



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

PAL ATT SE.01 – PUBLIC  
2026–31 REGULATORY PROPOSAL

## Acknowledgement of Country

Powercor acknowledges and respects the Traditional Owners as the original Custodians of the lands and waters our networks cover; lands First Peoples have occupied for tens of thousands of years.

Powercor pays our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge their ancient and continuing connection to Country.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and vision

Our role as a network is to deliver an affordable, reliable and safe electricity supply to our customers, empowering customer choices and delivering services important for our communities and the environment. To achieve this, it is essential we understand the needs and expectations of our customers to ensure we are delivering a service that is valued.

Customer and stakeholder engagement and delivering services customer's value is at the core of what we do as a network. We recognise our responsibility as the provider of an essential service, and the criticality of listening and understanding our customer and the community energy needs in which we operate.

Since 2021, we have been conducting our largest engagement program ever to inform our future plans. This program has benefited from our prior learnings from the previous reset, our study of domestic and international engagement programs and we have increased our internal resourcing to support this regulatory reset. This document seeks to detail our engagement program that supported the development of our 2026–2031 regulatory proposal.

## 1.2 Strategy and objectives

Our engagement strategy, business-as-usual engagement activity and customer interactions has guided our engagement program. This has enabled us to understand and respond to current, emerging and future customer needs and preferences.

The energy strategy contained a set of engagement objectives which included:

- allowing our customers and stakeholders to meaningfully influence the direction of our engagement program
- use a customer-centric approach and evidence to inform our decision-making
- design products and services that meet the needs of our customers
- build trust and confidence amongst our customers and stakeholders.

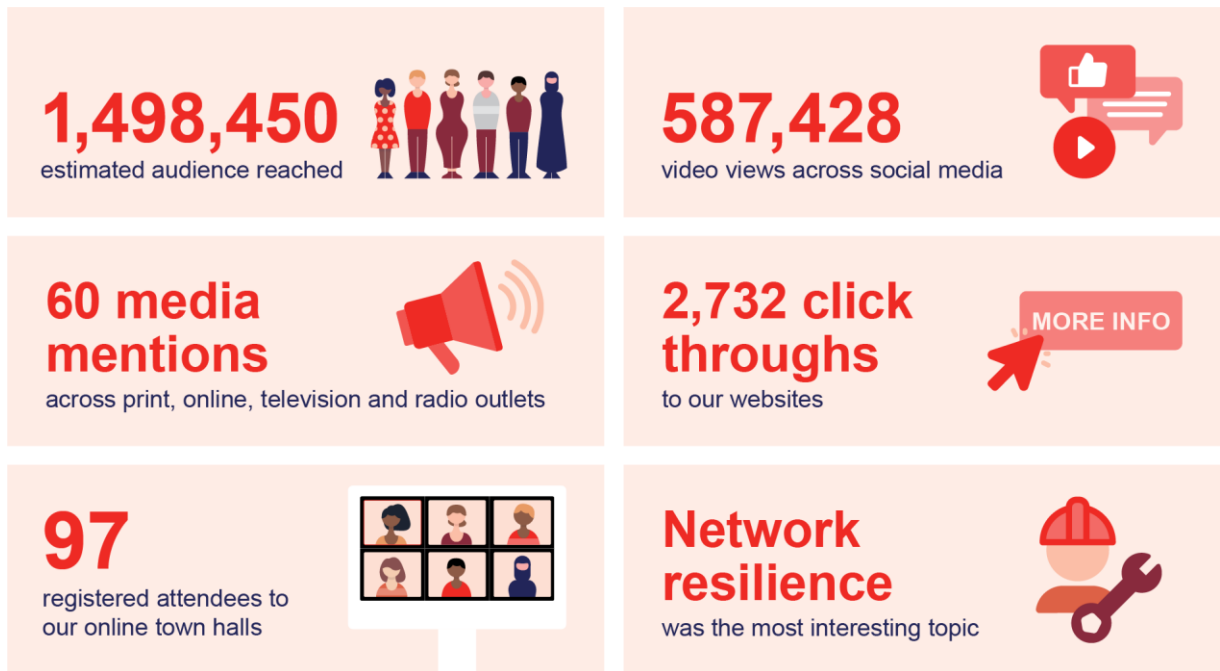


Powercor special interest group stakeholders participating in one of the regional & rural summits.

