Test and Validate: Roundtables

Produced for CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy

November 2024

Forethought® Outcomes

Contents

1. Background

Forethought® Outcomes

Introduction

Regulatory reset proposal program

To support the development of the regulatory reset proposal, a foundational community engagement program was conducted in 2022 and early 2023. This broad and wide engagement program identified the key needs and preferences of customers and identified three themes:

1. Affordability and equity
2. Reliability, resilience, and safety
3. Energy transition

Since this foundational engagement, CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy each developed their own draft regulatory reset proposals, building on engagements conducted since 2022 to address the community's needs and preferences. The networks have reached the 'Test and Validate' stage, where they re-engaged with special interest groups to gather feedback on key initiatives within their respective draft proposals.

For a copy of each network's draft regulatory reset proposals please find these linked below:

- CitiPower
- Powercor
- United Energy

This report

This report details the findings from the Test and Validate Roundtable series conducted across September and October 2024. Following a detailed examination of the community and stakeholder feedback from this and several other engagements in recent months, the insights will feed into the final 2026-2031 regulatory reset proposal.

Involvement of Forethought®

Forethought is an independent Marketing, Analytics and Strategy organisation, with teams that specialise in research and engagement within multiple industries, including energy.

Forethought has significant experience in the energy industry, including conducting customer and stakeholder research and engagement with organisations across the full value chain, including electricity generation, distribution, transmission and retail services. It partners with clients to provide an independent customer voice, ensuring that the customer is always at the forefront of organisational decision-making.

Forethought was selected for this program based on their expertise across utilities, as well as research and engagement capability to independently design and facilitate engagement forums and objectively report back on the needs and preferences of customers across the network.

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Program Overview

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Objectives

Organisational objective
Develop a regulatory reset proposal that aligns with the needs and preferences of a diverse range of customers.

Program overview
CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy are developing their final regulatory reset proposals for the 2026-2031 period and now are within the Test and Validate stage.

One part of this stage is testing the networks' draft proposal with special interest groups to understand the level of support for the proposal.

The engagement seeks to understand support for both the overarching proposal, including the bill impact, as well as prioritised initiatives.

These initiatives have been developed by CPPALUE and have been built from earlier engagements relating to the needs and preferences of the community.

Engagement objectives
- Seek feedback on the proposal package and associated network bill impacts for the 2026-2031 regulatory reset proposal
- Identify initiative refinements to be considered in the final proposal submission

IAP2 spectrum
Customer participation was intentionally high, falling under 'Involve' in the IAP2 Spectrum as we wanted to understand their initiative improvement level preferences and explore their reasonings behind decisions.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.

Approach summary

Below is an overview of the program developed to achieve the program objectives.

Overview

Network	CitiPower	Powercor	United Energy
Date	**13th September & 11th October**	**26th September & 11th October**	**19th September & 11th October**
# of engagements	2	2	2
Format	1 x face-to-face 1 x online	2 x online	1 x face-to-face 1 x online
Participation of participants	n=9	n=22	n=7
Customer Advisory Panel attendance	n=2	n=1	n=1
Customer Challenge Panel attendance	n=1	n=2	n=1

Methodology: Qualitative, deliberative

Engagement length: 3 hours

Location: Face-to-face and online

Network representatives also attended these engagements to listen and help answer questions from the participants without biasing or leading the conversation. The following staff attended the forum and/or focus groups:

- Renate Vogt – General Manager, Regulation
- Brent Cleeve – Head of Regulatory Policy and Compliance
- Genevive Hart, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
- Victoria Ryan, Strategy, Programs & Change Analyst
- Kaitlin Pisani, Project Coordinator

Additionally, the roundtables were also attended by members of CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy's Customer Advisory Panel (CAP) and the Customer Challenge Panel (CCP) who were invited to attend in a viewing-only capacity.

Recruitment

Two methods were used to recruit participants for this program.

1. **Stakeholder lists:** Participants were recruited through existing contacts that have been established and built off the back of previous engagements, supplied by CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy.

2. **Referrals:** Referrals/snowballing is an approach where we ask existing contacts if they know of any other participants who may be interested and available to attend the roundtable session. All snowball participants noted throughout the recruitment phases were contacted and also asked this same question to broaden the engagement reach of special interest group participants.

Methodology overview

Below is an overview of the methodology participants were taken through within this program.

Pre-read

Before the engagement commencement, a short pre-read was disseminated to all participants. Understanding that the draft regulatory reset proposal is a large document, the pre-read was provided to give some context and set expectations on what was going to be discussed at the roundtable.

Roundtable session

Each session commenced with an introduction by the facilitation team, comprising representatives from Forethought and team members from CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy. The sessions opened with a scene-setting exercise, where the representatives provided an overview of the context, objectives, and structure of the regulatory reset.

Following the introduction, each initiative was presented individually, with explanations covering its development rationale, improvement options, and associated costs. This approach ensured participants had a comprehensive understanding of the initiatives before offering their feedback.

Participants were then invited to provide their input on each initiative. Feedback was gathered through a post-it note exercise or documented by the Forethought team, capturing sentiments towards the elements of the draft proposal that were supported or opposed, along with participants' reasoning.. Additionally, participants were asked to identify success criteria i.e. how would this impact the community, organisations or stakeholders that they represent, and discuss potential challenges or external factors that could influence the implementation of the initiative. Key conflicting viewpoints were raised and addressed, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder perspectives. This feedback was discussed in detail, with facilitators ensuring that all participants had an opportunity to share their perspectives.

Specific initiatives for participant feedback included those outlined on slide 10.

At the end of each session, participants were asked to summarise the key points they wanted to ensure were included in the final regulatory reset proposal. This included areas such as emphasising the most critical feedback and areas for improvement. Participants were also invited to fill out a feedback survey to further enhance the engagement process (the results of this survey are available in the Appendix of this document).

A note on interpretation:

Throughout this engagement, participants recognised the time constraints for presenting and discussing complex initiatives. As a result, many participants expressed that they may not fully grasp the technical details of each initiative and wanted this to be considered in interpreting their feedback. Other stakeholders with deeper technical expertise were confident in their input, offering well-informed perspectives. Overall, feedback was provided to the best of the participants' abilities within the constraints of the program.

Overview of initiatives tested

Initiative and description	Network tested in
Energy Transition A range of initiatives including: 1. A non-network demand management marketplace, Piclo: partnership with Piclo to share public information and tender network constraints to the market for third-parties to resolve 2. Data visibility: Increases data visibility to allow customers to better manage their energy i.e. view constraints and identify spare capacity, and know where to best connect their load to the network 3. Network export capacity allocated on an ' equal allocation' basis 4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake by maintaining current voltage and power quality performance, meaning the quality of your electricity service will not deteriorate	All networks
Metering A proactive replacement of 56% of the networks' AMI meter population	All networks
Customer Assistance Package The customer package combines several programs to enhance the services provided to our customers, especially those at risk of some form of vulnerability. Initiatives included are: 1. Energy Care: providing informative in-person training sessions and targeted communication: To help interpret bills and understand energy consumption 2. Community Energy Fund: Allocated based on proposals presented to the networks' Customer Advisory Panel 3. Energy Advisory Services: Enhancement to our data advisory program to support community information requests 4. Customer Assistance Program: assisting customers and communities' transition away from gas-based appliances. Financial assistance for fuse replacement and upgrades to support electrification 5. First Peoples Program: aims to address inequalities of the past and reduce the energy equity gap and includes: adoption of energy efficient appliances, moderate funding program to support access to solar and batteries, funding ahead of climate emergencies for resilience and access to food or water during a climate emergency and a First Peoples emergency liaison officer.	All networks
Innovation Fund An allocated fund to test and implement new ideas with the potential to provide long-term value to customers.	United Energy and Powercor (& 2 x CitiPower participants)
Regional and Rural Options 1. Upgrade of single wire earth return (SWER) to three-phase lines, improving reliability, ability to electrify and deliver more value renewables 2. Harden the network against failure during extreme weather events 3. Alternative sources of supply to support worst-served and least-resilient parts of the network 4. Invest in community support to manage responses to outages from extreme weather events 5. Regional and rural roadmap outlining a series of long-term strategies and short-term recommendations to bridge the inequity gap over time	Powercor only
Modernisation Asset replacement program based on risk modelling and historical defect rates. The key focus of this proposal will be underground cables and distribution switchgears	CitiPower only

3.
Executive Summary

Forethought®
Outcomes

3.1 Executive Summary

CitiPower

Forethought® Outcomes

CitiPower Summary

Overall, there was support shown by participants across the four CitiPower initiatives proposed

Overarchingly, CitiPower participants showed support for the initiatives presented by the network. This executive summary shares an overview of the four initiatives tested with participants including: the Energy Transition, Metering, Customer Assistance Package and Modernisation.

Energy Transition

The Energy Transition initiatives received support from CitiPower participants.
Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
1 Piclo	
2. Data visibility	
3. Export capacity allocation	
4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake	

The key themes for the energy transition initiatives included:

- Strategic planning and collaboration wanted with government and energy experts to set a strategy which initiatives can contribute towards
- Equity wanted in addressing the specific needs for a metropolitan area
- Community engagement was desired to ensure localised solutions were delivered
- Prioritising low-cost solutions was desired, prior to expensive augmentation
- Education raised as a challenge in consumers understanding the energy transition and its implications

The main feedback and considerations shared for the following initiatives are outlined below.

