

The Energy Consumers Australia Board met in Adelaide on 7 & 8 November 2018

Board Stakeholder Forum, 7 November 2018

The discussions at the Forum focused on energy affordability in South Australia and policy, regulatory and market developments impacting outcomes for households and small businesses. The Forum was attended by consumer advocates representing households and small businesses, as well as officials from the South Australian Government and energy service providers.

Dr Andrew Nance, Director, The Energy Project provided a consumer perspective on the Riverlink Project which would provide a new high-voltage electricity interconnection link between South Australia and New South Wales. The costs and benefits of the Riverlink are currently being reviewed by the Australian Energy Regulator as part of a Regulatory Investment Test (RIT) process. Dr Nance outlined a number of areas where consumers need further assurance about the project, including in relation to how the costs and benefits between consumers in NSW and SA would fall, how uncertainty could affect the viability of the project, and how alternative approaches have been tested.

Mr Mark Henley, Manager Advocacy & Communications, Uniting Communities, discussed his work on a new model for energy networks and consumers to work together to align business interests with price and service outcomes. A focus of this work is the Energy Consumers Australia grant funded project *DNA: Alive and (mainly) Thriving* – that shows how networks and consumers can ‘deliberate, negotiate and agree’ (DNA) key elements of revenue determinations, moving beyond the traditional more adversarial and less open approaches.

Mr Chris Alexander, Director Advocacy & Communications, Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), briefed the Forum on the latest consumer insights from the Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey and provided an overview of ECA’s advocacy priorities. Mr Alexander explained how immediate action on price was needed to address the affordability challenges households and small businesses were facing and begin to regain their trust and confidence in the market.

Board Meeting, 8 November 2018

The Board commenced the meeting by reflecting on the feedback and insights from the Stakeholder Forum, noting:

- How open and deliberative engagement between networks and consumers is essential for better outcomes and is becoming more common practice.
- The need for rigorous assessment of the costs and benefits of proposed transmission and interconnection projects to ensure the investment is in the long-term interests of energy consumers.
- The extent to which energy prices have outpaced key indices such as inflation and wages and undermined the competitive position of businesses – particularly energy intensive – in the last ten years. The Board noted important work by some energy consumers to put a specific dollar figure on the electricity price which allows them to remain competitive.

The Board then dealt with a number of governance matters.

Annual General Meeting, 8 November 2018

The Board convened Energy Consumers Australia’s Annual General Meeting, presenting the Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements to the Executive Director Energy and Technical Regulation, SA Department of Minerals and Energy, who represented ECA’s sole Member, the South Australian Minister for Energy and Mining.

Next meeting

The next Board meeting will be held on 14 March 2019 in Melbourne.