



# Minutes

<b>Meeting Title:</b>	Economic Regulation Authority Consumer Consultative Committee	
<b>Meeting Number:</b>	02/2022	
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	Wednesday, 1 June 2022 10:00am (AWST)	
<b>Location:</b>	Online via Microsoft Teams	
<b>Attendees:</b>	Jenness Gardner	ERA
	Danielle Asarpota	ERA
	Sara O'Connor	ERA
	Tyson Self	ERA
	Elizabeth Walters	ERA
	Natalie Warnock	ERA
	Colin Smith	Synergy
	Hugh Smith	ATCO Gas
	Mark Turner	ATCO Gas
	Marcus Claridge	Energy and Water Ombudsman
	Tim Dymond	UnionsWA
	Liz Crompton	Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA
	Lindsay Duncan	Property Council of WA
	Melanie Every	Financial Counsellors' Association
	Analena Gilhome	Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA
	Doug Hall	Pastoralists and Graziers' Association
	Graham Hansen	WA Council of Social Service
	John Hassell	WA Farmers
	Rowan Kelly	Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
	Kitty Prodonovich	Regional Chambers of Commerce
	Brent Savage	Energy Policy WA
<b>DMS:</b>	D247145	

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## 1. Welcome and acknowledgement of country by Jenness Gardner, CEO ERA

The meeting opened at 10:01am. Jenness Gardner welcomed all attendees.

Jenness introduced members to Sara O'Connor, who will be taking over from Paul Kelly as the ERA's new Executive Director of Regulation when Paul retires in July.

She also noted that this was Natalie Warnock's last meeting as coordinator of ERACCC before heading on maternity leave and introduced members to Natalie's replacement Danielle Asarpota.

## **2. Apologies**

Jenness noted the apologies as below:

- Steve Edwell and Paul Kelly, ERA
- Penny Lipscombe, Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety
- Emily Young, Property Council of Australia (WA), represented by Lindsay Duncan.

## **3. Minutes of meeting 01/2022 held on Wednesday, 30 March 2022**

The Chair approved the minutes of Meeting 1/2022 as a formal record of those events.

## **4. Guest presentation – Colin Smith, General Manager Customer Experience, Synergy**

Colin Smith, Synergy, presented an update on an ongoing issue whereby many Synergy customers had received a bill based on an estimate rather than an actual meter reading. Colin first presented on this matter at Meeting 1/2022.

The issue particularly affects customers with solar panels, who will not receive their energy credits while bills are being estimated, as well as increasing the risk of bill shock for all customers if their actual bills, once corrected, are much higher than the estimate bill.

Colin advised that the issue had not returned to a more normal footing, as had been expected when he last presented, as a growing number of meter readers had been affected by COVID. This has increased the estimate of how many customers will be affected to around 280,000.

Around half of those customers who first received an estimated bill have now received a corrected bill. Synergy is also trying to ensure that customers do not receive two estimated bills in a row

Synergy has observed a higher number of both requests for payment extensions and inquiries to its call centre.

Members asked questions, including about the electricity bill credit of \$400 announced in the recent State budget, whether it was possible for customers to be trained to read their own meters as many do in regional areas, and about how the matter was affecting city versus country customers.

Representatives from WACOSS and the Financial Counsellors' Association noted that Synergy had engaged very well with their members on this issue and has tried to minimise any effect on vulnerable customers.

## **5. Western Power AA5 review – Public submissions**

Jenness provided an update on the ERA's review of Western Power's access arrangement, which it conducts every five years.

An access arrangement sets the terms and conditions for third parties to access Western Power's network and determines the amount of expenditure Western Power can allocate to operate and maintain the network.

Western Power's network charges make up about 45 per cent of the average residential electricity bill.

Jenness noted that, since the last meeting, the ERA had received 17 submissions on Western Power's proposal and the ERA's issues paper. A number of ERACCC members had provided submissions, and Jenness thanked those members for their insight into consumer attitudes in Western Australia as this greatly assists the ERA.

Jenness provided an overview of some of the common themes in many of the submissions, including questions about how it would be determined whether Western Power's plans for the network were the best option given the speed of transformation. Other common themes included the question of "who pays for what", reliability performance (especially in the regions), and concerns about the quality of information in Western Power's tariff proposal.

The ERA will present on this matter again at the next meeting, which will take place in October following the release of the draft determination.

Members asked questions including about customer expectations of the network, whether a natural monopoly was still the best option for the network given the new technologies available and the intersection of the AA5 review with projects and processes like the Whole of System Plan.

**6. Guest presentation – Mark Turner, General Manager Business Development & Customer Relations, and Hugh Smith, General Manager Regulation, ATCO Gas**

Mark Turner and Hugh Smith attended to provide a brief overview of ATCO Gas' plans to submit a reference service proposal to the ERA in September 2022. This is the first step in the preparation for the ERA's review of ATCO's next access arrangement proposal, which is due to be submitted in September 2023.

A reference service proposal sets out the proposed standard services to be offered to ATCO's gas network customers in the next access arrangement period. ATCO's customers mainly include the major gas retailers and large industrial gas users.

Mark and Hugh provided information on the access arrangement process, how ATCO fit into the gas supply chain, and the development of their reference service proposal.

Members asked questions including about how plans for decarbonisation would affect the ATCO network, and the use of alternative gas sources like biogas or adding hydrogen to the traditional gas blend.

**7. Date of next meeting**

- Wednesday, 5 October 2022

**8. Meeting closed at 11:13AM**