

AP 850 Overview to September 2018

Initial expectations of the scope of this project were limited to a selection of energy network and retailer businesses across NSW and Victoria. The initial version of the instrument was developed with input from several network businesses in NSW and Victoria. It became clear that the scope of the instrument could expand to include a wider range of network and retailer businesses and include a variety of energy agencies that have customer-facing activities and a potential CALD focus.

All Victorian and NSW network businesses expressed active interest, along with SA Power Networks, AEMC, AER, IPART, ESC Victoria, ECA and EWON.

Retailers have had more difficulty committing to joining the project, citing conflict with allocation of resources to other projects, commercial sensitivities and staffing levels although ECCNSW has had positive responses from Origin Energy and Red Energy more recently.

AGENCIES

AEMC:

AEMC has completed two iterations of the instrument, with some movement towards best practice in the customer-facing stream. Changeover in staffing has provided some difficulties in continuity of information given and received by AEMC.

Retail Competition Review

ECCNSW has had input into the Retail Market review process for several years with language questions included in previous iterations following representations by the ECCNSW energy advocate. The use of the ECA Consumer Sentiment Survey for the domestic consumer section of the 2018 survey included questions about language spoken at home but did not actively seek CALD responses in line with the population profiles of the relevant jurisdictions. The major focus on SMEs in this year's review included specific CALD questions around barriers to participation following ECCNSW advice on the SME approach for the review in the early stages of the preparation of the brief to consultants.

AER:

AER have provided two responses to the instrument and have moved up the best practice hierarchy in their customer-facing activities.

Continuing advice and guidance is provided to AER through the ECCNSW membership in the AER CCG process.

A recent re-build of the energymadeeasy website, translated materials, information and videos have been targeted responses to the needs of CALD consumers, and followed discussions with the regulator by the ECCNSW Energy Advocate.

ECA:

ECA has completed the first iteration of the instrument.

Behind the Meter Products project (BTM Project)

ECCNSW has provided input to this project through the consultancy (Frankham Consultancy) conducting the research for the project, including the costing of specific and targeted CALD engagement processes run through the ECCNSW bilingual educator network.

Consumer Sentiment Survey series data (CSS)

ECA has included questions about language in all of the iterations of the Consumer Sentiment Survey, refining the questions slightly in later versions. There is additional importance to the data in 2018 as this CSS replaced the AEMC Retail Market Competition Review questionnaire for domestic consumers and so forms the basis for analysis of domestic consumer competition data across the NEM.

ESC Victoria:

ESC Victoria has indicated that they wish to join the project. Considerable pressures from other areas of their workload (notably the PDF and the Thwaites Review implementation) and changes in staff have precluded this until now.

Payment Difficulties Framework and Thwaites Review implementation

ECCNSW was active in the long consultation process and development of the PDF. We are continuing our ongoing discussions with the PDF team as they prepare for implementation in January 2019, most recently around Recommendations 3F-3G and the Clear Advice entitlement. We have also had preliminary discussions about CALD engagement processes with the Thwaites Review implementation team and are providing ongoing assistance in this area.

EWON:

EWON is an active supporter of the project, albeit with some limitations on their engagement due to the recent changes necessitated by the exempt sellers/embedded network changes to energy law. Advice and support around the specific needs and challenges faced by CALD consumers has been provided by the ECCNSW Energy Advocate in their role as Community Director on the EWON Board.

EWON has most recently instituted specific projects catering to CALD communities with targeted 'bring your bills days' with retailer members attendance and on-the-spot assistance.

IPART:

IPART has partially completed the initial presentation of the instrument and a subsequent iteration.

NETWORKS

Ausgrid:

Ausgrid has been an enthusiastic participant in the project, though wide-ranging staff turnover and managerial change during the infrastructure sale had some impacts on their participation in the project, as did the work done around the 2014-19 remit and 2020-2024 reset proposals.

Ausgrid undertook CALD specific research initiatives in 2017 with respect to life support customers and tariff/willingness to pay questions for their reset proposal.

They are expanding the scope of this work in 2018 and the ECCNSW Energy Advocate is in discussions about the specific issues and processes to be undertaken.

Ausnet Services:

Ausnet Services has conducted several targeted projects to CALD communities in 2017. Advice and guidance were provided by the ECCNSW Energy Advocate. They have undertaken an ethnographic study utilising expert researchers (Larissa Nicholls and Yolande Strengers and conducted three deliberative forums with consumers. The ECCNSW Energy Advocate has participated in the joint Victorian DNSP forums established in preparation for their Revenue resets.

Citipower/Powercor:

Citipower/Powercor have provided one iteration of the instrument. They are developing some targeted CALD consultation projects around their Revenue reset process, which are in their early stages of development as yet. The ECCNSW Energy Advocate has participated in the joint Victorian DNSP forums established in preparation for their Revenue resets.

Endeavour:

Despite a positive approach to the project, Endeavour have yet to complete the instrument. Again, changes accompanying the partial sale and the 2014-19 remit and 2020-2024 Revenue proposals have complicated their engagement. Membership of the re-constituted Customer Council by ECCNSW should provide some further impetus for involvement.

Essential:

Essential have provided two responses to the instrument at this stage. There is growing interest in specific CALD consultation in specific communities and ECCNSW is providing advice and expertise with regular communication with relevant members of their Consumer Engagement Team. Essential have undertaken research with a CALD focus on their revenue reset proposal, specifically with Italian/Spanish communities.

Jemena and Jemena Gas Network:

Jemena and JGN have been active and enthusiastic supporters of the project from its inception. Currently JGN is utilising (through Straight Talk consultancy) ECCNSW bi-lingual educators to consult with CALD domestic consumers and owners of small businesses around the provision and funding of new services. JGN has utilised the *Cultural Connections* guidelines effectively and have also identified several members of their staff who are native speakers in the languages used and seconded them to the project. The ECCNSW Energy Advocate has participated in the joint Victorian DNSP forums established in preparation for their Revenue resets.

SA Power Networks:

SA Power Networks have instituted several CALD specific projects utilising the general processes outlined in the *Cultural Connections* guidelines. Specifically targeted groups included the Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, Burmese and Bhutanese communities through a consultancy firm (Democracy Co).

ECCNSW has provided ongoing advice and support to these projects and SAPN are active supporters of the project.

RETAILERS

AGL

AGL has completed two iterations of the instrument with some movement up the best practice hierarchy. Considerable staff turnover has added complications to communication around CALD initiatives and AGL remains committed to undertaking CALD specific initiatives around vulnerability.

Energy Australia

Following initial enthusiasm for the project, Energy Australia indicated that work commitments in other areas precluded involvement in this project. Subsequent discussions with members of EA Customer team have opened up the possibility of engagement in the project. Staff turnover and changing roles continue to make continuity in access to relevant staff challenging.

Origin

Again, commitment by this retailer has been complicated by staff turnover and job description changes. Origin has previously expressed an interest in joining the project and following ongoing work on their Financial Inclusion Action Plan (FIAP) there is renewed interest in an active engagement in the project as of September 2018.

Red Energy

Red Energy has expressed considerable enthusiasm for joining the project and discussions are continuing with relevant staff members.