1. Piclo

- Participants wanted to understand what determined an existing potential supplier and the initiative parameters
- To improve the initiative, it was recommended to leverage learnings from global experiences
- An optimal rollout included a pilot stage, prior to full rollout
- Success criteria raised was that the program was set up in the right locations

2. Data visibility

- Practical and timely data desired
- Data was wanted to support community-level projects and renewable connection to the grid

3. Network solar export capacity allocation

- Participants generally supported the equal allocation method proposed by CitiPower
- Participants emphasised fairness for all customers especially in the practical rollout of the initiative

***Key:** Support levels

Forethought Outcomes

- Clear communication was desired on the implications of the allocation method chosen
- It was recommended to leverage learnings from other similar examples

4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake
- Participants were supportive for the increased demand management required as a result of greater EV uptake and usage
- Concerns were raised on the ability to view EV ownership and consumer privacy in securing data
- Consideration of time-of-use tariffs in decision making was raised
- Participants noted the important role of retailers in communicating tariffs

Metering

Participants showed a medium level of support for a proactive replacement of aging meters.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Metering (proactive approach)	

The following feedback was shared relating to this initiative:
- Participants agreed on the importance of upgrading meters without interruptions
- A targeted rollout approach was preferred in order to optimise the rollout effectiveness without compromising the meter benefits
- A proactive rollout approach was considered reasonable noting that there would be immediate benefits, such as reliability, as well as long-term visibility benefits
- Communication and transparency was desired:
    - Participants wanted clear communications with customers relating to the purpose and benefits of the rollout
    - Customers required confidence that their privacy would be maintained to prevent speculation
- Enhanced data and monitoring capabilities were also expected in the new assets

Customer Assistance Package

Citipower customers showed strong support for the Customer Assistance Package initiatives.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
Energy Care	
Community Energy Fund	
Customer Assistance Program	
Energy Advisory Services	
First Peoples Program	

Overarching themes included:
- Highlighting the importance of accountability tracking and communication of outcomes
- Building strong partnerships to deliver greater impact and ensure access to vulnerable customers. Some examples include St Vincent De Paul, and Brotherhood of St Laurence.
- Increasing investment was desired to deliver more meaningful impact

Specific feedback by initiative included the below:
- Energy Care: Education was important and seen to support vulnerable customers. An additional suggestion was to leverage the network's team on-the-ground to educate and inform consumers
- Community Energy Fund: It was proposed that the funding should go towards organisations or community groups compared to an individual as there were concerns of who would apply for this funding. Additionally, concerns were raised in switching from the current pro-bono approach to support vulnerable customers, to a funding approach
- Customer Assistance Program: An idea raised was to include supporting education
- First Peoples Program: There was emphasis that the initiative delivery was undertaken by a First People organisation

Modernisation

There was strong support shared for the Modernisation initiative.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Modernisation	

The key themes raised relating to this initiative included:
- Ensuring the network was future-proofed without implementing a gold-plating approach
- Minimising community disruption by coordinating with other utility providers when upgrading the assets

For more detailed participant feedback across initiatives, refer to the respective section in part 4 of this document.

3.2 Executive Summary

Powercor

Forethought® Outcomes

Powercor Summary

Initiatives proposed were supported by Powercor participants

Overarchingly, Powercor participants supported the initiatives presented by the network. This executive summary shares an overview of the five initiatives tested with participants including: the Energy Transition, Metering, Customer Assistance Package, Innovation Fund and Regional and Rural Options.

Energy Transition

The Energy Transition initiative received support from Powercor participants.

Overarching scoreboard:

Initiative items	Support level*
1 Piclo	
2. Data visibility	
3. Export capacity allocation	
4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake	

The key themes for the energy transition initiatives included:

- Ensuring regional and rural equity as well as vulnerable customer equity was considered. Frustration was raised in the current generation and transmission inequity with inability of communities to access generated renewable energy
- Strategic planning and collaboration required to coordinate with government and energy experts to set an overarching strategy and ladder initiatives up to
- Collaboration wanted with community to support decisions that deliver optimal and localised solutions
- It was agreed to prioritise low-cost solutions prior to expensive augmentation

The main feedback and considerations shared for the following initiatives are outlined below.

1. Piclo

- Consideration needed in the type of data shared with potential suppliers, as the type of information was critical in designing solutions
- Balance was required in achieving immediate benefits, yet also solving for core issues
- There were concerns for supplier location preference, as metropolitan areas would allow for higher revenue and leave regional and rural behind in optimising the benefits of this system
- Consideration for seasonal demand pressures for towns such as Apollo Bay
- Benefits would support farmers and economies in growth constraint areas
- Active planning was required to develop clear incentives or guidelines, ensuring that regional and rural projects were not overlooked

Forethought Outcomes

2. Data visibility
- Equity wanted in data access
- Data needed to be useable, timely and type of data wanted was extensive i.e. to support community level projects
- Data to be extracted was felt to be complex and therefore required assistance to interpret
- It was noted that existing information exists and can be leveraged

3. Network solar export capacity allocation
- Support showed for equal allocation method proposed
- Clear communication wanted for the implications of the allocation method chosen
- Desire to leverage learnings from other relevant examples
- Risks raised of multiple allocation solutions deployed across the state and the recommendation was for a unified approach to prevent confusion

4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake
- There was acknowledgment of growing demand and infrastructure challenges
- Regional and rural Victorians did not want to be left behind in infrastructure improvements
- Some participants raised that they did not see EVs in all consumer futures; for example farmers

Metering

Participants generally showed a medium level of support for a proactive replacement of aging meters.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Metering (proactive approach)	

The following feedback was shared relating to this initiative:
- Participants agreed on the importance of upgrading meters without interruptions
- A targeted rollout approach was wanted to optimise the rollout effectiveness without compromising the meter benefits
- A proactive rollout approach was considered reasonable noting that there would be immediate benefits, such as reliability, as well as long-term visibility benefits
- Communication and transparency was desired:
    - Participants wanted clear communications with customers on the purpose and benefits of the rollout
    - Customers required confidence that their privacy would be maintained
- Enhanced data and monitoring capabilities were wanted in the new meter assets

Customer Assistance Package

Powercor customers showed support for the Customer Assistance Package initiatives.

***Key:** Support levels

Low High

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
Energy Care	
Community Energy Fund	
Customer Assistance Program	
Energy Advisory Services	
First Peoples Program	

Overarching themes included:

- Highlighting importance of accountability tracking and communication of outcomes, especially as success was defined by the impact made
- Building strong partnerships to deliver greater impact and ensure access to vulnerable customers
- Increasing investment to deliver more meaningful impact. Examples included:
    - Concerns about funds being absorbed by administration
    - Some participants felt that the investment to the full grid including farmers and other vulnerable groups facing energy poverty in regional and rural Victoria was insufficient as initiatives totaled investment of $5.85million, compared to investment to the Frist People community where the total investment was $9.5million
- Specific to the Community Energy Fund initiative, participants raised a recommendation to have an advisory panel oversee fund allocation

Innovation Fund

There was strong support shared for the Innovation Fund initiative.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Innovation Fund	

The key themes for the Innovation Fund initiatives included:

- Support of the overarching criteria, including:
    - Accountability seen in the ‘use it, or lose it’ guideline
    - Support that all criteria felt related to the energy transition
    - An additional criteria wanted in demonstrating customer benefits
- Mixed feedback was shared in the investment amount. Some participants advocated for this investment to be used as a pilot, whereas other participants wanted more to be proposed
- Ideas were shared of what innovation could look like, and included: demand management solutions such as the Piclo system proposed; as well as targeted innovation to solve for regional and rural energy challenges
- Clear communication was also wanted on the risk and reward nature of innovation, highlighting the likelihood of failure

Regional and Rural Options

There was high support shared for the Regional and Rural Supply initiatives, although many concerns were raised throughout that emphasised context surrounding needs and preferences of regional and rural customers.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
1. Upgrading SWER lines to three-phase	
2. Hardening the network against extreme weather	
3. Alternative sources of supply for the least resilient areas	
4. Community support to manage responses to outages	
5. The Regional and Rural Roadmap	

The key themes for the initiatives included:

- Appreciation of Powercor's proposal, given regulatory constraints, however, more investment was wanted for the regional and rural community to have access to energy that supports their growing needs
- There was acknowledgment of the challenge in balancing affordability and reliability which was described as an industry structural problem that was a bigger challenge than what the network proposal could solve for
- Strategic planning and collaboration between Government and other energy experts to coordinate efforts and ladder up to an overarching goal
- Facilitation role would be required to support communities and organisations to achieve the overarching goal

The main feedback and considerations shared for the following initiatives are outlined below:

1. Upgrade of SWER lines to three-phase

- Investment increase desired to make meaningful impact
- Current SWER lines negatively impact agriculture regions economically. This includes impacts on operations, competitiveness and ability to feed Australians
- Current SWER lines negatively impact cost of living for Australians, this stems from organisational challenges experienced from the SWER lines
- Alternate solutions wanted if full upgrades are not feasible

2. Hardening the network against extreme weather events

- Areas that are most at risk should be priorities. This includes Northern and Western Victoria regions
- There was concern that consumers who are 'at risk' are disproportionately negatively affected

3. Establishing alternative sources of supply for the least resilient areas

- Participants generally supported the plan to provide alternative sources of supply, particularly in areas with poor reliability
- There was recognition that microgrids and standalone systems could offer greater resilience in worst-served regions
- Appreciation was shown for the Apollo Bay micro-grid proposal, however, optimisation was raised to connect the two feeders that go into the town, into the proposed micro-gird to solve the root-cause
- Pressure testing alternative supply proposed, the intention was to ensure adequate coverage for reliability issues for worst-served customers

4. Invest in community support to manage responses to outages

- There was strong support for the proposed investment in community support, reflecting the recognition that power outages in regional areas have broader social and economic impacts
- There was emphasis to prioritise vulnerable customers

5. The Regional and Rural Roadmap

- The roadmap was a positive step to developing a long-term strategic plan
- Clarity was wanted in clear timelines and impacted towns

For more detailed participant feedback across initiatives, refer to the respective section in part 4 of this document.

3.3 Executive Summary

United Energy

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United Energy Summary

Overall, there high support levels for the United Energy initiatives proposed

Overarchingly, United Energy participants highly supported the initiatives presented by the network. This executive summary shares an overview of the four initiatives tested with participants including: the Energy Transition, Metering, Customer Assistance Package, and the Innovation Fund.