### 1.3 Reaching our customers and communities

We've utilised a wide range of engagement channels and techniques to reach the broad range of customers and stakeholders. This allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of their current and future energy needs including the specific needs of customers within regional and rural areas. A summary of our engagement coverage can be seen in [Figure 1](#).

**FIGURE 1** ENGAGEMENT COVERAGE DURING THE REGULATORY RESET



### 1.4 Engaging with a difference

When developing an engagement program, it is essential that we constantly sought opportunities to innovate and be intentional with understanding the nuances and differences within the Powercor network; as it covers multiple customer groups, and importantly different geography that have distinct needs.

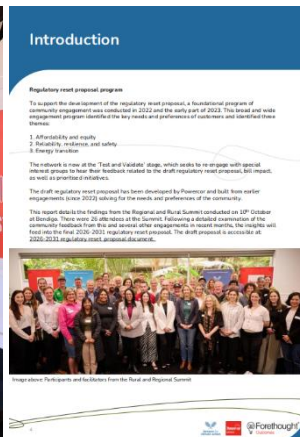
For this engagement program, we are proud of the unique aspects of our program which we believe have provided new insights that helped inform our decision making. These unique aspects have included:

- intentionally building relationships within regional and rural communities to deliver our regional and rural summits and varying engagements. Some collaborations included Farmers for Climate Action, Committee for Greater Shepparton and Food and Fibre – Great South Coast Inc.
- our first collaboration with a tertiary institution, Monash University, to examine our customers' future energy needs
- our customer values analysis which established quantitative based measures on what customers truly value
- the trade-off forums and quantitative modelling survey with grass roots customers which enabled customers to prioritise and value the discretionary elements of our regulatory proposal

- the stakeholder forums we held in late 2023 that provided an opportunity for the community and stakeholders to hear and challenge our views on energy and demand forecasts
- our first deep dive study into the preferences and priorities of vulnerable customers.

### 1.4.1 Regional and Rural Summits

The first regional and rural summit was held in 2023 in collaboration with Food and Fibre – Great South Coast Inc. and had 46 attendees. The purpose was to understand regional and rural community needs and preferences, as well as discuss, debate and prioritise proposed customer outcomes/ service levels. The service levels were developed based off grass root engagements and insights within the broad and wide phase. The summit was also designed to understand the trade-offs that customers were willing to make across the service outcomes presented, allowing us to identify where the priorities were for our proposal investment.



Powercor partnered with Farmers for Climate Action for our second regional and rural summit in 2024 which had 26 attendees. The purpose of this summit was to seek feedback on the Powercor proposal and identify key areas for refinement to be considered in the final submission. Additionally, the session was designed to ensure that Powercor continued to listen to the pressing regional and rural energy needs and proposed energy opportunities for the future of these communities. Understanding that there are broader energy needs within this community, the consultation also allowed time for Farmers for Climate Action to facilitate a panel discussion outside distribution.

**72 POWERCOR CUSTOMERS ENGAGED**

### 1.4.2 Customer values analysis

The Customer values analysis project linked customer feedback with economic analysis by quantifying what customers value and their willingness to pay for different initiatives. Building on our 2020 study, the updated research in 2022 included 506 Powercor customers and incorporated changes in economic environment since 2020, technique improvements and a sharp focus on qualitative feedback we have received through engagement over the 2021–2023 period.

**506  
POWERCOR  
CUSTOMERS  
ENGAGED**

### 1.4.3 Monash University Future Home Demand

**36  
HOUSEHOLDS**  
**1,325  
CUSTOMERS  
ENGAGED**

The first stage of this study involved ethnographical research of 36 households spread across Victoria. Stage 2 sought to verify the findings from stage 1 and included a survey of 1,325 customers. The results of stage 1 and 2 identified 51 new and emerging digital energy trends in 9 areas of household life. These

findings were shared in a webinar on 12 October 2023 with over 75 participants. Many of these trends have been incorporated in our regulatory proposal and reflected in our modelling of augmentation and connections and design of tariffs and new service products such as flexible export limits.



selection criteria were used Monash and CPU to representation of diversity across income, linguistic diversity, household type and technology ownership. Also selected across each area to reflect the respective distribution area. In included 12 United households, 14 Powercor and 10 C&P Power 20. Participants were contacted by where participants also, a replacement that as closely as possible a iterative process in participant post-its, with 41 people in the research. The with the research topics.

Based on the success of this project, we are proud to be participating in a second phase of the project entitled Scenarios for Future Living through RACE 2030 that will involve Monash University, University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney and CSIRO.



