had been a number of very strong applications for the Scholarship.

"While there can only be one Gill Owen Scholar, we have offered a CEO grant to University of New South Wales academic Dr Mike Roberts. As part of the CEO Grant, Dr Roberts will undertake research about new opportunities to empower consumers to manage their energy bills and usage."

Background

To honour Dr Gill Owen's memory Energy Consumers Australia created an annual scholarship in her name, to enable advocates to travel to research initiatives that could be of value to Australian energy consumers. Information about the scholarship is available on the ECA [website here](#).

The 2019 Gill Owen Scholar was Ash Salardini, Chief Economist, NSW Farmers. Ash's final report, which explored consumers outcomes in competitive retail energy markets in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, is [available here](#).

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