Energy Transition

The Energy Transition initiatives received high support from United Energy participants.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
1 Piclo	
2. Data visibility	
3. Export capacity allocation	
4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake	

The key themes for the energy transition initiatives included:

- Equity considerations raised to ensure vulnerable customers renter, and short term-residents did not get left behind
- Prioritisation wanted in low-cost solutions prior to expensive augmentation
- Strategic planning and collaboration required with government and energy experts to set a strategy which initiatives can contribute towards
- The need for community involvement in decisions to support localised solutions

The main feedback and considerations shared for the following initiatives are outlined below.

1. Piclo
- Wanting to understand the value proposition for residential consumers
- Clarity on the overlap with the existing Australian Energy Monitor Operator systems
- Recommending a pilot launch prior to full implementation

2. Data visibility
- Improve network data to empower communities with insights and support renewable adoption
- Highlighting current frustration in long lead times when trying to access data

3. Network solar export capacity allocation
- Supported equal allocation method proposed by United Energy
- Consider leveraging learnings from other examples
- Value seen, yet too much complexity in the Value-Based allocation method
- Councils raised tariffs to be considered in allocation decision making

***Key:** Support levels

Forethought Outcomes

4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake
- Acknowledgement of growing EV adoption and infrastructure required to support
- EV focus said to be urban areas

Metering
Participants showed a high support for proactive replacement of aging meters.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Metering (proactive approach)	

- A proactive approach was preferred due to:
    - Immediate reliability and visibility benefits
    - Renewable uptake and managing energy usage
- There was emphasis on the need for an immediate start in the next reset to acquire benefits
- Communication and transparency was wanted:
    - On the purpose and benefits of the rollout
    - To bring confidence to their privacy and prevent speculation
- Enhanced data and monitoring capabilities expected in the new assets

Customer Assistance Package
United Energy customers showed strong support for the Customer Assistance Package initiatives.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative items	Support level*
Energy Care	
Community Energy Fund	
Customer Assistance Program	
Energy Advisory Services	
First Peoples Program	

Overarching themes included:
- Highlighting importance of accountability tracking and communication of outcomes
- Building strong partnerships to deliver greater impact and ensure access to vulnerable customers
- Increasing investment to allow more meaningful impact to be delivered

Specific feedback by initiative included:
- Energy Care: guidance was appreciated to support vulnerable consumers participate in the energy transition
- Customer Assistance Program: Participants suggested targeted incentives for landlords supporting renters participate

- Energy Advisory Services:
    - Leveraging technology to tailor data requests
    - Recommendation for a role for smart meters and generative AI to support tailored education
    - Seen as an imperative initiative in connecting respective stakeholders with all other Customer Assistance Packages
- First Peoples Program: Seek learnings from similar energy related programs

Innovation Fund

There was strong support shared for the Innovation Fund initiative.

Overarching scorecard:

Initiative	Support level*
Innovation Fund	

The key themes for the Innovation Fund initiatives were:

- Support of the overarching criteria, including:
    - Accountability seen in the 'use it, or lose it' guideline
    - Support that all criteria felt related to the energy transition
- Mixed feedback was shared in the investment amount. Some participants advocated for this investment to be used as a pilot, whereas others wanted more to be proposed
- Ideas were shared of what innovation could look like such as demand management solutions such as the Piclo system proposed demand management
- Timing of investment spend was also essential. It was recommended that investment was front loaded in the next regulatory period to reap immediate benefits

For more detailed participant feedback across initiatives, refer to the respective section in part 4 of this document.

4. Initiative Specific Feedback

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4.1
Energy Transition

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Outcomes

Energy Transition

There was support for the energy transition initiatives across networks

Participants across CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy were engaged in discussions on key energy transition initiatives proposed within the draft regulatory reset. These areas covered:

1. A non-network demand management marketplace, Piclo
2. Data visibility
3. Export capacity allocation
4. Support for demand increase for EV uptake and charging

The report summarises feedback from participants, highlighting overarching themes, concerns, and exploring network-specific views and ideas.

Initiative overview

Initiative items	Support level by network*			Key considerations
	CitiPower	Powercor	United Energy	Themes included: • Equitable investment desired to address specific network needs • Prioritising low-cost solutions before expensive augmentation • Strategic planning and collaboration required to coordinate with government and energy experts to set an overarching strategy and ladder initiatives up to • Community involvement was also critical to support localised solutions
Piclo				
Data visibility				
Export capacity allocation				
Investment to manage increasing EV uptake				

Overarching themes across networks & initiatives

Equitable investment

There was strong support across the networks for ensuring equitable investment.

CitiPower

Participants raised the following points consistently:

- Equity addressing the specific needs for a metropolitan area: Considerations wanted for reliability in dense urban environments and ensuring that lower-income or vulnerable groups in the metro region were not left behind in the energy transition.

  There was mention of understanding the equality disparities with the regional and rural network, however, the emphasis to ensure Victoria wide energy equity during the transition was not as strong as Powercor participants.

***Key:** Support levels

Low High

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Powercor

Participants raised the following points consistently:

- Regional and rural equity: Powercor participants raised a focus on regional and rural inequity in the ability to access an essential service that was expected as an Australian. There was also comparison made relating to the differences between regional and rural Victoria to accessing reliable energy, compared to metropolitan Victoria.
- Vulnerable customer equity: They was clarity in participants view of the importance of supporting vulnerable customers, and their ability to genuinely participate within the energy transition was raised. A Powercor stakeholder mentioned that while 95% of customers may have access to unrestricted solar exporting ability that was proposed in the draft regulatory reset proposal, the statistics however, hide the reality for SWER line customers who are ineligible due to infrastructure constraints. This resulted in vulnerable customers not being able to participate in elements of the energy transition.

> *"Energy Transition democratisation."* Powercor Participant

United Energy

Participants raised the following points consistently:

- Vulnerable customers, renter and short term-resident equity: Council members specifically shared their emphasis on supporting vulnerable customers within the energy transition, and others wanted to ensure that renters and short term-residents were being considered. There was said to be no incentives for landlords to improve access for renters to participate in the energy transition.

Prioritising low-cost solutions prior to expensive augmentation

Across all networks, participants raised the following point consistently:

- Low-cost solution prioritisation: Participants across all networks agreed with the proposal to prioritse low-cost network optimisation before costly infrastructure augmentation.

  One example that was raised by both Powercor and CitiPower participants was shifting the timing of residential hot water heating to better align with periods of excess solar generation; and in doing so minimising network augmentation by adjusting demand patterns. This aimed to make the most of the "solar soak" period during the day, utilising excess solar generation and reducing network stress during peak demand times. Questions were raised about how similar approaches could be applied to manage the anticipated increase in EV uptake on the network.

> *"It's essential that the network demonstrates it is doing everything possible to address issues before committing to further investments."* United Energy Participant

> *"Where you plant seeds for more coordinated builds, mitigates the need for more augmentation. For example, hot water."* CitiPower Participant

Reference Swan Hill Rural City Council, 13 August 2024, Scheduled Council Meeting, accessed 21st October 2024, https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/our-council/council-meetings/2024/agenda_13_august_2024.pdf.

Case study: A member from Renewable Newstead highly supported the idea of moving hot water heating to the middle of the day, utilising periods of excess solar energy. In their community, the organisation had around 40-50 customers ready to adopt this approach, with some already making adjustments at their own cost. It was acknowledged that Powercor was also conducting testing, and the individual welcomed a partnership with the network relating to the trials and identifying consumers who were ready to participate.

Strategic planning and collaboration

Across all networks, participants raised the following points consistently:

- Strategic co-ordination: The feedback highlighted a strong need for coordinated strategic planning at state and federal levels, supported by energy experts. Participants noted the importance of aligning investments with broader energy transition objectives to create a cohesive and sustainable future.
    - An example shared by a Powercor participant was that energy transition relating programs were being undertaken at a project by project basis.

- Progress setting and tracking: Participants called for clear guidelines and metrics to measure tangible progress against these strategic goals.

Community involvement

Across all networks, participants raised the following points consistently:

- Localised solutions: Participants highlighted the need for increased collaboration with local councils and community groups to ensure that proposed initiatives aligned with the needs of local communities. This approach would help create targeted solutions that deliver tangible benefits and build trust in the implementation process.
    - Swan Hill Council specifically shared that they are looking to engage with Powercor to improve solar deals and lower power bills for their residents (Swan Hill Rural City Council, August 2024, p.164).
    - CitiPower participants raised concerns that education was going to be a significant challenge within the community during the energy transition. Questions were going to be raised by the community and clarity was needed on who would be best to share this information.

Key Areas of the Initiative

1. Piclo System

The Piclo system that aims to create a marketplace for non-network solutions to solve for peak demand challenges, received support. Across all networks, participants welcomed the innovative idea despite the market of third-party suppliers not being established. Participants saw this initiative as a low-cost solution prior to investing in costly network augmentation. There were, however, considerations raised on how the Piclo system could be optimised and participants wanted to understand more details of the initiative.

> *"Low-cost solutions are great for immediate savings, but we have to make sure we're not just putting a band-aid on bigger issues."* Powercor Participant

CitiPower
Participants raised the following points:

- Understanding existing potential suppliers and initiative parameters: There was desire to understand whether community batteries could complement this initiative, particularly in areas that were not currently facing constraints. Further, an understanding of the contract duration. This would help determine who would be eligible to support this initiative. This feedback indicated a need for clear terms and parameters.
- Learnings from global experiences: There was an interest in identifying similar challenges or opportunities overseas that could offer valuable insights that the network could leverage
- Leverage piloting strategies: There was a preference for building Piclo in the interim and gradually improving the system to reach the desired state, taking a test and learn approach prior to full rollout.
- Success criteria raised was that the program was set up in the right locations.

