

AP 986 Overview to May 2019

Initial expectations of the scope of the AP 850 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.

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.

What has been interesting and informative about the range of responses to ECCNSW engagement in various AEMC Rule Change and other processes has been how siloed such agencies can become, with one team not having shared useful information with other teams. It only emphasises the importance of high level signoff within large organisations.

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 last 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.

ECCNSW has been in discussions with the Retail Competition Review team for the 2019 review.

Strengthening Protections for customers in Hardship RC

ECCNSW is engaged in the Rule Change process, presented submissions to the Draft Guidelines document in January 2019 and engaged with consultation workshops on the Guidelines and standard statements.

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.

Additional research and work on Value of Customer Reliability (VCR) initiated by the VCR team has had preliminary input from ECCNSW Energy Advocate in December 2018, which has been followed up with more detailed consultation in January 2019.

The Energy Advocate has also consulted with the Life Support Registration team about best practice communication processes and CALD communities and the Consumer Data Rights (CDR) team.

ECCNSW is active in the consultation process around the formulation and implementation of the AER Hardship Guidelines. We have spoken with the Outreach Project team about possible collaboration/assistance around CALD communities' consultation and best practice information dissemination.

ECCNSW joined the AER Forum led by the Compliance and Enforcement team, providing CALD insights and advice.

As indicated elsewhere, valuable and useful information around best practice CALD engagement and information is often not shared within separate teams working on different projects. This can only point to other areas that will have similar issues around information dissemination.

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.

Energy Charter

ECCNSW had some initial contact in the early stages of the development of the Energy Charter. We have had further contact post-release and maintain regular contact. The Charter has the potential to drive best practice in a range of areas, including CALD engagement and participation, and it fits neatly into the high level managerial take-up provisions of the monitoring instrument of the project. ECCNSW continues to have regular contact with members of the Charter through their Customer Councils.

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. ECCNSW Energy Advocate facilitated connections between the Domestic Violence team at ESC Vic and the current ECCNSW project around DV and men's groups in Arabic speaking communities.

ECCNSW continues to maintain their engagement on the ESC Vic VDO consultative process as well as observing the roll-out of the PDF.

ECCNSW is in discussion with ECCV around a joint project to monitor the progress of the rollout of the ESCV PDF with respect to CALD energy market participants.

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 a 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. Specific details of EWONs CALD engagement activities will form one of the case studies in the revised Guidelines.

They completed the second iteration of the instrument in May 2019.

IPART:

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

Service NSW:

While Service NSW is not a party to this project at this stage, ECCNSW has provided advice, support and guidance on the provision of energy support services to NSW CALD consumers in a variety of ways. These include ECCNSW Newsletter inclusion of material, distribution of material in language at events and potential inclusion of Service NSW material in other bi-lingual projects conducted by ECCNSW.

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. Current staff now have a better grasp of what their predecessors submitted and have indicated their willingness to be part of any case study additions to the Guidelines. 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 have expanded the scope of this work a little during 2018 to include questions about engagement processes and the ECCNSW Energy Advocate has been in discussions about the specific issues and processes around CALD engagement. Preliminary indications from their

2018 research have pointed to some issues with how data is collected (online surveys etc) and from who. These are major concerns and further discussions continue in 2019. ECCNSW has provided input and advice to the Ausgrid team undertaking a review of their safety messaging. Language requirements, cultural considerations and communications techniques have been discussed and consultation is ongoing.

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. This continues in 2019. They have partnered with CPRC on a project for implementation in 2019. Current efforts around the reset process have lacked a specific CALD focus, and they indicated they would like to change this. ECCNSW is in discussion about the scope and detail of those efforts. The possible extension of the reset process to December 2019 may allow some further time for these to occur prior to submission of the draft and inclusion into an update to the case studies in the Guidelines.

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 were in their early stages of development. The ECCNSW Energy Advocate has participated in the joint Victorian DNSP forums established in preparation for their Revenue resets. Ongoing involvement is difficult as there is no allocated funding for consumer consultation or travel. Work done in 2018 by Citipower/Powercor with a CALD focus is being collated for inclusion in the revised Cultural Connections case studies section.

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 has provided further impetus for involvement in 2019. Endeavour have decided to restructure their Customer Council to provide a 'peak body' and subcommittee mechanism and ECCNSW will retain membership in the peak body at a minimum.

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 undertook research with a CALD focus on their revenue reset proposal, specifically with Italian/Spanish communities. These will most likely be included in future case studies in the revised Guidelines.

ECCNSW maintains an active engagement with relevant staff about future CALD focused activities now that the major reset activities have settled.

Jemena and Jemena Gas Network:

Jemena and JGN have been active and enthusiastic supporters of the project from its inception.

JGN utilised (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 gas 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. These two projects have been particularly successful and were largely completed in 2018. Jemena followed up the engagement processes in 2019 with a final session, again utilising ECCNSW bi-lingual educators and their own Arabic speaking staff. The overall process of consultation around the gas network reset is part of an application for an IAP2 award later this year as well as a presentation at the IAP2 Conference in October 2019.

The ECCNSW Energy Advocate has also participated in the joint Victorian DNSP forums established in preparation for their Revenue resets.

SA Power Networks:

SA Power Networks Have completed two iterations of the instrument.

SAPN 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. ECCNSW will continue to be involved as a member of SAPNs Customer Council.

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.

The second round of the three year, \$6 million fund for vulnerable consumers has been initiated and ECCNSW is again involved in the discussions around the best use for the three years of funds.

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. ECCNSW continues to approach EA to check whether there is scope for future engagement.

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. This is yet to be realised, but still in train.

Red Energy

Red Energy has expressed considerable enthusiasm for joining the project and discussions are continuing with relevant staff members. Several discussions with Red Energy staff have taken place and centred around initiating CALD engagement processes, firstly in the life support area following changes by AEMC to the life support information and rules processes.