

Board Communique: June 2022

The Energy Consumers Australia Board met in person and via video conference on 17 June 2022

Grants Meeting

The Board meets at a time when energy is again in the headlines and consumers are rightly concerned about affordability and reliability after several weeks of volatility and chaos.

Huge increases in the wholesale price of electricity and gas led to the triggering of an automatic price cap and, as a result, to generators withdrawing their availability from the market. After warning of possible blackouts, the Australian Energy Market Operator had little choice but to temporarily suspend the National Energy Market.

These events came as Australians were already bracing for significant increases in the retail cost of electricity, after the Australian Energy Regulator released its determination on the Default Market Offer. The Board is unsettled to again see surging consumer concern around energy bills and energy supply and regards these problems as requiring urgent action to make sure the very real and understandable anxiety being experienced by consumers is addressed and concrete assistance is offered.

The events widely being referred to as an 'energy crisis' also bring into sharp relief how critical it is for consumer and small business voices to be heard and to be at the centre of decision making in the energy system. The current moment accentuates the need to make sure the energy system, and energy products and services, are affordable and accessible for those who sometimes face exclusion for financial or other reasons. It also makes clear how important it is that energy is reliable and is available to be used where and when Australians need it.

The Grants Program is an important way in which Energy Consumers Australia can push towards better outcomes in these areas, at a time when affordability of energy is very much front of mind. For this reason the Board is pleased to approve two new grants, totaling \$386,024. These projects will carry out innovative and impactful work to elevate the interests of diverse groups of Australians who can sometimes face energy exclusion: those who live in rental properties and regional Australians.

One of the newly-approved grants advances Energy Consumers Australia's commitment to delivering an inclusive agenda for energy efficient housing, something that has been a major priority for the Grants Program. Since 2016, the program has funded 13 grants and close to \$1 million in this space and we are pleased to continue supporting such work.

The applications approved for Grants Funding by the June Board Meeting are:

Healthy Homes for Renters

Better Renting
\$198,697

This project will inform and support advocacy and decision-making to improve energy performance standards in rental homes, and so deliver significant benefits to residential energy consumers.

Building a customer-focused plan for distribution network capacity management

Australian National University

\$187,327

This Grant supports a project that will build an important new evidence base around consumer perceptions and preferences towards network capacity management. By doing so the Board believes this project will help to build social licence with consumers around this complex issue.

Optimising energy use in swim schools – Establishing baselines

Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity

\$15,000

This project will provide a better understanding of the energy consumption of swim schools based at aquatic centres. It will produce a modelling guidebook to assist them to reduce their energy footprint and where facilities are using gas it will help them transition from gas in the most cost-effective manner.

Applications now open

The Board offers its thanks to both the successful and unsuccessful applicants and reminds potential applicants that a new funding round is now open for Influence Grants until 1 September. We are also encouraging applications for smaller grants (up to \$15,000) at any time under our Participation Grants sub-program.

We urge any interested parties to visit the Grants Program section of our [website](#) where they will find easy-to-use guidance about the program, eligibility guidelines and how to apply.