Powercor
Participants raised the following points:

- Type of data shared would support optimised solutions: Concerns were raised about the type of data being shared, specifically whether it would allow suppliers to understand the short-term or long-term challenges to solve for. It was noted that short-term solutions could lead to higher costs and potentially compromise long-term network resilience.
- Sustainability of low-cost solutions: There was also recognition of the immediate benefits of low-cost solutions, but participants emphasised the importance of ensuring these are not just temporary fixes.
- Concern for supplier preference in metropolitan areas: Participants expressed apprehension that under a market-based system like Piclo, third-party providers might naturally gravitate towards urban and metropolitan areas where energy demand is higher and revenue opportunities are more lucrative. In contrast, regional and rural areas often present lower densities of customers and fewer large energy consumers, leading to smaller revenue opportunities.

> *"If Piclo only benefits the big guys, we're going to see regional communities missing out on solutions that matter to them."* Powercor Participant

- Consider seasonal demand pressures: A participant highlighted the specific benefits of Piclo for areas like Apollo Bay that experienced seasonal spikes in demand due to tourism. These spikes put pressure on the network during peak times, and traditional upgrades could be costly and result in higher tariffs for customers. Piclo was seen as an opportunity to introduce flexible and scalable solutions such as community battery storage systems or small-scale renewable projects to support these seasonal peaks.
- Benefits would support farmers and economies in growth constraint areas: Participants raised that growth constraints existed in regional and agricultural areas. One example includes farmers who have or were looking to adopt technology in farming, such as the electrification of machinery. However, rather than upgrading long and expensive lines in low populated areas, Piclo could support smaller, distributed energy solutions like localised solar projects, demand-response programs, or microgrids to support these consumers.
- Active planning and guidelines required: Participants recommended that active planning be implemented to develop clear incentives or guidelines, ensuring that regional and rural projects are not overlooked and that these areas are sufficiently supported with innovative energy solutions.

United Energy
Participants raised the following points:

- Understanding the value proposition for residential consumers: Participants raised the lack of clarity on how the Piclo system benefits consumers. While the benefits for the network, such as deferring costly upgrades and managing demand more efficiently, were clear, the value for consumers was less evident. Participants emphasised that the system must provide a tangible incentive for customers to participate. Specifically, they noted that current tariffs and network charges could limit any financial benefits to consumers who invest in solar or community batteries.

> *"For consumers to engage in Piclo, there must be a clear value proposition, especially considering the significant network charges involved."* United Energy Participant

- Recommending a pilot launch: Participants recommended a pilot project before any large-scale rollout. They believed this would allow the network to identify potential challenges and opportunities, refine the approach, and demonstrate the system's effectiveness.

- Clarity on overlap with existing AEMO systems: A concern raised was the potential overlap between Piclo and existing demand management initiatives at a national level, particularly those managed by AEMO. Participants suggested that United Energy should assess the overlaps and consider how Piclo's implementation fits with other demand management frameworks already in place.

2. Data Visibility

Across all networks, there was support for enhancing data visibility. There were varied expectations about the type of data required and its utility.

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Practical and timely data: There was a strong desire for data that was not only accurate but also timely and relevant to different user groups, from individual customers to businesses and local councils.
- Supporting community-level projects: Participants wanted to use the data to encourage local projects such as community batteries, local solar generation, and demand-response programs, which benefit communities directly.

CitiPower
Participants raised the following points:

- Purpose of data was to support renewable connection to the grid: Stakeholders emphasised that the data should be utilised to support customers in connecting renewable energy systems like solar panels, batteries, and other energy assets to the grid.

> *"If we're going to make informed decisions about renewable energy investments, we need timely, transparent data from the network. Right now, the lag is costing us opportunities."* CitiPower Participant

Powercor
Participants raised the following points:

- Equity in data access: Participants called for equitable access to data, ensuring that all customers, regardless of location or size, could leverage this information.

- Data complexity required assistance: While participants saw the potential benefits, there were concerns about the complexity and nuances in understanding the shared data. This initiative was felt to require a level of assistance and interpretation support.
- Data needed to be useable, and type of data wanted was extensive: Powercor customers wanted the following data:
    - Analysis of the entire Powercor network, including capacity and constraints with a specific mention to the South-West region of Victoria.
    - Renewable energy-related information.
    - Detailed data on how the network operates, tariff structures, and access procedures.
    - Wanting easy access to NMI data, as participants shared that accessing National Metering Identifier (NMI) data was challenging and suggested a nationwide approach to ensure it is available for the public.
    - Bushfire and recovery information where urgency was raised in providing recovery and bushfire-related information was flagged to address resilience planning.
    - Information was wanted to use in project submissions and funding applications. Participants currently experienced long wait times for data to be shared that is creating a barrier and missed opportunities.
- Existing information can be leveraged: while there was already a significant amount of information available in the public domain, more nuanced and accessible data could enhance decision-making.

United Energy
Participants raised the following points:

- Improve network data to empower communities with insights: Using data visibility to empower communities with insights, with a direct emphasis on benefits for communities, rather than just network insights.
- Data wanted to support renewable adoption: Emphasis on receiving solar uptake information to foster greater renewable adoption in specific regions.
- Current frustration in long lead times to access data: Stakeholders indicated a need for better capability, and access to data, mentioning pain points associated with the current state of data sharing. Participants shared frustration over the lengthy wait times to access network data, which hindered their ability to capitalise on project opportunities or meet submission deadlines.

> *"The network holds a wealth of data that could empower local initiatives, but long lead times in accessing it mean we miss critical windows for project submissions and funding applications."* United Energy Participant

3. Export Capacity Allocation

Across the three networks, stakeholders expressed a range of views on export capacity allocation. While there was the strongest support for the equal allocation model, the core sentiment revolved around finding an approach that balanced fairness, network constraints, and clear communication to set realistic expectations for customers.

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Clear communication of the implications of allocation chosen: A common consensus was that clear communication was needed so consumers could understand what any chosen model means for their energy exports and how this would impact any solar and battery investments. There was a strong emphasis on being upfront about the level of exports achievable, avoiding unrealistic promises that could create dissatisfaction later.

Leverage learnings from other examples: The networks were advised to consider examples from others, including South Australia Power Network and South Australia retailers regarding how unclear communication, and consumers being changed to time-of-use tariffs had caused customer confusion and dissatisfaction.

CitiPower
Participants raised the following points:

- Fairness for all customers: the fairness and impact of export tariffs was questioned on both solar and non-solar households. There were concerns that export tariffs could create negative perceptions if not adequately communicated and justified to customers.
- Questioning practical implications of export capacity allocation: due to the technical nature of the export allocation method, customers wanted to pressure test how 'fair' this method was in practice, compared to viewing the allocation conceptually. For example, participants questioned if a customer would be impacted depending on where they live on the street.

Powercor
Participants raised the following points:

- There were risks of multiple allocation solutions across the state: There were concerns about the potential risks of offering different export allocation options across various distribution networks in Victoria. This could lead to customer confusion and suboptimal outcomes. A consistent, state-level strategy was recommended to avoid conflicting approaches and confusion for consumers looking to make renewable investment decisions.

United Energy
Participants raised the following points:

- Value seen, yet too much complexity in the Value-Based allocation method: While some saw potential in value-based allocation, participants expressed concerns about its complexity and the difficulty in implementing and communicating such a model to customers effectively. A clear recommendation was to avoid over-complicating the allocation model to prevent further issues.
- Councils raised tariffs to be considered in allocation decision making: Although the networks do not set the export tariffs, council members were particularly focused on how the structuring of tariffs would impact solar investments. They expressed concerns that tariffs are increasing the cost of exporting solar and have posed significant challenges to councils investing in promoting solar uptake, especially for vulnerable community members. They urged the network to consider these impacts in the context of capacity allocation initiatives, the role of the retailers, and where the location emphasis was for EV uptake for the networks to support.

4. Investment to manage increasing EV uptake

Across all networks, participant sentiments were mostly supportive regarding increased demand management required for increasing EV uptake and usage. While most stakeholders acknowledged the strategic importance of EV infrastructure, some questioned the feasibility and practicality for some customer groups. The concerns centered in the complexity of tariffs in changing energy usage, EV visibility and the focus on where EV demand was likely to increase for the networks to consider in their proposal.

CitiPower
Stakeholders from CitiPower highlighted several considerations in supporting the demand increase for EVs and managing the charging infrastructure.

Participants raised the following points:

- Considering time-of-use tariffs: time-of-use tariffs should be aligned with EV charging, particularly to encourage energy consumption during off-peak periods and to reduce the excess solar being exported during the middle of the day. Incentives would influence charging behaviour to prevent increase in peak demands. Time-of-use tariffs would benefit some customers, however, also disadvantage different community members such as shift workers.

  Throughout the conversation on time-of-use tariffs, participants acknowledged the complexities of the issue.

"If customers have an EV, then they should be on a time-of-use tariff." CitiPower Participant

"The more we're talking about different tariff types and different times of day, the more complex it gets." CitiPower Participant

- EV ownership visibility and privacy concerns: CitiPower stakeholders raised the challenge of distributors accessing data about which customers owned EVs, noting that there was no obligation for residential customers to share this information. Having accurate EV uptake and charging data was essential for the networks to plan for the next regulatory period. Although distributors can have knowledge of voltage accuracy to estimate where fast chargers are, privacy in EV ownership was hindering access to information for the distributors to make informed decisions. It was suggested by a participant that there could be a campaign delivered to seek this information.

[Example campaign] "Are you an EV owner? If so, you might benefit from time-of-use tariffs." CitiPower Participant

- Important role of retailers in communicating tariffs: Participants emphasised that retailers have the final say on how tariffs are packaged and communicated to customers. This led to a consideration that retailers should play a proactive role in clearly explaining the benefits of different tariff options and the final tariff packaging. This highlights the need for collaboration between distributors and retailers to achieve successful outcomes.