### 1.4.4 First People's engagement

We have engaged with First Peoples to better understand their lived experience with our distribution network and to identify First Peoples' energy related issues and priorities. Our activity included the following:

- In March 2023, our First Peoples team facilitated a First Peoples regulatory reset workshop with 38 community members in partnership with Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative. Due to the engagement occurring shortly after the 2022 Shepparton floods, we heard about the devastation, limited access to energy and their experience with Powercor at the time.
- We have engaged with three Registered Aboriginal Parties and two community organisations on their energy related priorities.
- We attended the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy roundtable in Geelong where we heard about the need for capacity building including energy literacy. Additionally, we heard about First Peoples' want to build, own and maintain renewable energy projects.
- In June 2023 we established the First Peoples Advisory Committee, made up of four community members from across our network. The Chair of the First Peoples Advisory Committee also sits on our Customer Advisory Panel. The committee has met seven times with Powercor's First



Renate Vogt, GM Regulation participating in a Welcome to Country facilitated by Yorta Yorta elders.



Peoples team and has also provided feedback, input and endorsement of the proposed First Peoples program in our regulatory reset proposal.

- To better understand First Peoples energy related priorities we attended the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd's Football and Netball Carnival. At the event and online, we conducted a survey with 110 First Peoples on the regulatory reset, with 75 respondents residing in the Powercor network. We tested our proposal initiatives that was built off previous feedback to understand the priorities for this community.



Powercor team attending the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd's Football and Netball Carnival.

### 1.4.5 Trade off forums

To support the draft proposal, we sought to understand our residential and small-medium business (SMB) customers' willingness to pay for discretionary services. The work involved 411 residential and 98 SMB Powercor customers and applied a mix of methods. This included focus groups, a deliberative forum, and a survey. Customers were provided education material prior to engagement activities and pre-tested with comprehension questions to ensure understanding. The findings informed the draft proposal.

**411 RESIDENTIAL  
AND 98 SMB  
POWERCOR  
CUSTOMERS ENGAGED**



**“I found the forum very informative and quite enlightening; very enjoyable. Different views [were] expressed and relevant information [was] received.”**

*Powercor customer, 2024*

**“I feel my opinion was valued and heard. I feel as though the scenarios and initiatives that were discussed matched my overall opinions.”**

*Powercor customer, 2024*

**“The Powercor reps were incredibly well-informed and answered all questions succinctly...[our facilitator] did a wonderful job of leading the discussion.”**

*Powercor customer, 2024*

Powercor residential customers participating in a deliberative forum.

#### 1.4.6 Vulnerable customer study

**59 CUSTOMERS  
ENGAGED**

We engaged with 59 vulnerable customers across the CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy network to understand their needs now and in the future as well as how customers facing vulnerable circumstances perceive the energy transition and identifying strategies for enhancing accessibility. We also sought to identify whether these customers share the same priority areas previously identified in other vulnerable customer research.

## 2. Understanding our customers

### 2.1 Customer overview

Our customers are diverse and to facilitate effective engagement, it has been necessary to segment them based on tariff classes i.e. residential, small to medium enterprises, and commercial and industrial customers. We've sought to build our understanding of each customer group and how they are represented overall in our customer base to ensure our engagement program is reflective of the customers we serve.

Our engagement channels and content have been tailored to be as relevant and meaningful to each customer group as possible. Recognising differences between customer segments has allowed for a more inclusive engagement program and for our regulatory proposal to be as responsive to each customer groups challenges and needs. We will continue to build on our customer knowledge and use these insights to further shape future decisions. Evolving and refining our customer understanding is a key priority to improve on over the next regulatory period.

