



Commentary

29 January 2020

New research about consumer expectations to stimulate debate at Foresighting Forum 2020

Early last year it became clear to us that we needed new and very different research about Australian household and small business energy consumers.

Many people will be familiar with the [Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey](#) (ECSS), which is a six-monthly “pulse check” of households and businesses to gauge their experience and thoughts about the energy market.

We now have four years of quantitative data that has helped build a rich picture of consumers in today’s energy market. The ECSS has been instrumental in informing the sector’s efforts to “pivot to the consumer” that we now see in [The Energy Charter](#) and many other initiatives, as well in the decisions organisations are making.

But the best next step to building the truly “consumer focused” energy sector of tomorrow, was not more “experience” research but new research into *consumer expectations*.

Research that went beyond (for example) consumer satisfaction with today’s energy services, to engage people in a more open and exploratory way about their lives, their enduring priorities and the values that shape the way they think about the future.

Research that could not only tell us what was *missing* in today’s market but could give us clues about the practical things that the sector could do to improve outcomes and win the trust and confidence of consumers.

With this need in mind, we commissioned Dr Jelena Dodic, a Principal Consultant with the Melbourne-based organisation Forethought, to undertake the work.

The qualitative research Dr Dodic led in the second half of 2019, included in-depth interviews and small group sessions with consumers across Australia. Those interviewed reflected a methodologically robust sample of the community, covering differences such as regional, metropolitan, age, ethnicity, gender, income, homeowners and renters, household decision makers, household influencers.

We’ll be publishing this consumer expectations research at Foresighting Forum 2020 and we think that it will make for a timely and hugely important discussion.

Reflecting on this research is an experience in the *Shock of the New*. It reveals the basis for a very different approach to engaging consumers in energy discussions. Essentially, we were asking them why energy mattered to them and what they thought a better energy future would look like, through the lens of their lives.

What are their life journeys and how does energy fit in? Where are the opportunities and pain points? How do attitudes and preferences change with our circumstances and responsibilities? What challenges are unique to some people, or shared by all?

As has been my experience with many consumers in many locations on many topics – the consumers we talked to for this research had extremely interesting and insightful things to tell us. Given the opportunity, they did not hold back. Given their views there is much opportunity for the energy sector

to engage in a new conversation with consumers about what matters to them and how the energy sector can help.

Foresighting Forum 2020 is being held 19-20 February at UTS Aerial Conference Centre. Further information about the event to register to participate is [available here](#).