"How do we get the retailers onboard?" CitiPower Participant

"Unless the retailers are right there with you and can explain it really clearly to the customer, it's not going to land and simplicity is what is needed." CitiPower Participant

Participants raised the following points:

- Not seeing EV in all consumer futures: Some participants, particularly those in regional areas or agricultural sectors, questioned the practicality of this initiative and the forecasts presented. There was concern that investments in EV infrastructure might overlook rural and regional immediate reliability needs.

"There's no world in which we have electric trucks—it's too unreliable—so many people in the same position as me. Why are we talking about augmenting the network to accommodate when so many people can't even consider EVs?." Powercor Participant

- Acknowledgment of growing demand and infrastructure challenges: there was however acknowledgement that increased EV update would happen across Powercor and that infrastructure decisions would need to be accommodated for, especially to support energy reliability. A recommendation was made to consider time-of-use tariffs to manage the increase demand.
- Not being left behind in infrastructure improvements: some participants raised concerns over the equitable allocation of infrastructure investments to ensure that all regions, including rural and less populated areas, could benefit from the growth in EV infrastructure. Stakeholders reiterated that regional communities should not be left behind in the energy transition.

United Energy
Participants raised the following points:

- Acknowledgement of growing EV adoption and necessary infrastructure required to support: participants noted that the network was experiencing one of the highest levels of EV ownership. This trend was expected to continue, and stakeholders recognised that this presents both positive opportunities and challenges for the network within increased demand. There was an emphasis on the need for strategic planning to handle the projected increase in energy consumption due to EV adoption. Participants acknowledged the importance of ensuring the network was equipped to handle peak demands and accommodate a growing number of EVs efficiently.
- EV focus in urban areas: The focus for EV infrastructure in United Energy was seen as more relevant for urban communities, given the higher potential demand for EVs in these regions.

Conclusion

Participants across CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy expressed medium to high support for the varying initiatives within the energy transition package, recognising the benefits of the non-network demand management solution, increased data visibility, export capacity allocation, planning for EV uptake and allocation of export capacity. However, they emphasised key considerations to be leveraged in the final proposal.

4.2
Metering

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Outcomes

Metering

Moderate support shown from CitiPower and Powercor participants and strong support from United Energy for proactive meter replacements

The metering initiative proposes a proactive replacement approach to upgrade aging meters across the network, rather than replacing meters on a 'fail basis'. Participants across CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy discussed their support levels, along with key considerations, concerns, and ideas for implementing this initiative.

Initiative overview

Initiative	Support level by network*		
	CitiPower	Powercor	United Energy
Metering (proactive rollout)			

Key considerations

- All network participants agreed on the importance of upgrading meters without interruptions
- CitiPower and Powercor participants pressure tested the proposed rollout, sharing ideas to optimise its effectiveness while maintaining key benefits through a more targeted approach
- Participants highlighted the advantages of a proactive strategy, noting both immediate and long-term benefits
- United Energy participants showed the strongest support, emphasising initiatives that align with the energy transition
- Clear communication was essential to convey the purpose and benefits of meter replacements
- Participants stressed the need for confidence in privacy measures to prevent speculation
- There was a strong desire for enhanced data and monitoring capabilities

Overarching themes across networks

Participants from CitiPower and Powercor demonstrated moderate support for the proactive replacement of ageing meters, while United Energy showed very strong support for the proposed proactive delivery method.

Targeted rollout approach

Participants from CitiPower and Powercor raised the following considerations.

- Optimising rollout effectiveness without compromising benefits: Participants shared ideas on optimising the rollout to minimise costs, questioning whether a more reactive approach might be feasible. They emphasised the need to avoid unnecessary investments that could impact energy affordability for vulnerable customers. Suggestions included:
    - Participants suggested following the process from the initial AMI meter rollout, assuming that meters installed first may be at greater risk of reaching their end-of-life.

***Key:** Support levels

- There was a call to identify other lead indicators of meter failure, as 'time' was the only metric presented.
- Another approach proposed was to wait for the first failure within a location and then commence a targeted rollout in that area.

"We should assess whether a mixed approach could be a better option in some areas, replacing older meters proactively but addressing others as needed." Powercor Participant

Proactive rollout approach

Across networks, participants raised the following points:

- Proactive approach has immediate and long-term benefits: All participants highlighted that a proactive replacement would offer immediate reliability benefits and long-term advantages by improving the visibility of network performance and supporting more effective demand management.
- Most support shown by United Energy participants: United Energy participants showed strong support for proactive replacement with the need for an immediate start in the next reset. This was mainly due to their emphasis on wanting solutions that support the energy transition.
    - Benefits range from renewable uptake and managing energy usage: The benefits highlighted were due to the updated technology in the new meters that led to supporting solar installations, import and export abilities, EV adoption, EV charging and vehicle-to-grid abilities in the future. Additionally, this would support vulnerable customers or everyday consumers to view their energy usage and manage their energy better.

"There are no negatives to starting soon as it only strengthens the support for renewables." United Energy Participant

"Perfectly reasonable". Powercor Participant

"Replacing meters proactively ensures reliability and reduces the risk of unexpected failures, which is critical for avoiding disruptions." CitiPower Participant

Communication and transparency

Across networks, participants raised the following points:

- Clear communications needed on the purpose and benefits: Across all networks, there was a clear call for effective communication and transparency with the community whilst undertaking this replacement rollout. Participants emphasised the need for networks to clearly explain the benefits of the replacement, how costs would be managed, and what customers could expect during the replacement process. This would promote trust in the process.

"Customers need to understand why we're replacing meters now and what the long-term benefits are. Without clear communication, it's hard to get people on board with changes." Powercor Participant

Communication and transparency

- Confidence in privacy to prevent speculation: Participants raised the need to provide reassurance to customers that the data collected by the upgraded meters would not compromise their privacy or control over energy usage. A participant in the Powercor group emphasised the need for Powercor's team to have clarity on privacy measures and protection, to support confident decision making and messaging, that would provide trust that their data is being protected.

> *"We've had issues in the past where people were unsure about the privacy aspect of new meters. Clear, proactive communication about the benefits and data privacy will help prevent any misconceptions."* Powercor Participant

> *"Customers need reassurance that the new meters won't have any negative impact on their privacy or control of their energy use. Clear messaging is key." United Energy Participant*

Enhanced data and monitoring capabilities wanted

Participants across all three networks expressed interest in the potential data benefits of upgrading meters. They highlighted the value of having more accurate and detailed information to:

- Obtain enhanced data to deliver to needs within the energy transition
- Support consumers to access their data
- Enabling a view of the community connection to the network.
- Better ability to monitor energy usage
- Identify consumption patterns
- Support consumers manage their energy bills

> *"With upgraded meters, we'll have better data to manage energy use and costs more effectively. This is especially valuable for customers who want more control over their energy bills."* United Energy

Conclusion

Participants across CitiPower and Powercor expressed medium support for the proactive replacement of aging meters, whereas United Energy showed strong support. All participants recognised the benefits of reliability and data accuracy. However, they emphasised key considerations to be leveraged in the final proposal including a targeted rollout, clear communication and transparency, data privacy, as well as the desire for enhanced data and monitoring capabilities.

4.3 Customer Assistance Package

Forethought® Outcomes

Customer Assistance Package

There was support for the Customer Assistance Package

The Customer Assistance Package presented by CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy consists of five key initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable customers. These areas included:

1. Energy Care
2. Community Energy Fund
3. Customer Assistance Program
4. Energy Advisory Services
5. First Peoples Program

Participants shared their perspectives on each initiative, highlighting areas of support, key concerns, and suggestions for improvement. The following section provides a detailed overview of the feedback for each of the five initiative elements, and network specific feedback.

Initiative overview

Initiative items	Support level by network*			Key Considerations
	CitiPower	Powercor	United Energy	• There was support for initiatives, with strong recommendations for improvement • Tracking initiative progress and clearly communicating outcomes • Deliver through partnerships to realise greater customer impact • Increase investment to deliver meaningful outcomes
Energy Care				
Community Energy Fund				
Customer Assistance Program				
Energy Advisory Services				
First Peoples Program				

Overarching themes across networks

Participants from CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy provided recurring feedback across all initiatives. This included clear accountability tracking, building strong partnerships to support delivery, and increasing investment to ensure meaningful impact is delivered.

Accountability tracking

Across all networks, participants raised the following points consistently:

- Track initiative progress: Participants emphasised the importance of transparent communication and clear articulation of the program's goals and outcomes. There was a strong call for accountability mechanisms, such as annual reporting, to track progress and build public trust.
- Communicate outcomes: Clear communication of outcomes and benefits would help set realistic expectations and build confidence among customers. For Powercor participants, the success was defined as the impact made across initiatives.

***Key:** Support levels

Forethought Outcomes

"If the programs go ahead, we want to see clear reporting back with quantitative outcomes about the results of these initiatives." Powercor Participant

Building strong partnerships to support delivery

Across all networks, participants raised the following points consistently:

- Partnerships to deliver greater impact: Necessity of developing robust partnerships with local councils, community organisations, and trusted intermediaries for the delivery of these programs. These organisations were seen to be delivering similar initiatives and therefore partnerships would allow for a greater program impact. Some felt that the networks could operate as an enabling role.
    - CitiPower customers recommended that the investment should not be used for individuals, rather for community and support organisations who can then deliver the programs to customers.

- Partnership had access to vulnerable customers: These partnerships were critical to reaching the right vulnerable individuals and delivering the intended benefits effectively. Examples shared included Brotherhood for St Laurence, St Vincent De Paul, Clean Energy Council, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and Federal University to amplify impact. Swan Hill Council showed interest to form a partnership and was open to piloting this program with Powercor.