### 2.2 Who we engaged with

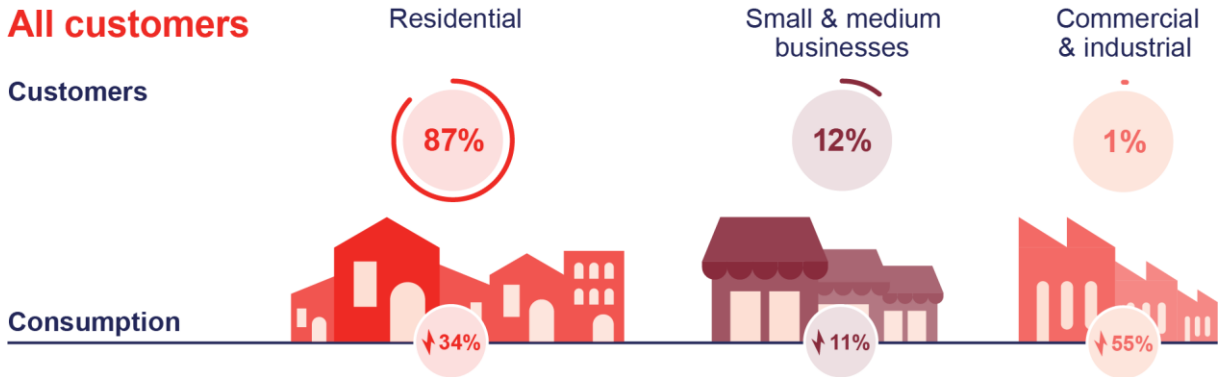
Throughout the engagement program we endeavoured to engage with wide range of our customers and that those customers were reflective of what we know about the demographics of our customer base across the Powercor network. Our knowledge was informed by utilisation of ABS databases including the latest census information and our own customer data records.

Customer groups included:

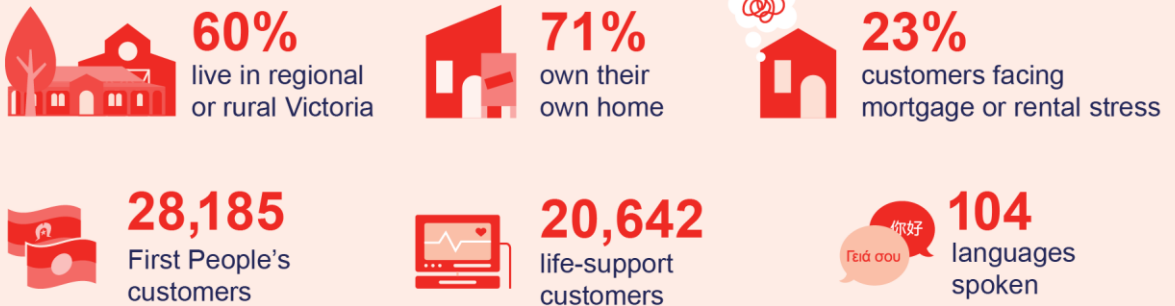


The below information provides a baseline for participant sampling of residential, small-medium businesses, as well as commercial and industrial customers as a measure of how well it reflects the population. It's important to note that this represents a goal, and the actual sample has depended on various factors including social context, participant availability and engagement stage.

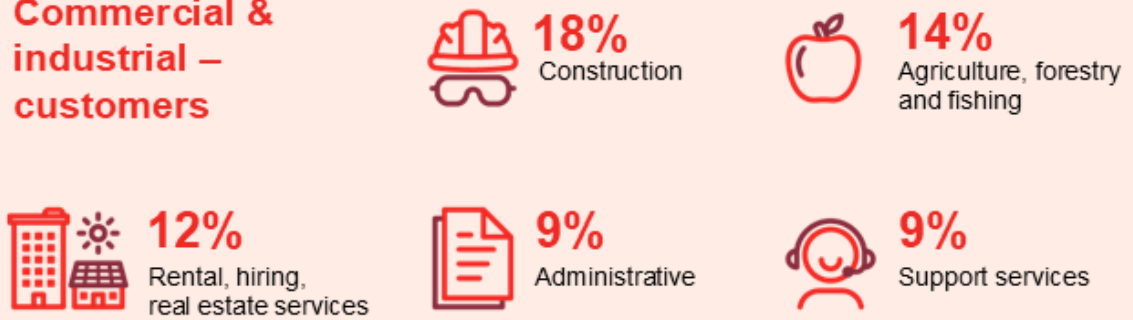
**FIGURE 2 OUR DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE**



**Residential customers**



**Commercial & industrial – customers**



**Commercial & industrial – consumption**



### 3. Continuously improving

Following the 2021–2026 regulatory reset, we conducted a comprehensive post-implementation review, engaging both internal and external stakeholders. This review incorporated feedback from reports and interviews with the Consumer Challenge Panel (CCP), the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), industry stakeholders, and our own internal assessments.

A critical recommendation was to establish a dedicated engagement workstream focused on developing and executing a continuous, long-term, engagement strategy. The workstream was established in late 2021, and purposely led by an experienced senior regulation manager as an additional control to ensure investment decisions were driven by customer and community feedback.. The workstream was further supplemented with additional resources including access to external engagement experts.

