

# Media Release

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## Grant winners tackle energy efficiency, affordability, and building consumer trust

Energy Consumers Australia has announced its latest round of successful grant recipients, stepping up support to improve energy efficiency across rental homes while ensuring customers are placed at the centre of key decisions about the future energy system.

Three projects, valued at more than \$400,000, have been approved for funding in the last month.

The recipients include the Australian National University, whose researchers are examining the role of social licence from consumers in the management of distribution network capacity, and Better Renting, which is campaigning for a national framework for minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties.

The Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity has also received funding for a project designed to assist community swim schools to cut their energy use.

“We are pleased to support projects that seek to address some of the pressing challenges we are facing now and into the future as we create an energy system that is flexible, resilient and affordable for all,” said Energy Consumers Australia Chief Executive Officer Lynne Gallagher.

“As our recently released Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey confirmed, access to affordable energy is a chief and growing concern among Australian households and small businesses, including the millions of renters who have less control over the energy efficiency of their homes and therefore over their energy usage and costs.

“At the same time, our energy system is undergoing transformative change, which is evidenced by the growth in households installing solar panels, incorporating at-home battery storage, and considering purchasing electric vehicles.

“We commend the work that is going on to better understand consumer attitudes, perspectives and expectations so that uptake of these consumer energy resources continues.”

### Healthy Homes for Renters – Better Renting – \$198,697

A majority of Australian homes are inefficient, falling well short of the benchmark six-star energy efficiency rating recommended in most jurisdictions. This leads to higher energy costs and additional strain on household budgets – a problem that is felt more acutely by those who rent.

Better Renting is a community advocacy group that has amassed more than 100 organisational supporters and 3000 individual supporters who share its vision for mandatory energy efficiency standards for rental homes.

The Healthy Homes for Renters project aims to grow the collaboration and work with new and existing partners to engage decision-makers, particularly in NSW, WA, and SA, as jurisdictions move towards developing a national framework for minimum energy efficiency requirements for existing rental properties. Innovative public awareness campaigns will highlight common deficiencies across rental properties, while the organisation will seek greater engagement from supportive landlords who can act as advocates for reform.

“Better Renting has built a powerful and highly effective movement that champions the rights of more than 8 million renters across the country, who would struggle to find a voice otherwise,” Ms Gallagher said.

“Quite simply, inefficient homes use more energy and incur higher energy costs, forcing those on lower incomes to make the tough decision to go without heating or cooling, which puts their health at risk.

“This is an exciting project that comes at a critical juncture with the potential to produce tangible financial, health, and wellbeing benefits for renters.”

### **Building a customer-focused plan for distribution network capacity management – Australian National University – \$187,327**

The growing uptake of consumer energy resources, such as solar PV and home batteries, means that many households and small businesses are no longer simply consumers of energy, but can also generate, store, and export it as well.

This has forced energy providers to reconsider how they manage network capacity, leading to trials of a number of reforms and technology-based solutions to deal with system-related challenges, such as excess solar exports.

However, these approaches are often hard to understand, do not always take consumer preferences and needs into account, and can give little control to consumers regarding decisions that are likely to have a significant impact on their lives.

It is therefore critical that any new solution to manage network capacity secures consumer buy-in to build trust between the consumer and the energy industry, and ensure benefits are realised for all parties.

Researchers from the Australian National University will examine social licence through focus groups to develop and test consumer-informed future scenarios that take into consideration consumer values and preferences for network capacity management approaches.

This knowledge-building work will culminate in a new consumer-informed framework for managing distribution network capacity that can also act as a template for other significant changes to the energy system that depend on consumer support.

“Trust is integral if we are to make a successful shift towards harnessing the consumer energy resources generated in our homes and neighborhoods,” said Ms Gallagher.

“We are effectively asking Australians to change the habits of a lifetime by investing their own money in altering how they power their homes, vehicles, and appliances, as well as when they conduct certain activities. In addition, we are asking them to embrace a collective mindset by sharing the resources they generate with the broader system.

“If we are to realise the potential benefits that DOEs offer, social licence is required. Customers want to be able to access programs they deem valuable, otherwise there is a risk of backlash, low uptake, or further erosion of trust in the energy sector.”

### **Optimising energy use in swim schools: establishing baselines – Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity – \$15,000**

Learning to swim is a right of passage for many Australian children, however swim schools can consume significant amounts of energy.

This project, sponsored by the Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity, will analyse baseline energy data at three community swim schools as well as calculate the impact of planned upgrades on energy consumption and costs.

Ms Gallagher said small business operators were increasingly cognisant of their energy footprints and looking for ways to cut their consumption and energy bills.

“This work will provide detailed and robust data to inform future decisions about investment for energy use optimisation,” she said.

“The data that is collected and analysed in this project will help to inform the development of a model to be used by swim school owners to reduce the amount of energy they use and, for centres that are still reliant on gas, to transition in a cost-effective manner.

“We are pleased to support projects like this that provide real insights that encourage small businesses to make transformative changes that will help create a more energy productive economy.”

**About Energy Consumers Australia**

Energy Consumers Australia is the independent, national voice for residential and small business energy consumers. We enable residential and small business energy consumers to have their voices heard by the sector by working with other consumer groups to gather evidence-based research with a national perspective, distil it to key viewpoints, and feed it back to the market to influence outcomes.

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