

Minutes

Meeting of the Economic Regulation Authority Consumer Consultative Committee

Meeting 1/2019

Date & Time: Thursday, 7 March 2019, 10:30am

Location: Ken Michael and Stirling Rooms, 4th Floor, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street

Attendees:	Nicky Cusworth	Chair, ERA
	Jenness Gardner	Chief Executive Officer, ERA
	Paul Kelly	Executive Director, Regulation & Inquiries, ERA
	Natalie Warnock	Senior Media and Communications Advisor, ERA
	Clare Darragh	Communications and Website Administrator, ERA
	Marcus Claridge	Energy and Water Ombudsman
	Tim Dymond	UnionsWA
	Doug Hall	Pastoralists and Graziers Association
	Graham Hansen	WA Council of Social Services
	Penny Lipscombe	Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety
	Gemma Mitchell	Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA)
	Daniel Norrie	Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA
	Kitty Prodonovich	Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry (WA)
	Ramdas Sankaran	Ethnic Communities Council (WA)
Apologies:	Sandra Brewer	Property Council of Australia (WA)
	Caroline Cherry	Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA
	Bev Jowle	Financial Counsellors' Association
	Dana Mason	WA Local Government Association
Presenters:	Analena Gilhome	ERA

1 WELCOME

The meeting opened at 10:38am. Chair Nicky Cusworth noted the apologies as listed above. She welcomed members to the committee for a new year, and particularly welcomed four new members: Tim Dymond, Gemma Mitchell, Kitty Prodonovich and Ramdas Sankaran.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (8 NOVEMBER 2018)

The minutes of Meeting 3/2018 on 8 November 2018 were accepted as a true and correct record of the meeting.

3 ERACCC STATUS REPORT

Ms Cusworth summarised the key points from the ERACCC Status Report and took questions from members on the content of the report.

Projects discussed included the ERA's approved access arrangement for Western Power's network, and the ongoing work reviewing access arrangement for the Mid-West and South West Gas Distribution Systems, and the Goldfields Gas Pipeline.

Members asked questions regarding the ERA's functions in the wholesale electricity market, and the ERA's ability to influence electricity prices and policies. Ms Cusworth said that, for the next ERACCC meeting, the ERA would present an overview of Western Australia's electricity market and how the various policy instruments and regulatory bodies fit together.

4 MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS

Given the addition of four new member organisations to the committee, Ms Cusworth asked each member to briefly explain their organisation, and the economic concerns of their members.

Concerns in common among a number of groups were the reliability and price of utility services, wanting more streamlined regulation, access to information.

Ms Cusworth said that, in addition to the item on the electricity market agreed to in agenda item three, the ERA would also schedule sessions on regional issues and services, and communication and accessibility for future meetings.

5 INTRODUCTION TO THE ERA AND ERACCC

Ms Cusworth provided members with an overview of the ERA's role and functions, including its guiding purpose to represent the long-term interest of consumers.

Jenness Gardner outlined the ERA's current major projects, including an investigation into Synergy's market behaviour, two gas access arrangements for the Mid-West and South-West Gas Distribution Systems and the Goldfields Gas Pipeline, annual reports on the performance of utility service providers, and the recently completed, but not yet published, business licensing inquiry.

Ms Gardner also talked members through the expanded membership for ERACCC, and other changes to how members receive information and guest presentations are selected, based on the survey of members in 2018.

She said that seeking out meaningful feedback on often highly technical information is a challenge for all utility regulators, and the ERA does not want to be reliant on the companies and industries it regulates for information on what consumers purportedly want.

LUNCH

6 BUSINESS LICENSING INQUIRY – FINAL REPORT

Analena Gilhome, Assistant Director Inquiries, provided members with an update on the ERA's inquiry into the reform of state government business licensing. The inquiry was completed on 22

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February 2019, but had not yet been tabled in Parliament for public release at the time of the meeting.

Ms Gilhome's presentation provided members with an overview of the inquiry, a summary of the major changes between the draft and final reports, and an opportunity to have input into the ERA's consultation strategy for the next inquiry.

Ms Gilhome said the three over-arching findings of the inquiry were:

- There is no consistent or continuous improvement of licensing schemes.
- Review and reform are seldom a high priority for government.
- There is inadequate consumer and licensee input into the design and reform of licensing schemes.

The ERA's draft report contained nine recommendations, and this has expanded to 15 recommendations in the final report, that are intended to work together as a governance framework for licensing in Western Australia as in the draft report.

Members discussed the consultation process, including time frames for responses, "consultation fatigue" with a high number of government reforms underway, and the difficulty of coordinating formal written responses with a number of member organisations.

All members agreed that informal meetings were a productive way of engaging with a consultation process, and the ERA staff agreed that such meetings would be particularly useful during the scoping process for an inquiry.

Members suggested breaking down the information wherever possible, and providing more targeted questions rather than lots of information in an issues paper or similar discussion document. Members also offered to distribute information within their organisations when relevant.

Ms Gilhome said that, timing permitted, she would like to bring the next inquiry topic to members for discussion before confirming the Terms of Reference with the Treasurer.

7 ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN'S REPORTS

Marcus Claridge provided a brief overview of the Ombudsman's role, and took questions from members on the quarterly reports.

Mr Claridge agreed to present at the next meeting on the role of the Ombudsman's office, to add to members' understanding of the role the Ombudsman can perform for consumers.

Meeting closed at 1:45pm

NICKY CUSWORTH
CHAIR, ERACCC