Beyond the dedicated team, a number of further critical changes were implemented including:

- greater reliance on business as usual engagement and data, building stronger familiarity and empathy with our communities. This included many face-to-face engagements, especially in regional and rural areas of our network
- building relationships with regional and rural industries and organisations to improve access to the broad community
- a strong focus on stakeholder engagement
- more use of quantitative based techniques
- executive presence at all public activities
- direct reporting of engagement activities and outcomes to the executive and board
- instituting voluntary customer commitments to ensure public accountability
- development of a long term customer behavioural research program.



Special interest group stakeholder participating in a regional and rural summit.

## 4. Governance

From the outset of this program, we were aware of the positive feedback received at the previous regulatory reset on our engagement program from many stakeholders, but the perception was that the good work was not reflected in the proposals they saw delivered.

For this regulatory reset, our focus has been on strengthening and addressing these concerns. Aside from the dedicated engagement workstream, its reporting line was directly to the General Manager Regulation, and its communication directly fed into the executive management team and board.

Leaders of expenditure workstreams were asked to play a more proactive role, being required to attend engagement events to hear and address customer needs and preferences. We believe this has reinforced the need for customer first solutions amongst expenditure workstream leaders and ensure we have not developed 'solutions looking for a problem'.



Powercor executive participating in a regional and rural summit, Scott Russell, General Manager, Strategy & Customer Group.

