

## Media Release

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### **Majority of small business owners worried about paying their energy bills as rising costs bite**

Small business owners are increasingly worried about being able to afford their rising energy bills, with more than half concerned about costs continuing to increase over the next three years.

The June 2023 Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey (ECSS), released today by Energy Consumers Australia, reveals that 59 per cent of small business people are more concerned about paying their electricity bills than they were a year ago.

The survey also found that confidence has fallen across a range of measures: only 60 per cent of small business customers felt they received value for money for their electricity service compared to 75 per cent a year ago.

Energy Consumers Australia Interim Chief Executive Officer Jacqueline Crawshaw said the results of the survey were reflective of a decrease in consumer confidence in the market over the past 12 months.

“These results are a reflection of the recent turmoil in energy markets around the world coupled with rising energy costs, which have placed small business owners under financial pressure as they also grapple with the increasing costs of doing business,” Ms Crawshaw said.

“Small business owners tend to be acutely aware of their energy costs and they know that there is more pain on the horizon with energy prices set to rise up to 30 per cent across the country.

“The latest Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey shows that more needs to be done to empower small business owners and restore confidence that the market is working in their interests.”

The ECSS is Australia’s most comprehensive ongoing research into the attitudes and activities of residential and small business energy consumers, canvassing the views of more than 2200 households and 500 small business owners nationwide.

Ms Crawshaw said the survey also highlighted that there was room for improvement in the way that the impacts of the energy transition were communicated to consumers.

“Consumers were asked whether they believed governments, energy retailers and other energy bodies had communicated clearly how the transition will impact them and only a minority believed they had successfully done so,” she said.

“However, in instances where consumers did feel that they had received clear information about the impacts of the energy transition, they were far more likely to believe it would lead to cheaper electricity prices.

“There is a need for clear and concise communications that empower consumers with the right information to navigate the transition, including current challenges such as rising energy bills.”

The 2023 ECSS also found:

- Confidence among small business owners that the overall market (the energy industry and energy regulators) is working in their long-term interests dropped to 46 per cent, down from 56 per cent a year ago.

- Small business confidence that technological advances will provide better outcomes over the next five years has fallen 10 percentage points to 47 per cent.
- Despite declining confidence and affordability concerns, satisfaction with provision of electricity and gas services remained high at 80 per cent and 78 per cent respectively.
- However, satisfaction with communication from retailers fell (down 10 percentage points to 58 per cent for electricity and down 10 percentage points to 62 per cent for gas).
- Only 59 per cent of small business respondents had confidence in the availability of information to make decisions about energy products and services, down from 66 per cent a year ago.
- There was a similar drop in small business owners' confidence that they had the tools and assistance needed to manage their energy use and costs (such as meters, smart phone devices, apps or other tools), from 64 per cent to 56 per cent.
- Only one-third of small business respondents felt that federal, state and territory governments had communicated clearly how the transition will impact them.

Ms Crawshaw said restoring consumer confidence, including among the small business sector, should be a priority for governments, retailers, and market bodies.

“The bill relief measures announced in the recent Federal Budget will go some way to easing the pressure on eligible small businesses, but a key to restoring consumer confidence is to ensure they have a sense of control over their energy use and ability to bring their bills down,” she said.

“Small business consumers want clear information and practical solutions which are easy to implement. However, the information they are currently receiving is often difficult to find or is not relatable to their business.

“Consumers must feel that the energy system has their interests front of mind if we want them to be actively engaged in the transition to net zero. There is a real opportunity to work directly with the small business community and the advisory pathways they trust, and empower them to make the best decisions for their future.”

The June 2023 Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey (ECSS) is available here:  
<https://ecss.energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/sentiment-survey-june-2023/>

### **About Energy Consumers Australia**

Energy Consumers Australia is the independent, national voice for residential and small business energy consumers. We enable residential and small business energy consumers to have their voices heard.

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