"Collaborating with organisations like St Vincent's for existing programs, such as switchboard upgrades, would maximise impact rather than duplicating efforts." CitiPower Participant

"These initiatives need to be delivered by trusted community organisations rather than solely relying on the network's direct involvement." United Energy Participant

Increasing investment to deliver meaningful impact

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Additional investment required: Considerations were raised about the scale of investment in these initiatives relative to the region's needs and recommended increasing the amount.
    - Participants, particularly from Powercor, questioned whether the allocated funding would make a meaningful impact given the large geographic areas and the challenges of rural poverty. A lot of the investment would be going into administrating the initiatives and therefore, not making it through to making an impact on vulnerable customers. Some highlighted that the amount was low when comparing the First Peoples initiatives, totalling $9.5million, noting that farmers and other vulnerable customers in regional and rural Victoria were facing energy poverty and initiatives totalled $5.85million.

"The numbers are underwhelming compared to developer-based projects. $14 million over five years seems small, given that other projects in the region have budgets of $20 million." Powercor Participant

Initiative specific feedback

1. Energy Care

The sentiment was supportive across all networks for the Energy Care initiative, with participants recognising the need to enhance energy literacy and providing targeted outreach, particularly to vulnerable customers.

CitiPower

Participants raised the following points:

- Education can support vulnerable customers: There was high support for using this initiative as education was important, especially bringing in knowledge relating to climate events. An idea was raised to educate on the electricity bill where there was felt to be more scope to behavioural change.
- Leverage the networks team on-the-ground: An idea was raised that there are already a significant amount of CitiPower personnel working on the poles and wires that could be leveraged to support with educating the community. “Be accessible” was a quote that summarised this idea.

United Energy

Participants raised the following points:

- Guidance appreciated to support consumers participate in the energy transition: Participants emphasised the need for clear communication and step-by-step guidance to help customers navigate the electrification efforts. They believed this would build confidence and empower customers to understand how they can participate in the energy transition.

2. Community Energy Fund

Participants across the networks supported the Community Energy Fund, viewing it as an enabling fund to support vulnerable customers.

CitiPower

Participants raised the following points:

- Funding to go to organisations or community groups compared to an individual: Participants expressed interest in seeing the fund prioritise community-based projects with measurable outcomes rather than giving the funding to an individual. It was felt if the fund was given to an individual; this would be inequitable believing that more knowledgeable stakeholders would seek access, and others might not have an opportunity to seek funding.
- Concerns raised in switching from a pro-bono method to supporting customers: Participants raised concerns about transitioning from a pro-bono model to a structured, budget-driven approach, questioning whether this might restrict voluntary and existing efforts.

Powercor

Participants raised the following points:

- Advisory panel recommended to oversee fund allocation: Support was high, with participants suggesting the establishment of community advisory panels to guide funding decisions. They believed this approach would ensure that the fund’s resources were allocated transparently and equitably.

3. Customer Assistance Program

This program received support for its focus on helping customers transition away from gas-based appliances. Participants valued its potential to remove financial barriers for low-income customers needing critical upgrades.

CitiPower

Participants raised the following points:

- Include supporting education: Participants raised an idea to include an education element to this part of the initiative to support the understanding of increased use of electricity, and what that means for more vulnerable customers as they transition off gas.

United Energy

Participants raised the following points:

- Suggested targeted incentives for landlords supporting renters participate: Support was evident, however participants also raised concerns about engaging landlords, as renters often face barriers to benefiting from such programs. They suggested targeted incentives for landlords to promote participation.

4. Energy Advisory Services

Participants generally supported the intent of this initiative, and ideas were raised about optimising its delivery.

United Energy

Participants raised the following points:

- Leveraging technology to tailor data requests: Participants emphasised the potential for integrating smart meter data and AI to provide personalised data. This would give tailored education and information on how consumers can use their energy.
- Connecting initiative supporting all Customer Assistance Packages: this initiative was foundational to connect to the other initiatives together, and therefore was highly important to the regulatory proposal.
- Purpose in support energy transition: Benefits were seen in how this program could support energy transition initiatives and increasing energy usage.
- Delivery via community groups: A trusted organisation needed to leverage the data to support communities, rather than delivery to individuals or via an online method.
- Role for smart meters and generative AI: role for AI to make data from different areas and use it as a mechanism for optimised or tailored education on how they can optimise their energy consumption.

"There's a role for AI to tailor education based on customer data and help them optimise their energy consumption." United Energy Participant

5. First Peoples Program

This initiative received support, with participants recognising the need to address historical inequities and build trust with First Peoples communities.

CitiPower

Participants raised the following points:

- Delivery via First People organsiations: Participants showed strong support for the program's focus on education and energy equity and also emphasised the importance of building on existing relationships with First Peoples organisations such as Aboriginal Housing Victoria to implement this initiative most effectively.

United Energy

Participants raised the following points:

- Seek learnings from similar energy related programs: Participants highlighted the need for long-term collaboration and stressed the importance of avoiding past mistakes seen in other organisations attempting to support First Peoples via energy initiatives. This example related to a solar system being installed on First Peoples homes where the homeowners then disconnected this system due to billing complications. The network, or partners would need to understand the daily lives, values and concerns of First Peoples for more effective implementation and impact.

Conclusion

Participants across CitiPower, Powercor, and United Energy expressed high support for the Customer Assistance Program, recognising the benefits to supporting vulnerable customers and First Peoples. However, participants had strong recommendations to be considered in the final proposal including increasing investment to ensure meaningful impact is delivered, connecting with partners who have access to vulnerable customers and First Peoples and can optimise outcomes delivered, as well as building in clear initiative accountability to track and communicate progress.

4.4
Innovation Fund

Forethought®
Outcomes

Innovation Fund

There was strong support for the Innovation Fund and aligned criteria

This section covers stakeholder feedback on the Innovation Fund initiative proposed by the networks, which is designed to support innovative projects that help accelerate the energy transition, improve customer experiences, and develop sustainable networks.

Initiative overview

Initiative items	Support level by network*		
	CitiPower^	Powercor	United Energy
Innovation Fund			

Key considerations

- There was support shown in the overarching criteria
- Mixed views were shared in piloting this initiative compared to other participants who proposed an increase in the initiative investment
- Collaboration with external entities highlighted to increase impact
- Recommendations highlighted in including accountability measures and clear benefits
- Ideas were also shared on what innovation areas could include

Overarching themes across networks

Across all three networks, there was strong support for the Innovation Fund, with participants recognising the need for long-term investment in new technologies to assist the energy transition, improve customer experiences, and create more sustainable networks.

Support of the overarching criteria

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Accountability seen in the criteria: The “use it or lose it” nature of the fund, where any unspent funds are returned to customers, was particularly well received as it provided reassurance that resources would be used efficiently.
- Supported that all criteria felt related to the energy transition: Stakeholders saw benefits in the criteria noted with justifications including acknowledgement that this will support the energy transition. It was felt ‘imperative for the network to be bold’ already being ‘so far behind’ with planning for the transition.

Pilot appropriate amount vs. increased investment

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Mixed feedback on investment: Relating to the amount being proposed across networks, there was mixed feedback with participants mainly being content with the investment proposed, sharing that this was a first-time initiative and they thought the amount was appropriate. Other participants were strong in their position that the amount was not enough and needed to be increased.

***Key:** Support levels

^Note: only two participants from CitiPower attended a mixed engagement that covered the Innovation Fund initiative

- There was also some discussion from Powercor participants on whether customers should bare the costs of innovation, especially if the outcomes were not clearly defined or may not benefit them.

Collaboration with external entities

Across all networks, participants raised the following points:

- Collaboration would maximise impact: Participants recommended that the networks collaborate with other utilities, Government bodies, including councils and research institutions to maximise the impact of the Innovation Fund and not 're-inventing the wheel'.

  *A specific example was from Port Phillip who specifically called out that they wanted more connection with CitiPower. There was a lot of innovation potential, specifically relating to load shifting, minimising demand on the network as they are undergoing a significant development, and the networks input was wanted during this planning and development stage.

Specially within United Energy, it was noted that the councils were undertaking important work in understanding micro-climates across the shires. This feeds into climate change projections and was felt to be critical data for both the network and councils. However, the insight was being viewed at a high level and collaboration could support granular insight which would be more effective in supporting organsiational decision making relating to resilience and planning, mitigating negative impacts of extreme weather.

Accountability

Participants across all networks shared the following points:

- Clear benefits needed: While there was broad support for the Innovation Fund, some participants raised concerns about how the money would be allocated and the potential for certain projects to receive funding without clear benefits.
  - Develop an advisory panel to fund allocation and live dashboard reporting: Powercor participants suggested to support accountability and transparency in the decision-making process, that a stakeholder advisory panel could oversee fund allocation as well as a real time dashboard with updates that could be easily accessed by the community.
  - Powercor participants discussed the regulatory requirements with some hesitation that a 'broader' initiative may not be approved. However, another distributor, Ausnet was successful in their innovation fund case where they proposed a smaller amount that was accepted.
  - Customer metric proposed: An additional accountability metric proposed within the Powercor group included the criteria for customers to benefit as a result of the innovation program approved.

> *"It's important that the community knows how these funds are being used and that the projects deliver real value"*. United Energy Participant

*Note: two participants from CitiPower attended a mixed engagement that covered the Innovation Fund initiative

Ideas on inclusions

Participants across all networks shared the following points:

- Examples of innovation: Participants shared the following as example of what could be included in the innovation fund:
    - Demand management solutions for demand management could be beneficial to include.
        - Examples shared included looking at where there is existing capacity, and how the system can optimise demand management; “dim and trim” was used to explain this concept.
        - Piclo was another example raised (noting this feedback followed the Energy Transition initiatives where Piclo was proposed)
    - Community batteries and local solutions to support local energy resilience
    - Small vertical access turbines, which could be used in areas where large turbines were not feasible
    - Islanding
    - Micro-grids

Network specific feedback

Powercor

Participants raised the following points:

- Targeted innovation for Regional and Rural consumers in Powercor: There was need for innovation to address the unique challenges these communities experience, such as reliability issues, limited access to renewable energy solutions and supporting vulnerable customers.
    - One participant suggested that the fund could be used to explore behind-the-meter solutions that help communities manage their energy use more effectively.