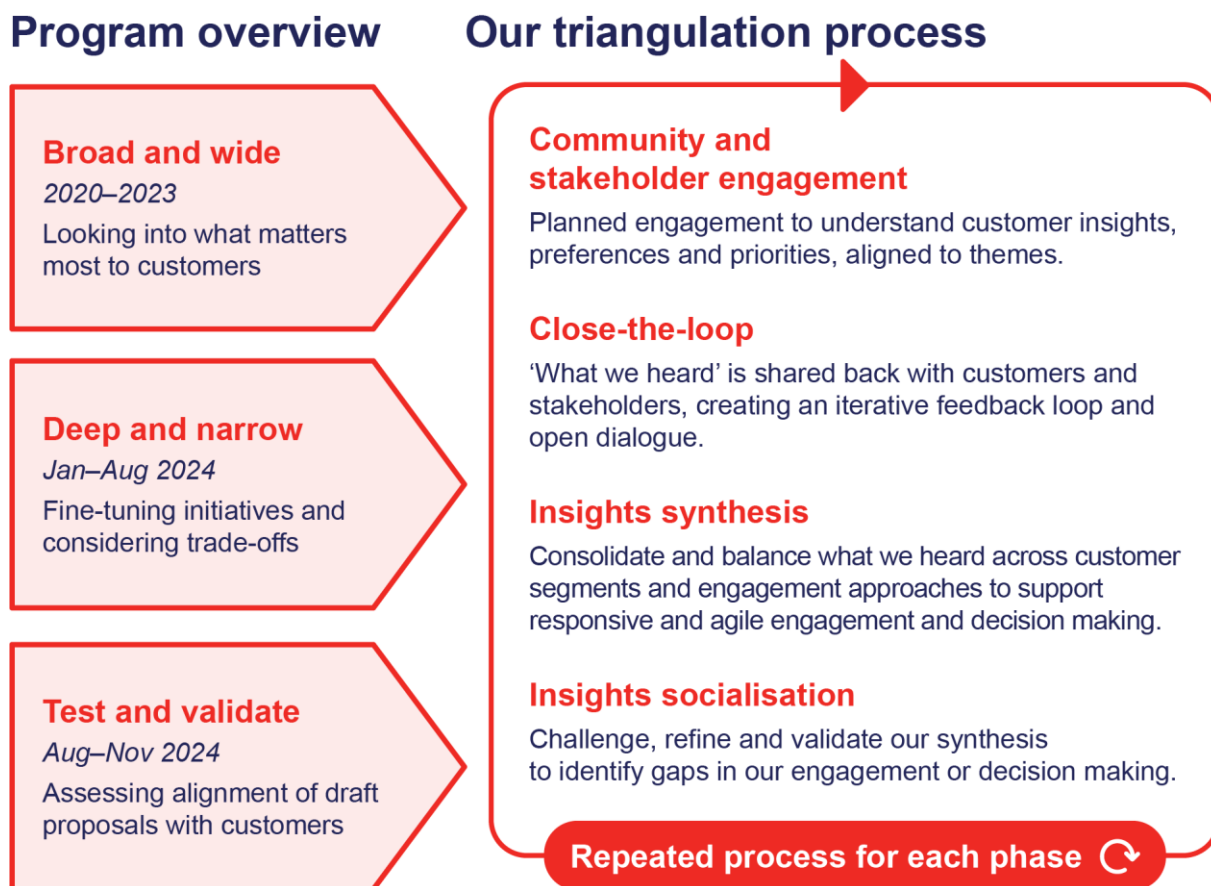


Powercor executive participating in a deliberative forum, Adam Gellie, General Manager Network Services.

## 5. Effective engagement

An overview of our engagement approach is outlined in figure 3.

**FIGURE 3 AN OVERVIEW OF OUR ENGAGEMENT APPROACH**



### 5.1 Explaining our engagement approach

#### 5.1.1 Broad and wide

Broad and wide was the foundation of our engagement and the lens through which we identified engagement themes and topics. During this phase, we met a broad range of community members to identify concerns, common themes, and knowledge gaps. Early feedback, consultations with other Australian networks, and research on essential services led us to focus on three key topics: reliability and resilience, affordability and equity, and energy transition. Customer service emerged as a key concern across all areas. Safety, which we understood from the previous reset most customers consider a given, was incorporated under the banner of reliability and resilience.

Engagement activities during this phase included:

- Customer valuation of services improvements (2021)
- [Climate Change and Network Resilience Commitments Report \(2021\)](#)
- [Exports Trial Research \(Flexible Service Offer Optimisation\) \(2022\)](#)
- [Community Roundtables: Resilience \(2022\)](#)

- [Broad and Wide: Powercor \(2022\)](#)
- [Broad and Wide: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Customers \(2022\)](#)
- [Broad and Wide: Youth \(2022\)](#)
- [Broad and Wide: Yorta Yorta Country \(2023\)](#)

### 5.1.2 Deep and narrow

In mid-2023 we commenced targeted discussions with stakeholders and customers to refine key topics and themes. Through in-depth conversations and feedback, we analysed options and considered trade-offs to optimise customer outcomes. The deep and narrow sessions informed what would become our draft proposal.

Key engagement activities during this phase included:

- [Future Energy Network Forum \(2023\)](#)
- [Regional and Rural Summit \(2023\)](#)
- [Customer Values Analysis Refresh \(2024\)](#)
- [Vulnerable Customer Engagement \(2024\)](#)
- [Test & Optimise Community Workshops \(2024\)](#)
- [Trade-off Evaluation: Mass Market Customers \(2024\)](#)

### 5.1.3 Test and validate

The final phase commenced in September 2024. It followed the release of the draft proposal and designed to understand whether what we had proposed was sufficiently responding to customer and stakeholder needs and preferences. Feedback we received was socialised and discussed with our Customer Advisory Panel and our Executive where refinements and changes were implemented to our investment plans which are now reflected in the regulatory proposal.

The test and validate phase was multi-faceted involving general engagement through focus groups, townhalls, a summit and roundtables in addition to more bespoke engagement with commercial and industrial customers and First People.

Key engagement activities during this phase included:

- [Validation: Mass Customer Engagement \(survey\) \(2024\)](#)
- [Validation: Roundtables \(2024\)](#)
- [Targeted Validation: Commercial and Industrial Customers \(2024\)](#)





## **5.2 Embedding customer-oriented principles**

Throughout the engagement program we have sought to be open, evidence-based, inclusive and agile. The following principles have guided our engagement and have been critical in understanding the preferences and needs of our customers and stakeholders.

### **5.2.1 Fostering transparency**

We have consistently engaged with our customers and stakeholders in a clear manner using simple language. This involves being clear on how their input influences the proposal and provided the opportunity to share feedback to ensure their voices have been heard and appropriately considered. Executives and expenditure workstream leaders have been present at all engagements. Clear governance processes have been in place to ensure transparency and consistent feedback of customer sentiment is presented to executive and board members.

### **5.2.2 Providing reliable evidence**

To ensure the accuracy of our findings, we routinely tested observations with our Customer Advisory Panel, allowing them to scrutinise feedback and whether our investment solutions were responsive to customer needs and preferences. A triangulation approach was adopted following completion of each engagement phase and captured in a dynamic transparent customer synthesis that was available to workstream leaders, the executive and the Customer Advisory Panel.

