

Board Communique: March 2022

The Energy Consumers Australia Board met via video conference on 15 March, 2021

A new environment

Board members agreed that 2022 represents a critical point in the transition of our energy system with potential for key decisions and processes to tilt the energy transition in favour of consumer interests, or in a contrary direction, and a degree of uncertainty in the operating environment as several jurisdictions approach election periods.

In this context, it is critical that Energy Consumers Australia retains a clear view of the energy landscape, including its risks and opportunities. The Board stressed the additional importance of the organisation having in place an explicit agenda for change on behalf of consumers and a well-articulated strategic plan to guide the activities that can help to realise that agenda. In this way, Energy Consumers Australia can be prepared for what lies ahead and in good position to capitalise on any opportunities as they arise.

Keeping affordability front of mind

The Board underlined the importance of continuing to prioritise affordability for all consumers as the energy system transitions towards one that is clean, flexible and fit-for-purpose. A watching brief is needed at present, as the Australian Energy Regulator has recently flagged the prospect of a return to rising wholesale energy prices, following a period in which they have consistently fallen, and consumers have benefitted accordingly.

In this moment there is also growing discussion – between governmental actors, market bodies and private investors – about the future transmission needs of a renewables-dominated system and the level of investment required for the system to meet the needs of those who use it.

The Board notes that this is an important discussion and one that all in the system must be motivated to get right. It can, at times, be difficult to pinpoint the difference between necessary investment and excessive overspend. History tells us that consumers too often pay the price if this challenge is addressed from the point of view of what is best for the system rather than what is in the best interests of consumers and the community. In particular, what costs consumers should reasonably be expected to bear and when those costs should be levied will be critical outcomes for whether the energy system serves Australia well. We cannot afford a return to the recent history of ‘gold plating’ that was so damaging to households and small businesses across Australia.

Foresighting Forum 2022

The Board considered how best to proceed with Energy Consumers Australia’s flagship stakeholder event, the Foresighting Forum, in 2022 and decided to pursue ongoing engagement and dialogue throughout 2022, focusing the organisation’s full effort, energy and resources on creating the best possible Foresighting Forum for February 2023. We are much looking forward to an exciting event in February 2023 and, particularly, are anticipating another good opportunity for in-person discussion and interaction.

Management Reports

The Board received detailed reports from the ECA CEO and directors and endorsed the approach for the Reference Committee (the Board’s formal advisory group) of concentrating on one crucial energy issue each meeting with a detailed expert presentation and discussion.

Race for 2030

The Board agreed that Energy Consumers Australia would join the Reliable, Affordable and Clean Energy (RACE) for 2030 Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) as a Tier 4 partner.

In areas such as innovative forecasting, improving residential energy efficiency, and the impacts of electric cars on the grid, RACE for 2030 CRC's energy research aligns well with our priorities and our partnership provides the opportunity to collaborate on both research and advocacy for impact.