

# Board Communique: March 2020

## The Energy Consumers Australia Board met via video conference on 19 March 2020

The Board met via video conference on 19 March 2020, moving from the in-person meeting in Canberra that was originally planned to minimise travel and implement the social distancing measures needed to protect the community against COVID-19.

The Board Reference Committee, and Board Stakeholder Forum meetings were cancelled and alternative arrangements for future meetings are being explored.

### RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The Board discussed the extraordinary set of challenges households and small businesses are facing ranging from the health impact of COVID-19 to the economic impacts.

The Board saw a clear role for the energy sector in not only ensuring continuity of supply of essential energy services but working with consumers who are grappling with uncertainty and anxiety about their livelihoods and sudden reduction in household incomes and business revenues.

The Board's immediate priority, after the safety and well-being of our staff, is to ensure Energy Consumers Australia plays its role in ensuring that households and small businesses get the essential electricity and gas services, and the additional support, they need.

This means engaging with stakeholders and gathering evidence and insights about the impacts of COVID19 to inform the design and delivery of support for affected consumers.

The Board also discussed the need to adjust internal research priorities to align with the health and economic challenges consumers are facing.

### GOVERNANCE

Energy Consumers Australia is implementing its business continuity plan and the Board discussed additional measures to ensure the organisation is able to continue to perform its role for Australian household and small business energy consumers in a safe and effective way. Energy Consumers Australia's people are now working remotely, and arrangements are in place to continue to engage with stakeholders using technology.

To support business continuity, the Board also took the decision to appoint Lynne Gallagher as interim CEO for a 12-month period. The Board congratulates Lynne for her leadership to date and looks forward to working with her in the months ahead to continue to serve the interests of Australian household and small business energy consumers.

The Board also noted the challenges our Grants Program recipients may face as a result of COVID-19 is encouraging people to contact the Grants Team to work through issues.

### FORESIGHTING FORUM 2020

The Board reflected on Foresighting Forum 2020, which was held on 19-20 February 2020 and explored a consumer vision for future energy services.

- There is significant interest in the energy transition framework that is emerging in the United Kingdom. The position put by keynote speaker Dr Jeff Hardy, Grantham Institute, that successful transition hinges on delivering 'better' outcomes for consumers aligned with the insights from the Forethought Consumer Expectations Research.

- There is an opportunity to re-evaluate the challenges energy consumers are facing through the lens of design. Because energy is core to the way we live, any change will impact on lives and routines in profound and unexpected ways, meaning changes contemplated by the sector must be carefully considered and start from a position of trust.
- Situating energy challenges in a broader social and economic context is clarifying and potentially provides a basis for consensus about transition. Australia has navigated big transition challenges before (Post War Reconstruction), with success resting on collaboration and alignment.

The Board also reflected on how COVID-19 had changed the strategic context for consumers and the need to re-evaluate sector priorities to ensure they are geared towards providing immediate support and building a foundation for recovery.

The Board noted the new research, scenarios and other material from the event, including recordings of the sessions, are accessible on the Energy Consumers Australia website [here](#).