### **5.2.3 Promoting inclusivity and collaboration**

Broad representation of customers from all parts of the network was sought. To achieve this, we actively identified and engaged with traditionally overlooked communities to ensure their voices are heard. We used a range of engagement tools and approaches to ensure our program was accessible to all. In particular, we made much greater use of our online platform and social media, to improve our reach to different audiences and capture their feedback.

### **5.2.4 Agile and adaptive**

We adopted a wide range of activities and were not constrained to amending or changing these as circumstances demanded. Following the conclusion of an engagement activity, we reviewed what worked and did not work and made those changes immediately. Whilst this can be challenging, and often placed demands on staff, we believe it has delivered a richness in outcomes and data that would otherwise not have been possible.

### **5.2.5 Customer and stakeholder segmentation**

Powercor's customer base is both broad and uniquely distinct compared to other networks in Victoria. Understanding the specific needs and preferences of Powercor customers was critical to the planning and delivery of our engagement program. Throughout the program, we were intentional in gathering feedback from customers, stakeholders, and the CAP specific to this network. This approach ensured that insights and feedback were not gathered homogeneously but instead reflected the unique characteristics of Powercor stakeholders. One distinct example of this was delivering our regional and rural summits in collaboration with institutions that already have reach throughout the Powercor customer base.

To help build our understanding of community needs it was essential to plan engagements to be face-to-face, and also adapt to an online environment where needed to optimise attendance and ease of

access for our stakeholders. Within this reset we delivered face-to-face engagements across the following areas:

- Bendigo
- Ballarat
- Trentham
- Mildura
- Geelong
- Creswick
- Torquay



Special interest group stakeholders, farmers, residential customers at the regional and rural summit 2024.



CAP member / First People Advisory Panel Chair participating in the regional and rural summit 2024.

## 5.2.6 Seeking engagement feedback to support iterative improvement

After qualitative engagements, customers were asked to complete a feedback survey to support the refinement of the engagement process. This feedback was reviewed following each engagement by the project team where changes were discussed and agreed on for following engagements.

Feedback scores across engagements ranged from 3.59 to 5 (out of 5).

**“Great cross section of participants. Huge kudos to Powercor for organising. Needs to do this more. Mark Clarke (GM Powercor) was brilliant.”**

*Special interest group stakeholder, 2023*

**“Was great to have a rep from the organisation on each table really listening to us.”**

*Powercor residential customers, 2024*

**“On behalf of my community, very grateful for this opportunity to have input/collaborate. B) Learn more about the transition challenge, c) get insights to Powercor's significant challenges.”**









*Special interest group stakeholder, 2023*



Special interest group stakeholder participating in the feedback survey for the regional and rural summit 2023.

