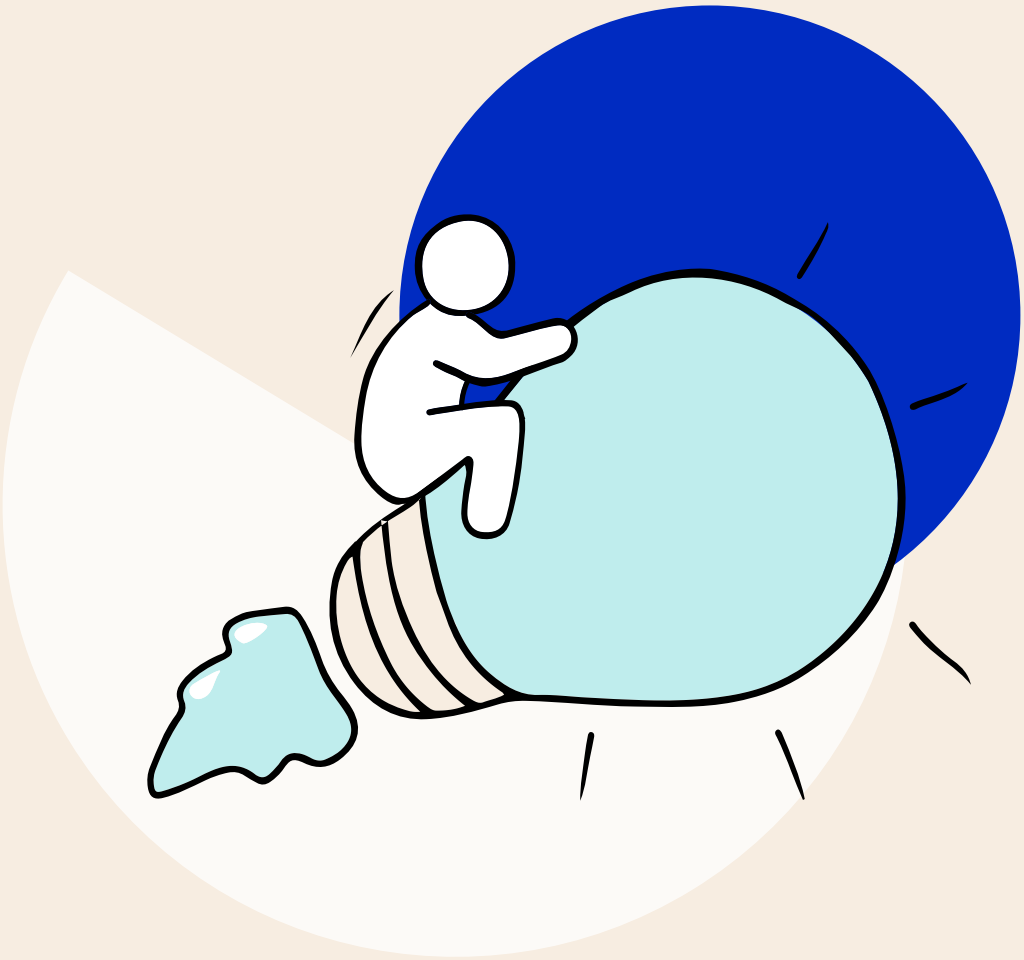

Jemena Electricity Networks (JEN)

Prepared June 2024

Local Councils Forum

Summary Report

GAUGE CONSULTING

Jemena
bringing energy to life

Introduction

Purpose

On Wednesday 29 May 2024, Local Councils from the distribution network of Jemena Electricity Networks (JEN) met at Brunswick Town Hall in Melbourne. This meeting enabled participants to:

- share their current and anticipated energy-related challenges and opportunities,
- describe their desired outcomes and expectations for the role JEN plays to support those outcomes,
- and dive deep into topics of particular importance to local government: public lighting and network resilience and reliability.

The session slides are available at Appendix 1. The forum insights will help shape JEN's 2026-2031 Regulatory Proposal, business-as-usual (BAU) operations and ongoing sector advocacy.

