



24 April 2024

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

GPO Box 3090

Canberra ACT 2601

Sydney Community Forum (SCF) and the Voices for Power (VfP) leaders appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the Electricity and Energy Sector Plan Discussion Paper.

Sydney Community Forum is a regional community development organisation that has worked towards social justice, inclusion, and sustainability outcomes for disadvantaged and marginalised communities in Sydney since 1974. Through the Voices for Power project, in the past seven years, along with migrant community leaders and in collaboration with Sydney Alliance and its partner organisations, we have worked very closely with hundreds of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community members, privileging their voices for climate justice and energy equity. In the last three years, through our targeted and co-designed energy literacy program, we have listened to the most marginalised members of the migrant communities in Sydney, most of whom are renters and low-income households. **We are writing this submission, co-written by the following Voices for Power leaders, to express our concern about the marginalised migrant communities being left out in Australia's transition to net zero, mainly residential electrification.**

1. Rev. Alimoni Taumoepeau, Team Leader, Intercultural Ministry and Climate Action, Uniting Mission; VfP founding Pacific Community leader.
2. Sheikh Adid Alrubai, Chairman, Muhajirin Association; VfP founding Iraqi Muslim leader.
3. Asha Ramzan, Executive Officer, Sydney Community Forum; VfP founding Fiji Indian leader.
4. Michal Levy, Jewish Sustainability Initiative; VfP Jewish leader.
5. Anoop Sud, Volunteer, Council on the Ageing (COTA); VfP Indian leader.
6. Ian Epondulan, Our Lady Of Lourdes Catholic Church, Seven Hills; VfP Filipino leader.
7. Dr Kim Loo, Chair of Doctors for the Environment Australia (NSW), VfP leader.
8. Ibtisam Hammoud, VfP Lebanese leader.
9. Chao Zhou, Volunteer Coordinator, Paramatta Mission, VfP leader.
10. Dibya Sree, Academic, Western Sydney University, VfP Nepalese leader.
11. Raza Hussainizada, Afghan Fajar Association; VfP Afghani leader.
12. Jijo George, VfP Indian leader.
13. David Deng, VfP Chinese leader.
14. Tu Le, Vietnamese Australian Lawyer's Association, VfP Vietnamese leader.
15. Lajiraj S, VfP Indian leader
16. Chantelle Ogilvie-Ellis, Co-Lead Organiser, Sydney Alliance.

We appreciate that the federal government is proactively leading the country's transition into renewables. At Voices for Power, we have campaigned for our communities to have access to clean and affordable energy in the last seven years. Now that the government is laying out strategies and policies to guide the country's transition into renewables and complete domestic electrification, we want to ensure that the structural and cultural hurdles for migrant communities to engage in this transition are appropriately addressed. It is essential to ensure that CALD communities can make this transition successfully.

In this context, we ask for:

1. Investment in Place-Based Ongoing Engagement: We urge the government to invest in sustained, place-based engagement with CALD communities to support their active participation in residential electrification. By understanding the specific needs and barriers these communities face, we can tailor solutions that foster their inclusion.
2. Mechanisms for inter-department policy coherence as solutions to structural barriers for CALD customers to access renewable energy and participate in the transition lie within the discretion of different federal and state departments.
3. Equitable Policies and Support: We recommend that the issues raised by CALD communities explicitly inform policies addressing residential electrification. Adequate support mechanisms should be implemented to address these barriers, guaranteeing that CALD and other marginalised communities can access the benefits of residential electrification.

What we are hearing through Voices for Power engagement

Over the past three years, Voices for Power listening sessions with over 2,000 CALD community members have made it abundantly clear that their journey through this transition will be challenging. Even though there is a high appetite and aspiration to participate in electrification, significant knowledge gaps and resource limitations hinder their full engagement. In collaboration with Energy Consumers Australia, we recently published an Insights Report on understanding consumers' diversity and their energy system experiences.¹ This report reemphasises the structural barriers that CALD communities face regarding fair access to the energy system and the additional support they would need to participate in residential electrification.

Barriers to Community Participation in Energy Transition

Most CALD communities in Sydney are renters, making them particularly vulnerable to exclusion from the transition. The community members that we listened to described their homes and those of family, relatives and friends in their communities as unhealthy and potentially dangerous. They talked about their lack of power to address that harm – they couldn't make changes themselves and were concerned that asking for improvements would lead to higher rents. They also discussed the challenges that newly arrived migrants experience due to their unfamiliarity with Australian consumer rights and energy retailer market options.

"I am new to this country; I have a kid to care for and have work responsibilities. My husband and I have a lot more responsibilities. I had no idea that we have rights as renters in the energy system; our real estate agent put us in an energy deal, who told us we had no rights, and we have no idea how the energy system works here. We are paying more than we can afford to pay. [...]". --- - Voices for Power Train the Trainer Program Ukrainian community participant (2023 Program Final Report)

Governments must address CALD community-specific barriers to ensure their homes don't increase their energy bills or affect their health and well-being. Without targeted support, they risk missing out on the consumer benefits of electrification. **Policymakers must account for this gap and implement provisions to ensure these communities are not left behind due to their rental status and associated financial, cultural, and knowledge disparities.**

¹ ECA & SCF (2024) Insights Report Understanding the diversity of consumers and their experiences of the energy system: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Consumers Edition, <https://energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/report-insights-deep-dive-diversity-consumers-energy-system-cald-edn.pdf>

Complex intersectionality and inter-department coherence of policies

For migrant communities, electrification is not a standalone issue. It has complex intersectionality with their struggles of settling down and the pressures of meeting everyday needs. Meeting the cost of transition should also be seen in light of the increasing cost of living.

