

Board Communique: May 2021

The Energy Consumers Australia Board met in Sydney on 20 May 2021.

Board Reference Committee meeting

The Board held the second meeting of the calendar year with the Reference Committee. The Reference Committee was joined by Helen Ford, from the Energy and Water Ombudsman New South Wales, as an observer.

The Board heard from members on a range of consumer issues across the jurisdictions.

The Reference Committee provided feedback to the Board on the proposed changes to the Grants Program, which is currently being consulted on with advocates and other stakeholders.

This was the last meeting of this current Reference Committee and the Board thanked all members for their contribution over the past two years. Directors particularly recognised the valuable advice provided to the Board by Gerard Brody from the Consumer Action Law Centre and Craig Memery from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, who have reached the limit of three terms. A new Reference Committee will be appointed early in the next financial year.

Board meeting

Post 2025 Market Design

The Board met with Dr Kerry Schott AO, to discuss the Energy Security Board's (ESB) Post 2025 Market Design Options Paper.

Dr Schott outlined some of the big challenges facing the ESB as it carries out final consultations before submitting the Options Paper to Energy Ministers later this year.

She guided Energy Consumers Australia's Board members through the four workstreams that make up the paper and updated on progress that is being made, including incorporating feedback from Energy Consumers Australia and other consumer advocates. Dr Schott remarked that while an independent voice, Energy Consumers Australia has been "extremely helpful" during the process of preparing the Options Paper, particularly in supporting the engagement and participation of consumer advocates.

The Board discussed with Dr Schott the inherent difficulty in making decisions in the present moment for a 2050 world and the value of scenario planning in assisting with this. It was agreed that Energy Consumers Australia's annual Foresighting Forum can make a valuable contribution to this challenge.

The Board flagged to Dr Schott its view that there is a need for strong governance to carry on and help implement the ESB's work once the ESB ceases operations in late 2021. Directors observed that the two energy transitions are among the most important challenges Australia faces and in their view there is a demonstrated need for an 'Energy Transition Board' or similar body to guide the necessary change.

Priorities and emerging consumer issues

The Board noted that there had been substantial work across our advocacy agenda since the last Board meeting. Directors are encouraged to see ECA engaged with multiple processes relating to the participation of distributed energy resources in energy markets, noting how critical such participation will be to ensuring the success of the 'second transition'.

Directors noted that many of these processes appear to be based on a starting point of system needs, rather than consumer ones but was encouraged to see the collaboration with market bodies with ECA, seeking input about how to embed our work on social licence into their reform processes.

The Board discussed the importance of reconnecting with consumer advocates and other stakeholders and deepening those connections as the pandemic begins to recede in Australia and both inter-state travel and in-person meetings become more common. ECA's Executive Management Team has begun planning for a new series of stakeholder engagement events, which will take place Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide in the latter half of 2021.

Board Directors also reviewed and discussed the Draft Energy Consumers Australia Strategic Plan, a document that is being created for the Board to guide the vision, mission, priorities and everyday operations of ECA for the period 2021-2024. The Board noted that the strategic plan is progressing well and observed that a final draft should be ready for review and decision at the June Board meeting.