- Clear communication of the risk and reward nature of innovation: Participants acknowledged that not all innovation projects would succeed, failure was expected, and they wanted to emphasise that this needed to be clearly communicated to customers.

> *“If its safe, its not innovating”.*
> Powercor Participant

> *“The whole point of innovation is trying things that might fail. That needs to be understood and accepted by everyone involved”*.
> Powercor Participant

United Energy

Participants raised the following points:

- Timing of the investment spend: United Energy participants were considerate of the regulatory cycles the network worked within and due to the critical nature of this initiative viewed by these participants, it was felt essential to front-load the investment and program commencement in the first 2-3 years. The purpose was so consumers could see the benefits of the innovation sooner. This was compared to spreading the investment out over the five-year regulatory cycle or investing late in the cycle where benefits won’t be seen until the following reset period.

Conclusion

The Innovation Fund initiative received strong support from participants, particularly for its focus on facilitating the energy transition, improving customer experiences, and building a sustainable network. However, participants emphasised key considerations to be leveraged in the final proposal.

4.5 Regional and Rural Options

Forethought® Outcomes

Regional and Rural Options

More investment was wanted to support energy needs of regional and rural Powercor

This report consolidates the feedback received regarding Powercor's proposed regional and rural supply initiatives, focusing on five key areas that include:

1. Upgrading SWER lines to three-phase
2. Hardening the network against extreme weather
3. Establishing alternative sources of supply for the least resilient areas
4. Investing in community support to manage responses to outages

Initiative overview

Initiative items	Support level*	Key considerations
1. Upgrading SWER lines to three-phase		Although feedback was positive relating to each initiative proposed, the following themes set the context to ensure needs were understood and addressed. This included: • More investment was required, despite regulatory limitations • Acknowledgment of challenges in balancing affordability with reliability • Strategic planning required for initiatives to ladder up to • Collaboration required with government and energy experts to implement the strategy • Equity was raised as a challenge, and it was the role of the Government to set guidelines relating to energy equity • More clarity wanted on who benefits from initiatives
2.Hardening the network against extreme weather		
3. Alternative sources of supply for the least resilient areas		
4. Community support to manage responses to outages		
5. The Regional and Rural Roadmap		

Overarching themes

More investment was required, despite regulatory limitations

- Regulation framework limits on regional and rural investment and access to energy needs: Powercor participants broadly supported the recognition of regional challenges and the intent to invest in strengthening the network. There was an appreciation for Powercor's commitment to addressing the underinvestment in rural infrastructure caused by the regulatory frameworks in which they operate.

  Participants stressed, however, that improving regional and rural reliability would require not only technical upgrades but also a shift in planning and policy to recognise the distinctive requirements of regional and rural areas. Frustration was raised in the criteria set by the Australian Energy Regulator that has resulted in the lack of reliability being experienced, and the ability to service the population's growing energy needs.

***Key:** Support levels

Balancing affordability and reliability

Participants raised the following points consistently:

- Acknowledged challenges in balancing affordability with reliability: Powercor participants acknowledged the difficulty of balancing cost considerations with necessary infrastructure investments. While there was general agreement that investment in reliability was critical, especially in regions dependent on agriculture.

  It was described as a 'structural challenge' that participants were raising and felt to be a larger industry issue that would not be solved for in feedback relating to the draft regulatory proposal which was being discussed.

Strategic planning and collaboration

Participants raised the following points consistently:

- Coordinate and laddered approach required: There was a need for coordinated strategic planning at both state and federal levels, with input from energy experts. They highlighted that Powercor's investments should be aligned with broader energy transition objectives to ensure that each initiative contributes to a cohesive and sustainable future.
- Facilitation role required: There were calls for an intermediary or facilitation role, which could be led by Powercor, to help communities understand the overarching strategic plan and how individual initiatives are contributing towards achieving that plan.

Defining equity was the role of the Government

Participants raised the following point consistently:

- Non-upgraded SWER consumers were unable to benefit: Given the complexity of the energy system, participants felt that the responsibility for assessing what is equitable—such as determining service levels between metropolitan and regional or rural Victoria—should lie with the Government. They suggested that this would ensure a more consistent and balanced approach to service provision across different areas.

Clarity and transparency

Participants raised the following point consistently:

- More information wanted on who would benefit: The need for greater clarity and transparency regarding how investments would be utilised and the number of people impacted or benefited by them. Participants stressed the importance of evaluating each investment not only for its direct benefits but also for its broader impact on regional communities.

Initiative Specific Feedback

1. Upgrade of SWER lines to three-phase ($45 million)

Participants raised the following points:

- Investment increase: There was strong support for upgrading SWER lines to three-phase but concerns were raised about the limited scope of the initiative. There was a perception that the investment of $45 million, representing only 2% of the overall budget, was insufficient to address one of the most critical issues for rural communities.

> *"For every dollar spent in this region you get a return of $5; its worth investing in."* Powercor Participant

- Current SWER lines negatively impact agriculture regions: Agricultural regions, particularly those heavily reliant on reliable electricity for farming operations, were identified as most at risk from inadequate power infrastructure. Participants expressed concern that unreliable power supplies are harming local business competitiveness as well as the ability of farmers to feed the nation and export, which all provide economic benefits to Victoria and Australia. For every dollar spent within the region, there was said to be a $5 return; noting the strong economic backing for investing in regional and rural Victoria.

> *"Our local butter factory can't expand because we're constrained by the capacity of the SWER line."* Powercor Participant

> *"We're handicapped by infrastructure"* Powercor Participant

- Current SWER result in consumers not having access to support energy needs: For everyday consumers who were not being upgraded, it was emphasised that this would result in consumers not having access to an essential service.

- Current SWER lines negatively impact cost of living for Australians: The concern extends beyond businesses to broader economic implications, particularly in farming regions. Participants noted that when power infrastructure fails, it can lead to the spoilage of food products, increased production costs, and higher consumer prices.
- Willingness to invest proactively: There was a sentiment that participants were generally willing to pay more now (in this reset period) at the expense of higher negative flow on effects later.

> *"If farmers have to throw out food or it costs more to produce, prices go up for Australians to eat."* Powercor Participant

- Alternate solutions wanted: Participants wanted Powercor to consider additional solutions, such as standalone power systems, to support remote and less resilient communities where full upgrades may not be feasible in the short term.

2. Hardening the network against extreme weather events ($21 million)

There was a general consensus that hardening the network was essential to mitigating the growing risk of extreme weather events. Participants recognised the importance of proactive measures to protect critical infrastructure.

Participants raised the following points:

- Areas at most risk to be prioritised: Participants highlighted regions prone to bushfires and flooding as the most vulnerable. Without understanding the full complexities in Powercor's modelling that was undertaken, participants wanted to emphasise particular regions that were prone to bushfires and flooding. This included the following areas:
    - Northern Victoria including the Macedon Ranges, Daylesford and Trentham
    - Western Victoria including The Otways

> *"We're seeing more extreme weather, and it's vital that Powercor stays ahead of these risks, particularly in the Otways and Macedon Ranges."* Powercor Participant

- Consumers 'at risk' are disproportionately affected: In regions across North and West Victoria, participants emphasised that vulnerable populations, such as elderly residents, families, and critical agricultural businesses were disproportionately affected by power outages caused by these weather events.
- Investment increase: Participants also questioned whether the $21 million allocated was adequate to cover Powercor's expansive regional network and if more was required.

> *"The proposed investment feels underwhelming given the scale of the challenges we're facing."* Powercor Participant

3. Establishing alternative sources of supply for the least resilient areas ($29 million)

Participants generally supported the plan to provide alternative sources of supply, particularly in areas with poor reliability. There was recognition that microgrids and standalone systems could offer greater resilience in worst-served regions.

Participants raised the following points:

- Optimising Apollo Bay microgrid proposal: There was positive feedback about the microgrid proposal for Apollo Bay, acknowledging that previous feedback was included in the draft proposal. A key point raised was the need for integrating two of the existing feeders into microgrid proposals to maximise their impact. Without the connection, only half the community would benefit from the proposed microgrid. This integration would address the fundamental reliability issues faced by the town.

> *"The microgrid, as proposed, would only address one side of town, leaving the other half in the dark."* Powercor Participant

- Pressure testing alternative supply proposed: The reliance on alternative supply systems was viewed as crucial, especially for remote communities that cannot depend on traditional grid expansions. However, participants voiced concerns about whether the proposed solutions would provide adequate coverage and reliability for the issues experienced by worst-served customers in Powercor.

4. Invest in community support to manage responses to outages ($4 million)

There was strong support for the proposed investment in community support, reflecting the recognition that power outages in regional areas have broader social and economic impacts.

Participants praised the proposal to expand the fleet of mobile emergency response vehicles (MERVs). The addition of community liaison officers was seen as a proactive step to improve local readiness.

> *"It's not just about keeping the lights on; it's about keeping communities informed and connected."* Powercor Participant

Participants raised the following point:

- Prioritising vulnerable group support: Participants expressed concern that vulnerable groups, such as elderly residents and families with young children are disproportionately affected during outages. They recommended prioritising communication efforts for these community members.

5. The Regional and Rural Roadmap

Participants raised the following points:

- Positive step: The roadmap was a positive step to developing a long-term strategic plan.
- Clear timelines and impacted towns: Participants emphasised that the roadmap must provide clear timelines and prioritisation of towns to build community confidence in Powercor's commitment.