Attendance

Eighteen representatives from seven local Councils attended the forum, as well as 11 JEN staff.

Local Councils	JEN Staff
Hume City Council • Coordinator Civil Design • Coordinator, Climate Action Integration	• Matthew Serpell, Electricity Regulation Manager • Johan Ng, Commercial Manager • Shaheli Damiano, Business Development Manager • Christopher Masson Customer Development Manager • Shaun Rodrigues, CIC SME • Sam Saeedi, Senior Asset Performance Specialist • Max Demko, Senior Distribution
Merri-bek City Council • Public Lighting Officer - Permits • Built Environment Resilience Officer • Patrol Officer - Civil Works • Climate Resilience Integration Lead • Team Leader Transport Engineering	
Moonee Valley City Council • Senior Sustainability Officer • Utility Officer • Senior Coordinator Facilities and Infrastructure	
Hobsons Bay City Council • Coordinator Transport and Engineering Development • Manager, Capital Works • Capital Works	

Local Councils	JEN Staff
Banyule City Council • Project Manager • Project Engineer • Utilities Admin Officer **Yarra City Council** • Sustainable Energy Coordinator **Maribyrnong City Council** • Manager Operations and Maintenance	Standards Engineer • Karl Fernades, CIC SME • Luisa Hall, Senior Pricing Analyst • Louise Baring, Customer Engagement Lead • Jennifer Hardiman, Engagement Support and Comms Lead

Approach

After an overview of JEN's progress on its 2026-2031 Regulatory Proposal, participants worked individually and in small groups to share their organisation's current and anticipated energy-related challenges and opportunities. These were organised under topic areas that emerged from the registration forms completed by participants prior to the session:

1. Pricing & tariff structures
2. Network reliability & power quality
3. Energy transition & sustainability
4. Customer education & communication
5. Customer vulnerability
6. Other

Following a plenary report back, participants worked again – individually and in small groups – to articulate the outcomes they desired under these same topic areas and any expectations they had for JEN's role in supporting those outcomes. Groups reported back to the whole room.

After lunch, JEN shared its current approach to public lighting, as well as emerging and future trends. In small groups and plenary, participants shared its feedback on JEN's current program and identified the future opportunities they most wanted JEN to explore.

Finally, JEN presented on network resilience and reliability challenges the network is facing and proposed approaches for responding to these. Participants – in small groups and plenary – shared their insights and learnings from past extreme weather events, and suggested how JEN could best support them with their climate action plans.

Next steps

JEN will use the outputs of these discussions – summarised in the remainder of this report – to prepare proposed regulatory proposal, BAU and advocacy responses.

Challenges + Opportunities

The table below summarises the key challenges and opportunities to emerge from the first forum session, drawn from the small groups reporting back and table scribe notes. A full transcript of councils' challenges and opportunities is available in Appendix 2.

Theme	Summary Challenges + Opportunities
Pricing & tariff structures	• Dynamic network tariffs might enable savings for some but sports clubs and other large council venues have minimal ability to control their energy use and so can lose out with time of use tariffs • Solar-related tariffs can have impacts on non-solar customers, some of whom are unable to access solar solutions (e.g. tenants)

Network reliability & power quality	• Designing and/or retrofitting emergency response centres, to ensure they are a fit-for-purpose means of improving network resilience in more vulnerable areas – Opportunity for JEN to provide advice
	• Challenging getting best information out to customers during extended power outages
	  • Extended outages can have real impacts on communities (especially life support customers)
	  • Community members often call Councils as a trusted source of information about outages, asking for support
	  • Opportunity for more advice from JEN on how Councils and communities should prepare for and respond to outages

Energy transition & sustainability	• Lighting levels (e.g. in reserves, foreshores and conservation areas) is impacting wildlife • Opportunity for JEN to advocate to industry and government to support community batteries and/or to directly help implement these batteries

