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Media Release

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New grants to target energy resilience, energy efficient housing, and electric vehicle charging incentives

Extreme weather events are becoming more common, devastating, and dangerous in Australia. As our nation decarbonises, and our infrastructure electrifies, the resilience of our energy system will be critical. That's why ensuring communities' ability prepare, withstand, recover, and thrive after severe weather events and other hazards is the focus of a major new research initiative funded by Energy Consumers Australia.

The (Em)powering communities project, led by University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures, is among four new collaboration or influence grants totalling \$633,253 to be approved by the Board of Energy Consumers Australia, the national voice for household and small business energy consumers.

Other successful funding applications include a project designed to assist household renovators to future proof their properties, an initiative designed to encourage migrant communities to actively engage in the energy transition, and a program that will evaluate the benefits of price incentives and flexible tariffs for electric vehicle charging.

Energy Consumers Australia Chief Executive Officer Lynne Gallagher said consumer empowerment was a dominant theme running through the latest round of successful grant applications.

"Providing consumers with the essential knowledge they need to make informed decisions about how, when and where they use energy, as well as the type of energy they use, is a critical part of ensuring a timely and equitable energy transition," Ms Gallagher said.

"Energy Consumers Australia is pleased to support projects that empower consumers, while also targeting the key challenges affecting our community, such as resilience to extreme weather events that disrupt reliable and safe energy supply.

"Households and communities need to understand the potential risks, hazards, and vulnerabilities associated with extreme weather events and how to prepare for them. However, energy resilience planning is often disconnected from consumer experience.

"We need to better understand the lived experience of communities during and after extreme weather events, and the impacts of prolonged and major power outages in order to help Australian communities become more resilient."

Successful applicants to receive funding include:

**(Em)powering communities on the journey to energy resilience – University of Technology Sydney, Institute for Sustainable Futures
\$200,480**

Resilience and preparedness for the impacts of climate change are becoming key issues, both in the energy sector and more broadly. However, regulatory agencies have sometimes been slow to respond, while definitions of energy resilience lack consensus and often overlook the consumer viewpoint.

This project will identify and engage with community members who have previously experienced climate events, to develop and assess a consumer-centric guide to building community resilience.

The visual guide will provide vulnerable communities with valuable information to build more resilient systems – whether it be modern, flexible, and affordable distributed energy systems, fire-proofing systems or emergency plans that ensure essential health services, such as dialysis machines and defibrillators, are not disrupted.

“On a practical level, boosting resilience not only helps to reduce the likelihood of energy and telecommunications outages in a disaster, but helps to reduce risks to life and wellbeing, property damage and the costs associated with rebuilding and recovery,” Ms Gallagher said.

“It also helps to address the critical issue of soaring bills when temperature extremes are experienced, which we know is a serious concern for many Australians.”

**Renovation Pathways determines cost effective ways to future-proof Australian homes for more comfort, health, energy efficiency, zero carbon and resilience – The Climateworks Centre
\$250,000**

Many Australian households live in poorly insulated and energy inefficient properties and face high energy bills as a result. This will continue unless something is urgently done to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.

While technologies and technical solutions to achieve zero-carbon buildings are readily available, there is currently no overarching government policy or financial incentive to support consumers to adopt them when undertaking renovations.

Another barrier is the significant gap in knowledge and understanding of existing building stock and assessment of cost-effective renovation strategies to improve building quality, safety, and performance.

The Renovation Pathways project seeks to address this gap and provide evidence and recommendations to inform policy that can help guide and influence the next renovation boom. It aims to see consumers offered future-proofing renovation services by builders as well as major banks and lenders developing preferential products and prioritising lending activities to support sustainable housing upgrades.

“The Climateworks Centre rightly makes the link between Australia’s carbon intensive building stock, and resultant poor health, discomfort and high energy price outcomes for consumers,” said Ms Gallagher.

“This multi-year project, which is backed by a coalition of supporters, is closely aligned with Energy Consumer Australia’s advocacy agenda to improve the energy performance of housing.”

**Evaluating the benefits of price incentives for electric vehicle charging: evidence from a field experiment with telematics data – The University of Queensland
\$132,773**

Australia’s pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, with approximately 15 per cent of reductions to come from electric vehicles (EVs), presents both a challenge and an opportunity. While the added load could see grid performance come under pressure, increasing the number of EVs in circulation also has the potential to enhance grid security and smooth renewable generation if consumers are prepared to make their vehicles available for these purposes.

This University of Queensland project aims to investigate whether a flexible approach to managing EV load and storage with price incentives could benefit consumers.

Ms Gallagher said the work would fill a knowledge gap in understanding the effectiveness of economic incentives and consumer preferences around the uptake of electric vehicles.

“Ultimately, it will support the uptake of electric vehicles and effective integration of renewables into the National Energy market for the benefit of consumers via lower prices and more stable electricity supply,” she said.

**Voices for Power CALD Community Empowerment Training – Sydney Community Forum
\$50,000**

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities face challenges engaging with the energy system due to intersecting socio-economic disadvantage, social and language barriers, and a lack of opportunities to engage with decision makers.

This project builds on the Sydney Community Forum’s previous work with community and faith leaders to co-design and roll-out energy literacy training to eight CALD communities across Sydney.

Training workshops will be delivered to more than 200 CALD leaders, in their own languages, to empower and instil confidence to engage with key decision makers and advocate for the needs and priorities of their communities, so that they are not left behind in the transition to net zero.

“This approach creates pathways to build capacity using ground-up community advocacy at the local level,” Ms Gallagher said.

“A significant cohort of these migrant communities are also small business owners who will directly benefit from the training on energy transition and the new initiatives and technologies to support communities.”

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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.