"I live in an accommodation managed by the University. Even though I pay the rent and hold the electricity account, I am not allowed to change the energy provider. Through Energy Made Easy, I found that I could save up to 40% of my energy bill by switching the provider. However, I am not allowed to".

(story from one of the Voices for Power community listening sessions held in Parramatta)

Addressing the complex intersection of tenancy, economic, and knowledge challenges requires a holistic approach. As these policy solutions lie within the discretion of different federal and state departments, mechanisms for inter-department policy coherence must be established. We are worried that these challenges will not be adequately considered in policy development, as the tensions between the policies would lead to undesirable outcomes for our communities.²

To make sure that everyone, including renters, has equal access to the benefits of energy transition, all tiers of government and departments need to talk to each other, and we call for;

- **Mandatory disclosure at point of advertisement (lease and sale) by real estate agents of a home's energy efficiency rating and its likely average annual energy costs;**
- **Minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties;**
- **The Federal Government should develop a roadmap with set targets forbidding the rental of unhealthy and inefficient homes, with applicable penalties for landlords who do not comply;**
- **Disclosure at sale or lease if a home is part of an embedded network, as these may further restrict people's choices and lock them into high energy prices; and**
- **All new builds and major renovations should be energy efficient and all-electric, with all existing homes to have a clear target to reach at least a 7-star rating (in NatHERS) and all-electric by 2030.**

CALD communities' aspirations

CALD consumers want to have agency and feel supported in taking action in Australia's net zero journey through an energy transition narrative that reflects their priorities, needs, concerns, and values.

The lack of trustworthy spaces for CALD communities to participate in the transition creates the danger of migrant clean energy aspirations not being captured and our communities being labelled climate laggards. Moreover, the country is losing out on utilising CALD communities' knowledge and skills that can help the nation transition more efficiently. We hear innovative ideas on the ground, which nobody is listening to. Queensland University of Technology's toolkit for government and industry to support CALD Australians to be empowered energy consumers emphasises that decision-makers must adopt an ethics of care perspective with adequate customer care provision, culturally sensitive and appropriate language, framing and messaging, and an intersectional lens to

² Pickering (2023) ; Towards a coherent energy transition: expanding renewables while sustaining community wellbeing; <https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-environment-institute/news/2023/11/20/towards-a-coherent-energy-transition--expanding-renewables-while.html#:~:text=Policy%20coherence%2C%20in%20a%20nutshell,the%20UN%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals.>

acknowledge how factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and disability, as well as complex experiences and past histories, intersect creating privilege and oppression³.

These culture-specific barriers can only be addressed through community networks, and top-down blanket solutions for all consumers will not work to address such complexities. **They want to see the three levels of government partner with CALD communities to deliver accessible and tailored programs to support decarbonisation efforts and lower bills for households that need it most but can't do it alone.**

Need for Grassroots Investment:

Given the national significance of changes in energy supply and costs affecting daily lives, a deficit-based traditional top-down community engagement strategy will not suffice. Merely translating information and having token CALD representation in policy exhibitions will not address the engagement gap. We strongly advocate for dedicated investment in sustained, grassroots-level engagement with CALD communities. There is a lack of trust, and people are confused about the credibility of information reaching them.

My (African) community members get fraudulent calls asking us to switch electricity connections, and they promote solar products. We are confused and afraid of getting scammed. I wonder how these people racially profile us and target us.

(story from one of the Voices for Power community listening sessions held at an interagency meeting)

Strengthening CALD engagement and education through grassroots organisations can provide safe and trusted spaces for community members to share their concerns, build their confidence to take part in the journey to net zero, and provide partners for industry and government to co-design solutions. Sustained community education and place-based engagement also build leadership and advocacy skills, supporting more diverse representation in energy decision-making processes. There is evidence from the Voices for Power energy literacy program about the efficiency of such a grassroots-level approach through community networks.

We ask that the Commonwealth Government should pilot a mobile Community Energy Hub with Sydney Community Forum by December 2024. This model of 'one-stop-shop' works for migrant communities; if successful, it should be rolled out in other regions, States and Territories. A mobile Community Energy Hub would:

- provide education in language and culturally appropriate ways,
- promote place-based engagement to support active participation in the transition and
- encourage more diverse representation in energy decision-making processes.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Electricity and Energy Sector Plan Discussion Paper and hope our recommendations will be considered seriously. By addressing the needs and barriers CALD communities face, we can achieve a more equitable and inclusive transition to renewable energy for all Australians. If you have any questions about our comments in this submission or want to discuss this further, please get in touch with Nirmal Joy at projectofficer@scfonline.org.au.

³ Gordon R., Badejo F., Harada T. (2023). Supporting CALD Australians to be empowered energy consumers – Toolkit of recommendations. <https://research.gut.edu.au/social-marketing-research-group/wp-content/uploads/sites/331/2021/02/Supporting-CALD-Australians-to-be-empowered-energy-consumers-Toolkit-of-Recommendations-FINAL-1.pdf>