Customer education & communication	• It can be challenging to elicit customer engagement in energy discussions
	  • Opportunity for JEN to leverage Councils' relationships with communities, to educate customers on energy
	  • Opportunity to leverage the moment customers change or purchase an appliance to improve their awareness of tariffs
	  • For example, JEN and councils could advocate for enhanced green labelling on appliances
	• There are communications issues re: who is responsible for asset repair or upgrading of public lights etc.
	  • Residents are calling Councils and/or having issues trying to report through JEN's channels
	  • Opportunity for JEN to promote a streamlined process for communities and Councils to log public lighting faults (e.g. integrating into Council's Snap-Send-Solve system), with clarity around who at JEN to speak to and estimated timeline for resolution
	  • Opportunity to develop shared JEN/Council messaging about responsibilities and processes for repairing public lights, to communicate an aligned position and avoid perceptions of "handballing" (including in Council policies)

Customer vulnerability	• The cost of electrification can be too high for vulnerable customers
	  • Opportunity for JEN to be maximising the utilisation of assets (e.g. managing peaks down) to save costs for all
	  • Social justice should be a criterion in JEN's decision-making
	  • JEN should be exploring opportunities to help pay for the electrification of products for vulnerable customers, or otherwise subsidising costs
	• Some customers have no or limited options to change or reduce costs on demand-based pricing structures
	  • E.g. heating and cooling can be costly for at-risk customers

Other (Customer service)	• The lengthy reconfiguration of large-footprint sites to smaller lots is delaying new sports fields and other projects • Councils are disproportionately impacted by these timing challenges, as they hold so many large land titles

Other (Public lighting)	• Opportunity for greater standardisation of lighting levels
	• Public lighting needs to be upgraded to be compliant
	  • Councils are having to spend their own budget to upgrade decorative public lights on existing roads to make compliant
	  • Response times to address public lighting queries are taking too long, meaning communities are fearing crime and blaming Councils
	• Opportunity for smart controls in street lights, including to dim at certain times and/or detect outages
	  • This would help reduce maintenance, deliver energy/cost savings and reduce community complaints
	  • JEN could explore jointly-funded pilots, similar to those currently being run in City of Melbourne and other local government areas
	• Consider the additional capital investment to install batteries and renewable energy technologies on public lights, to save on energy costs
	• Explore LED replacements and technology upgrades of lights for the energy/cost saving and environmental benefits, especially as traditional bulbs are becoming increasingly difficult to replace

Outcomes + Expectations

The table below summarises the key desired outcomes and additional expectations of JEN that emerged from the second forum session, drawn from the small groups reporting back and table scribe notes. A full transcript of councils' challenges and opportunities is available in Appendix 3.

Theme	Summary Outcomes + Expectations

Pricing & tariff structures	• Pricing structures (including dynamic pricing) should be clearly understandable for Councils and communities, including when the best times are to use energy
	  • See how JEN are sharing information about tariffs via their connection pack (including visuals)
	• JEN should be sharing knowledge early to avoid surprises to customers – this would ideally include modelling but could simply include future trends (for network and load growth) and de-identified scenarios (e.g. cost comparison of running a washing machine outside of vs during peak), with supporting evidence behind these predictions
	  • JEN should help present this information to local media and at roundtables with Councils and energy users in each local government area
	• Councils need more reflective peak load predictions so they are not paying for more power than they require
	• JEN should negotiate quotes related to Operational Maintenance Requirements (OMR)

Network reliability & power quality	• Customers need to know what to do when outages occur • Councils need advice from JEN on how to optimise the setup of large buildings that deliver a wide range of services with very different energy usage requirements • JEN should improve notifications to Councils during outages and fault repair progress and notify Councils about who within their organisation is receiving these updates
Energy transition & sustainability	• JEN should advise on whether community batteries are a good solution for the energy transition • JEN should work with Councils to provide guidance/ develop a standard for public lighting in reserves, foreshores and conservation areas, to reduce impact on wildlife

