

Board Communique: November 2021

The Energy Consumers Australia Board met via video conference on 11 November 2021

A new environment

The Board assembled for the first time since world leaders and the global community gathered in Glasgow for the Conference of Parties conference (COP26). Emerging from those meetings was a new set of commitments and a new framework for action, both for Australia and for the world.

Australia now has a commitment to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050. As encouraging and as necessary as this commitment is, we recognise that the hardest work begins now.

As Directors of the only national organization providing a voice for household and small business energy consumers in the debates that are already underway we are clear about our priorities. The energy transition is happening and will now accelerate further. It is vital that the values, needs and expectations of consumers are placed at the centre of the change to come.

With these challenges in mind we also note the continuing importance of the Energy Security Board's work and the critical next steps required to further develop and implement its plan for a post 2025 energy system. We thank outgoing Independent Chair Dr Kerry Schott and Independent Deputy Chair David Swift. Both have ably led the ESB's activities, and Dr Schott has been generous in sharing her time with us previously, presenting the ESB's work at our May meeting. We welcome incoming Chair Anna Collyer, wish her well, and look forward to continued opportunities to engage and collaborate on behalf of consumer interests.

Investment in the Grants Program

The Board reflected on recent trends in Energy Consumers Australia's investment in its Grants Program. Since it was established in January 2015, Energy Consumers Australia has invested more than \$15.3 million in organisations undertaking advocacy and research to achieve beneficial outcomes for households and small businesses across the energy system.

The Board noted that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in organisations taking longer to complete their existing projects because pressures on staff combined with the online environment are making collaboration more difficult. Consequently, we have also seen the number of applications fall by half, resulting in an underspend in 2019-21 of approximately \$630,000 against budget reported in the audited Annual Financial Statements. These unusual circumstances have not reduced the annual funding committed to the Grants Program in future years, and the underspend is available to be allocated to grants in future years.

A recent positive development has been an increase in applications on behalf of small business, which resulted in two grants being approved. At the October meeting, the Board approved funding of \$150,000 for Business Australia to build on its current program of SME energy policy and support, through assessing small business' understanding of the energy market, focusing on advice, procurement, energy efficiency, renewables, and net zero.

At its November meeting the Board approved funding of \$147,900 for the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia (COSBOA) for research into the policies and programs that provided the most effective assistance to small business during COVID-19. This project aims to influence governments' decisions about what assistance and protections should be extended or built into the regulatory framework.

Annual General Meeting

Energy Consumers Australia also held its Annual General Meeting, attended by Vince Duffy, Executive Director, Department Energy & Mining, SA Government (representing ECA's Member, South Australian Minister for Energy and Mining Dan van Holst Pellekaan).

The meeting received ECA's Annual Report for 2021-21, a document that details the impact the organization has made during a challenging period that has been dominated by the global pandemic. The Board was pleased to see a document that details the impact ECA has made in priority areas such as bringing energy prices down, fostering increased agency and influence for consumers and their interests and continuing to build trust in the National Energy Market. The report also outlines significant work the organization has done to improve its governance and to boost its ability to capture and amplify consumer voices through improved communications and stakeholder engagement capabilities.

The meeting also received and considered the 2021 Grants Supplement to the Annual Report, as well as the Directors Report and audited Annual Financial Statements.