> *"We need to understand which towns are at the top of the list and why."* Powercor Participant

Conclusion

Powercor participants demonstrated support for initiative impact in improving reliability and proactive resilience support for regional and rural Powercor consumers. However, participants emphasised key considerations and concerns to be leveraged in the final proposal. This included more investment despite regulatory limitations, balancing affordability with reliability, strategic planning required for initiatives to ladder up to, collaboration required with government and energy experts to implement the strategy. Additionally, equity was raised as a challenge, and it was the role of the Government to set guidelines relating to energy equity, and more clarity was wanted on who benefits from initiatives.

4.6
Modernisation

Forethought®
Outcomes

Modernisation- CitiPower only

CitiPower customers highly supported the Modernisation initiative ensuring reliability and safety

This section explores participant feedback on CitiPower's Modernisation initiative, focusing on the proactive replacement and upgrade of aging infrastructure within the network. CitiPower's modernisation proposal aims to address aging assets, safety risks, and the need to enhance reliability, particularly in high-demand areas. Participants provided input on the importance of maintaining reliability, the need for timely upgrades, and the trade-offs between immediate costs and long-term benefits.

Participants expressed high support for CitiPower's proactive approach to modernising its infrastructure, recognising the need to replace aging assets before they become a safety risk or cause widespread outages. It was seen essential to maintaining reliability and ensuring the network could support future electrification needs however that this did not steer into overinvestment in assets.

"If we don't address these issues proactively, we risk higher costs and more frequent outages in the future". CitiPower Participant

"The risk of waiting for things to fail is just too high, especially with the growing demands on the network". CitiPower Participant

Initiative overview

Initiative	Support level*	Key considerations
Modernisation		Holistic infrastructure planning required including: • Future-proofing the network • Preventing a 'gold plated' approach • Minimising community disruption

Overarching themes

Holistic infrastructure planning

Participants raised the following points:

- Future-proofing the network: Concerns were expressed about ensuring that new infrastructure was equipped to handle future technological and capacity demands. This included preparing for increased electrification of homes and transportation, as well as integrating new energy sources like solar and batteries. It was expected that these assets had more advanced technology or a longer lifespan compared to the aged assets.

"If we're going to upgrade, we should think ahead and build in extra capacity to avoid further disruption down the line". CitiPower Participant

***Key:** Support levels

Low — High

Forethought Outcomes

> *"We need to make sure that this investment isn't just about fixing old problems but also preparing for the future energy landscape"*. CitiPower Participant

> *"We need to consider whether the higher tariffs now are worth the long-term gains in reliability and safety"*. CitiPower Participant

- Preventing a 'gold plated' approach: It was critical however that there wasn't a gold plating approach taking to upgrading assets, and a balance of replacement and cost management was considered. Participants highlighted the trade-off between higher immediate costs and future savings.

- Minimising community disruption: A recurring theme in the feedback was the importance of minimising disruptions to communities during the infrastructure upgrades. Participants suggested that CitiPower coordinate with other utilities (such as water and gas providers) to ensure that any roadworks or construction are aligned, reducing the frequency and impact of disruptions.

> *"It's exhausting for communities to have constant road closures—if there's a way to coordinate with other utilities, it would make a big difference"*. CitiPower Participant

Conclusion

The CitiPower modernisation initiative received strong support from participants, particularly for its focus on proactively upgrading aging infrastructure and enhancing network reliability and safety. While there was broad agreement on the need for immediate action, participants emphasised key considerations and concerns to be leveraged in the final proposal.

6.
Appendix
Engagement Context

Forethought® Outcomes

Engagement context

Potential influences prior to and within the consultation period were events that took place in both the lives of customers and within the wider electricity sector. We hypothesise these events impacted customers' preferences and perceptions.

Some customers referenced several of these events throughout the discussions at the roundtable:

2023

- Continued cost of living increases for Victorians announced in July 2023 with over a million households hit with power bill increases of up to $361 a year.[1]
- The State Electricity Commission was reinstated in October 2023 and is set to lead Victoria's renewable energy transition across the next 10 years.[2]
- 117 councils around Australia declared their regions in states of climate emergency in response to global climate change impacts and commitments to restore a safe climate by transforming the economy to net zero emissions.[3]
- War in Ukraine with the Russian invasion impacting Australian energy prices.[4]
- Gas prices were expected to increase considerably as the updated Gas Substitution Road Map forecasted decreasing production and pressure to switch to electricity.[5]

2024

- Severe storms across Powercor and United Energy networks on 13th February 2024, and October 2020 that resulted in a significant number of customers off supply.[6,7]
- The Essential Services Commission decided to reduce the base rate for solar feed-in tariffs by 32%, to 3.3 cents a kilowatt hour.[8]
- Victoria's gas distribution networks could no longer provide rebates or incentives to purchase new gas appliances, following the plan from the Gas Substitution Roadmap Update in December 2023.[9]
- Most Victorians would consider replacing a few gas appliances while just 52% said they would consider disconnecting from gas completely. Meanwhile, almost 90% are using gas appliances and supply gaps continue to increase. Rebates under the Victorian Electric Upgrades program began at the start of 2024 to help houses move away from gas.[10]
- Solar farms powering rural Vic - Solar energy is expanding in rural Victoria, with ENGIE's 250MW Goorambat East Solar Farm under construction and expected to power 250,000 homes by 2026, creating 250 jobs and funding a community benefit program. Meanwhile, the 99MW Winton Solar Farm is now operational, generating power for 52,000 homes. Supported by Victoria's Renewable Energy Target (VRET1), these projects contribute to the state's goal of 95% renewable energy by 2035, anticipated to drive job growth and lower electricity costs for residents.[11]
- Victoria has reestablished its State Electricity Commission (SEC) as a constitutionally protected public entity, ensuring renewable energy remains publicly owned. The SEC's projects aim to lower energy bills, and support Victoria's target of 95% renewable energy by 2035. Additionally, a home electrification digital planner pilot is underway to assist residents with energy-efficient upgrades, starting in Ballarat. [12]
- Farmers have raised concerns over the accelerated pace of renewable energy projects in rural Australia, fearing the loss of agricultural land and community disruption. While the Government pushes for renewable infrastructure to meet climate goals, landowners are calling for greater consultation and planning to balance energy needs with farming interests. [13]

Engagement context references

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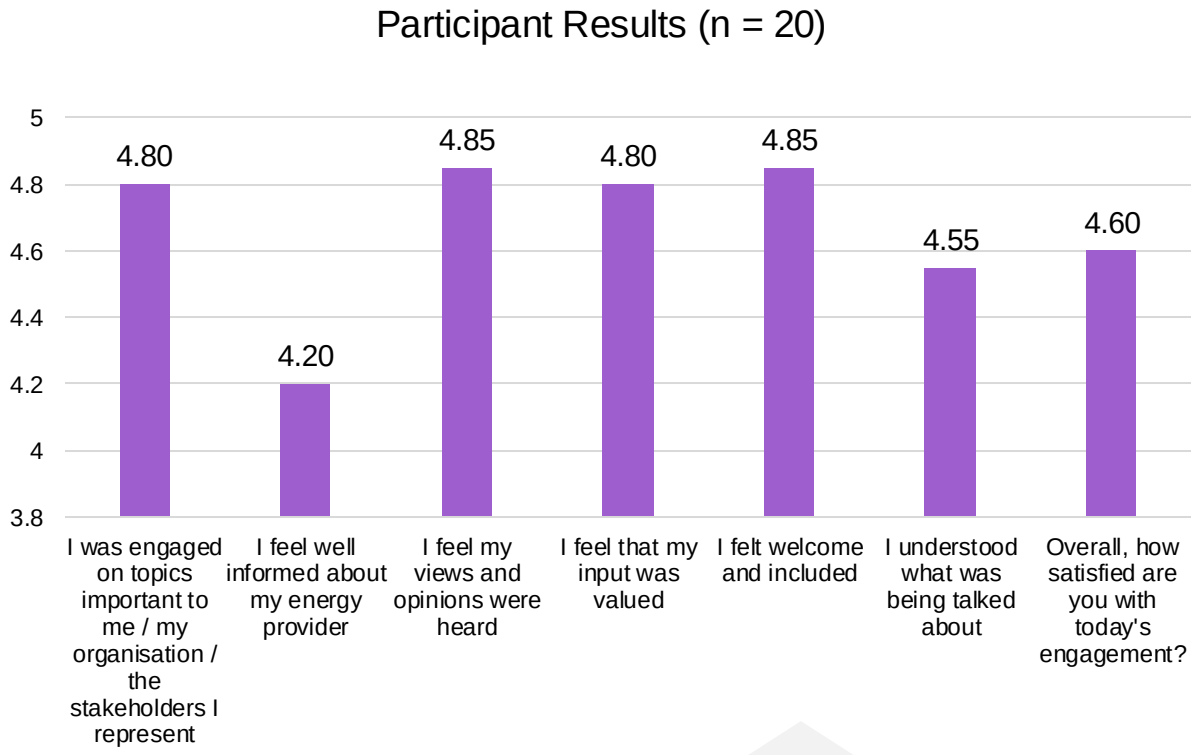
Roundtable engagement feedback

After the qualitative engagements, customers were asked to complete a feedback survey to support the refinement of the engagement process. The results are below.

Overall Satisfaction with engagements	4.8 / 5

Participants rated their engagements on a scale from 1-5,
where 1 was completely disagree/unsatisfied and 5 was completely agree/satisfied.



Participant comments

"I felt community views were listened to. Thank you."

"[The facilitator] did a great job facilitating the CitiPower & United Energy session. [CitiPower staff member] was a great resource, talking through some of the background and rationale."

"It was really great having less people, because you could really deep dive into the topics so appreciated that. It would be good if we could see more about next steps and what that looks like with the different options going forward."

"I think providing further pre-reading would be helpful as the draft determination is quite long but there were instances that we needed more information but didn't have the time. This would help provide more background without reading the entire draft determination."

"It is so heartening that Citipower, Powercor and United Energy appear to be really listening to what the community want and need and taking real action - such as the emergency community response trucks / info centres. The session was really well run with perfect balance of MCing and technical advice on hand."