Customer education & communication	• JEN should provide effective information for Council engagement teams to forward on to their communities, including:
	  • An improved JEN website, including with clear and transparent explanations of tariffs front and centre
	  • An app or website function to display outages on a map and enable outage notifications for customers
	  • Simple English that is easily translatable
	  • Pictures and videos that are highly 'shareable'
	• JEN should brief Councils on these materials (e.g. via its staff rep on Local Emergency Management Committees) and directly or indirectly support community education via schools, libraries, seniors groups and other forums that Councils can leverage
	• JEN should develop shared messaging with Councils about responsibilities, processes and timelines for repairing public lights
	• JEN should provide Councils with clearer messaging re: timelines for resolution of faults (e.g. public lighting)

Customer vulnerability	• JEN should advocate for changes to mortgage insurance to allow domestic leases beyond 12 months, so tenants can consider investing in electrical supply changes (e.g. solar) • The City of Hume's household energy program offers rebates for vulnerable customers to install split systems, insulation and heat pumps – opportunity for collaboration with JEN
Other (Customer service)	• JEN should speed up relocations/new connections and mains upgrades, so Councils can more quickly deliver community benefits (e.g. new sports fields or community centres) • JEN should distinguish between estimated vs offered timeframes and provide avenues for negotiating the lead times on these works, with consideration for the implications of delays • JEN should provide after-hours support
Other (Data)	• JEN should be supporting smart networks and providing valuable energy usage data to Councils and communities to inform decision-making (e.g. for optimisation and investment decisions)

Public Lighting (Q+A)

Participants had some questions, following JEN's presentations of its (i) existing public lighting program and (ii) new public lighting technologies. These are summarised in the below table.

Question	Answer
Is JEN looking into how to reduce lighting impacts on wildlife in reserves, foreshores and conservation areas? E.g. through different wattage, colour temperatures and wavelengths	• The current Australian public lighting standard is for 4000 Kelvin (K) but JEN can approve alternatives to 4000K (e.g. 3000K)
If a Council upgrades lights themselves, is there a way they could be insulated from covering part of the costs for other Councils who have JEN do it?	• JEN must share its costs for lighting upgrades, though we work to keep those costs down • However, we do pass on the savings from upgrades to Councils that paid for those • We can share our scheduled lighting upgrades with you
Should JEN take responsibility for providing non-standard fixtures where standard options don't meet a Council's needs?	• Presently, JEN will pay to install standard fixtures but Councils will need to pay for non-standard fixtures (e.g. for level crossing removals)
Is it true that JEN cannot help with smart controls for public lights?	• The technology is available but we have not yet found a sufficient answer for the cost barrier • Until now, staff resources and competing priorities have kept JEN from looking into this further but that is now changing

Public Lighting (*Input*)

The following sections summarise participants' input in the third forum session, drawn from small group reports and table scribe notes.

Key considerations for JEN's public lighting program

- Share planned timeframes for installations/updates (e.g. for T5 replacement) so Councils can plan
  - Engage with Councils on these timings as some project funding – which is tied to light installations/upgrade – might be time-dependent
- Share the lifecycle of current lights with Councils, including failure rates, likely maintenance and replacement options to support planning
  - Include retrofitting as part of replacement options (e.g. component replacements, to reduce landfill costs)
- Make swifter updates in GIS re: which lighting has been repaired or upgraded
- Do not always implement the cheapest option – Councils are balancing cost with reliability, efficiency, longevity and sustainability (e.g. the protection of fauna)
  - Engage Councils on trade-offs associated with different options (e.g. via survey) before installing/upgrading lighting
- Provide more information on price differentials between distribution businesses
- Share more data with Councils (e.g. in quarterly reports) to a level more granular than 'city-wide', so Councils can provide better reports to their communities. Data would ideally include:
  - Nature of faults
  - Decommissioned or abolished lights
  - Light types
- Keep up to date with required maintenance
- Keep up with new technologies

