

Minutes

Meeting of the Economic Regulation Authority Consumer Consultative Committee

Meeting 2/2021

Date & Time: Thursday, 22 July 2021, 10:00am

Location: ERA office, Level 4, 469 Wellington St, Perth WA 6000

Attendees:	Nicky Cusworth	Chair, ERA
	Rajat Sarawat	Executive Director, Energy Markets, ERA
	Natalie Warnock	Manager Strategic Communications, ERA
	Aden Barker	Energy Policy WA
	Marcus Claridge	Energy and Water Ombudsman
	Tim Dymond	UnionsWA
	Nic Fitzgerald	Western Power
	Doug Hall	Pastoralists and Graziers' Association
	Penny Lipscombe	Department of Mines, Industry Regulation & Safety
	Linh Nguyen	Chamber of Minerals and Energy
	Kitty Prodonovich	Regional Chambers of Commerce
	Georgia Turco	Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
	Nick Warland	Property Council of Australia WA
Apologies:	Melanie Every	Financial Counsellors' Association of WA
	Jenness Gardner	ERA
	Rachelle Gill	Energy Policy WA
	Roberta Grealish	Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
	Graham Hansen	WA Council of Social Service
	John Hassell	WA Farmers Federation
	Paul Kelly	ERA
	Adrienne LaBombard	Chamber of Minerals and Energy
	Dana Mason	WA Local Government Association
	Suresh Rajan	Ethnic Communities Council

1 WELCOME

The meeting opened at 10:05am. Chair Nicky Cusworth noted the apologies as listed above.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Chair signed the minutes of Meetings 3/2020 and 1/2021 as a formal record of those events.

3 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Chair asked members to provide an overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting their members and organisations, particularly in light of economic support packages being withdrawn, and the lockdown in the Perth and Peel region in June 2021.

Mr Claridge, Energy and Water Ombudsman, noted that energy complaints had risen to pre-COVID levels, following the withdrawal of government support measures. Complaints have risen 40 per cent over the past few months.

Nick Warland, Property Council of Australia, noted that the code of conduct put in place to protect tenants during the early months of the pandemic had now been withdrawn, and measures put in place to manage the pay-back of rent seemed to be working effectively. He noted that office occupancy rates had risen (outside of the lockdown periods), most notably in the middle of the week.

Doug Hall, Pastoralists and Graziers Association, noted that the ongoing border closures remained a significant challenge both for the movement of goods and workers.

Tim Dymond, UnionsWA, noted that the withdrawal of JobKeeper and lower rate of JobSeeker were causing significant hardship, particularly for those in extended lockdown in the eastern states.

Penny Lipscombe, Consumer Protection, noted that the rental moratorium had ended, but Consumer Protection was still running a grants scheme for tenants in rental distress.

Linh Nguyen, Chamber of Minerals and Energy, noted that there was a shortage of 40,000 workers in the resources industry – concentrated in the areas of skilled technicians and trade. The tight labour market was also exacerbated by regional housing shortages in some areas. – Released a summary of 40,000 worker shortage in resources industry, recently.

Kitty Prodonovich, Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry, noted that regional businesses were concerned about the long-term effects of the pandemic, particularly the border closures and tourism businesses in the far north.

Georgia Turco, Consumer Credit Legal Service WA, noted that the number of calls and questions about debt remained low, despite the withdrawal of government support measures.

4 DER ROADMAP OVERVIEW

Aden Barker, Energy Policy WA, provided an overview of the Distributed Energy Resources Roadmap, and of the first 12 months of actions undertaken to enact the Roadmap.

Mr Barker noted that monthly installations of rooftop solar appeared unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to increase. He noted that, sometimes, up to 57 per cent of electricity demand in the SWIS was being served just by rooftop solar.

He noted that the introduction of new inverter standards for rooftop solar had been accelerated from the end of the year to 1 July 2021. Twelve power banks have so far been installed on Western Power's network to absorb some of the daytime influx of solar and alleviate local stability issues.

He also noted that the Distributed Energy Buyback Scheme has replaced the previous buyback method, which provided a lower return rate for daytime solar, and a higher rate when more power was needed. This is intended to encourage the take-up of batteries and for households to plan their energy use to maximise use of solar power during the day.

Minutes
Meeting 2 of 2021 – ERACCC – 22 July 2021

Mr Barker noted that over the next few months, Project Symphony would commence. This is a trial project with the Australian Energy market Operator intended to centralise control of solar panels to allow for greater protection of the grid and its stability.

MORNING BREAK

5 GUEST PRESENTATION – WESTERN POWER’S ACCESS ARRANGEMENT CONSULTATION

Zahra Jabiri and Nic Fitzgerald, Western Power, provided an overview of Western Power’s community engagement process to inform its access arrangement proposal, due to the ERA in early 2022.

Western Power is engaging with a diverse set of customer groups – including business, residential, metropolitan and regional customers, to understand the varying priorities and services required.

The topics covered include: electricity knowledge and attitudes, experiences and interactions with Western Power, future expectations and trade-offs (that is, affordability versus reliability or environment/emissions).

Members asked questions about the engagement process. Ms Prodonovich passed on her thanks from the Mid West chambers of commerce following Western Power’s work to restore customers after Cyclone Seroja.

6 OTHER MATTERS

Due to timing, the Chair removed the final item, Synergy’s regulatory scheme overview, from the agenda. The ERA will circulate the slides for this item via email, and members are welcome to send through any questions they have.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 21 October 2021.

Meeting closed at 12:17pm

STEVE EDWELL
CHAIR, ERACCC