Other public lighting issues JEN need to address

- Provide clearer explanations of who ultimately owns which lights, where (ideally displayed spatially)
- Consider offering additional 'standard' options (e.g. for more wildlife-friendly lighting and/or lighting for level crossing removals)
    - Explore possibility of default 3000K lighting on local roads, to avoid JEN holding niche stock for reserves, foreshores and conservation areas
- Provide a 'more workable' solution for 'decorative' lighting, including a better process for replacing damaged lights
- Provide guidance to Councils with unique new and existing park lighting needs (e.g. for crime prevention)
- Communicate or prescribe footpath lighting standards
- Help councils educate communities on what complying public lighting standards look like – e.g. via information, statistics and visuals on JEN's website – to help Councils set community expectations

Most important future opportunities for public lighting

- Generally, the greatest interest was in smart lighting/controls (i.e. shifting from a default-on approach to task-based lighting, and helping with grid management), with the suggestion that the cost barriers to these should be overcome before embracing other technologies
- Other pole technologies of varying interest to Councils included:
    - 360-degree lighting
    - Solar panels
    - PA warning systems
    - CCTV (including with AI) – though we would need to determine who owns the CCTV footage
    - Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers – noting different urban typologies have different timing needs
- While Councils are interested in EV charging, challenges include:
        - The expectation Councils will take ongoing responsibility for the chargers – a current barrier to Councils adopting the technology
        - While there is some public pressure to support EV uptake, Councils find it difficult to predict future EV usage in their government area
        - Peak demand charges mean charging stations are too expensive for many providers

Opportunities for new public lighting pilot collaborations with Councils

- General interest in JEN helping secure funding or grants for smart/ remote control lighting, especially on bike paths
- Generally, partner with Council Parks Departments and Capital Works teams to explore opportunities

Network Outages: *Resilience + Reliability*

The following sections summarise participants' input in the fourth and final forum session, drawn from small group reports and table scribe notes.

Questions + Answers

Where does JEN source its extreme weather likelihood and impact data from?	• AECOM prepared data for multiple distributors • We will share those reports with you
Are JEN's insurance premiums increasing?	• Yes, sometimes by as much as 50%

Insights and learnings from extreme weather events

- We cannot just rely on past weather events or current modelling, given we are in a time of exponential climate change
- Councils have been preparing Community Energy Risk Assessments
- Councils have been confirming information with JEN before sharing or acting on
- The 2020 fires revealed that the pine and eucalyptus trees in the network can contribute to fuel-air explosions – how might the network use more fire retardant materials?
- The perviousness of areas has significant implications for water runoff during events
- Heat waves and outages have a "double whammy" impact on communities

How JEN can support Councils' climate action plans

Before events	• Input into risk assessment work, as JEN plays an important part in painting the full picture of risk and potential impacts to communities
	• Do not limit your outages work to simply getting customers back online – also work to build residents and businesses' resilience *during* outages. For example, by educating people on how to:
	  • Put plans in place for prolonged outages (e.g. preparing handheld power storage/ back up charging options)
	  • Manage stress and panic during outages
	  • Check on and support vulnerable neighbours
	  • Manage food wastage
	  • Keep cool during outages in heat waves
	  • Access emergency relief centres
	• Explore load management options for different event scenarios
	• Maintain regular scheduling / swiftly respond to Council requests for vegetation and tree maintenance around power lines, for fire prevention and to increase resilience to winds and storms
	• Factor in fire risks from EV charging and batteries in future network plans
	• Avoid putting network assets in flood prone areas and consider 'retreating' from these areas
	• Explore ways to waterproof electrical connections
	• Advocate for planning standards that are more appropriate for extreme events (e.g. standards for pervious surfaces, solar reflective rooves, and cool reserves and roads)

During events	• Keep Councils updated on what is happening to the network (e.g. predicted outage repair times) via a JEN liaison officer or similar, so local government can help manage community concern and get messaging out to hard-to-reach communities • Share load-shedding forecasts with Councils so they can notify communities in advance (especially the most vulnerable)
After events	• Make yourself known to local government – Reach out to Councils to support response and recovery • Assess whether damaged assets should be replaced like-for-like, including in flood prone areas where populations may drop