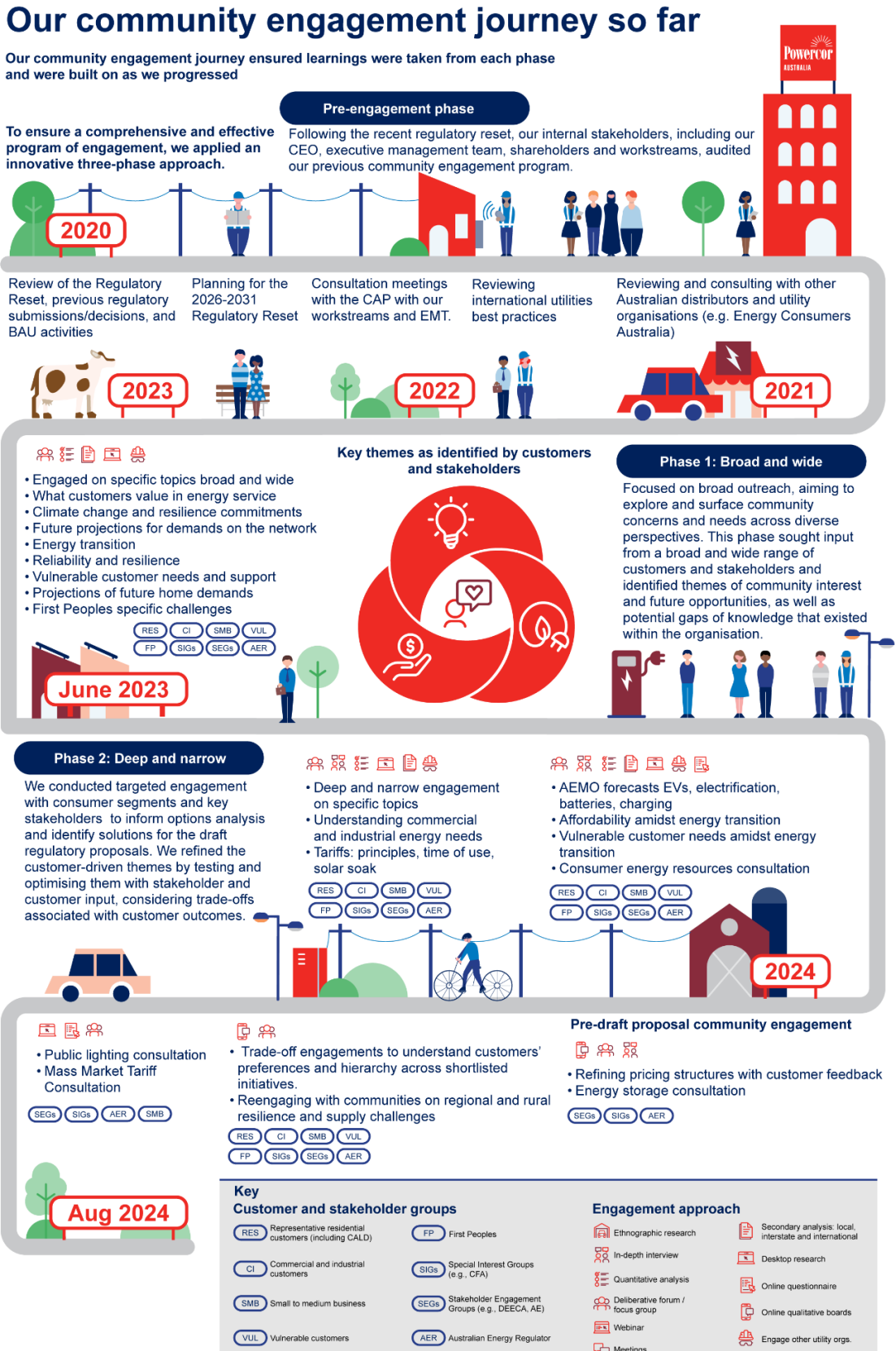
## 5.3 Applying top-down and bottom-up principles

FIGURE 4 APPLYING TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP PRINCIPLES TO ENGAGEMENT

BOTTOM-UP INPUTS	
Our approach	How we applied to our proposal
 <p><b>Identified need</b> Using customer feedback and behavioural trends to identify service level expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees at our Rural and Regional Summit (2023) strongly urged us to develop a long-term plan for regional and rural supply</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Options assessment</b> Using quantitative customer feedback and trade-off preferences to prioritise options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our trade-off forum tested three investment options with customers (including do-nothing), with 74% of customers supporting investments of \$50–70m to improve service levels</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Value to customers</b> Using customer values to quantify economic benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We valued constraints using AER approved values of customer reliability and emissions reduction</li> </ul>
TOP-DOWN PRINCIPLES	
Our principles	How we applied to our proposal
 <p><b>Affordability</b> No material price increases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our draft proposal included \$45m of investments, notwithstanding modelling that showed \$72m of works were economic. This prioritised the principles of affordability for our customers and acceptability to regulators. Our program also reflected future considerations, recognising that large areas of our SWER network are approaching end-of-life now and longer-term needs are likely to grow</li> <li>Feedback during the test and validate phase of engagement from both the Rural and Regional Summit (2024) and the CAP, aligned with a more ambitious approach given the scale of the challenges ahead</li> <li>Our revised approach, while still being conscious of affordability, proposes increased investment based on greater consideration of equity for regional customers and acceptance to government and customers alike</li> <li>We have also ensured the proposed investment is capable of delivery within the regulatory period</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Equity</b> Reducing systemic service level imbalances and improve vulnerable customer outcomes</p>	
 <p><b>Future-focus</b> Considering how potential solutions meet future customer needs, and ‘why now’</p>	
 <p><b>Acceptability</b> Considering the capability of acceptance by customers, regulators and government</p>	
 <p><b>Deliverability</b> Only proposing what we can deliver</p>	
 <p><b>Accountability</b> Ensuring we deliver what we say we will</p>	

## 5.4 Engagement program overview

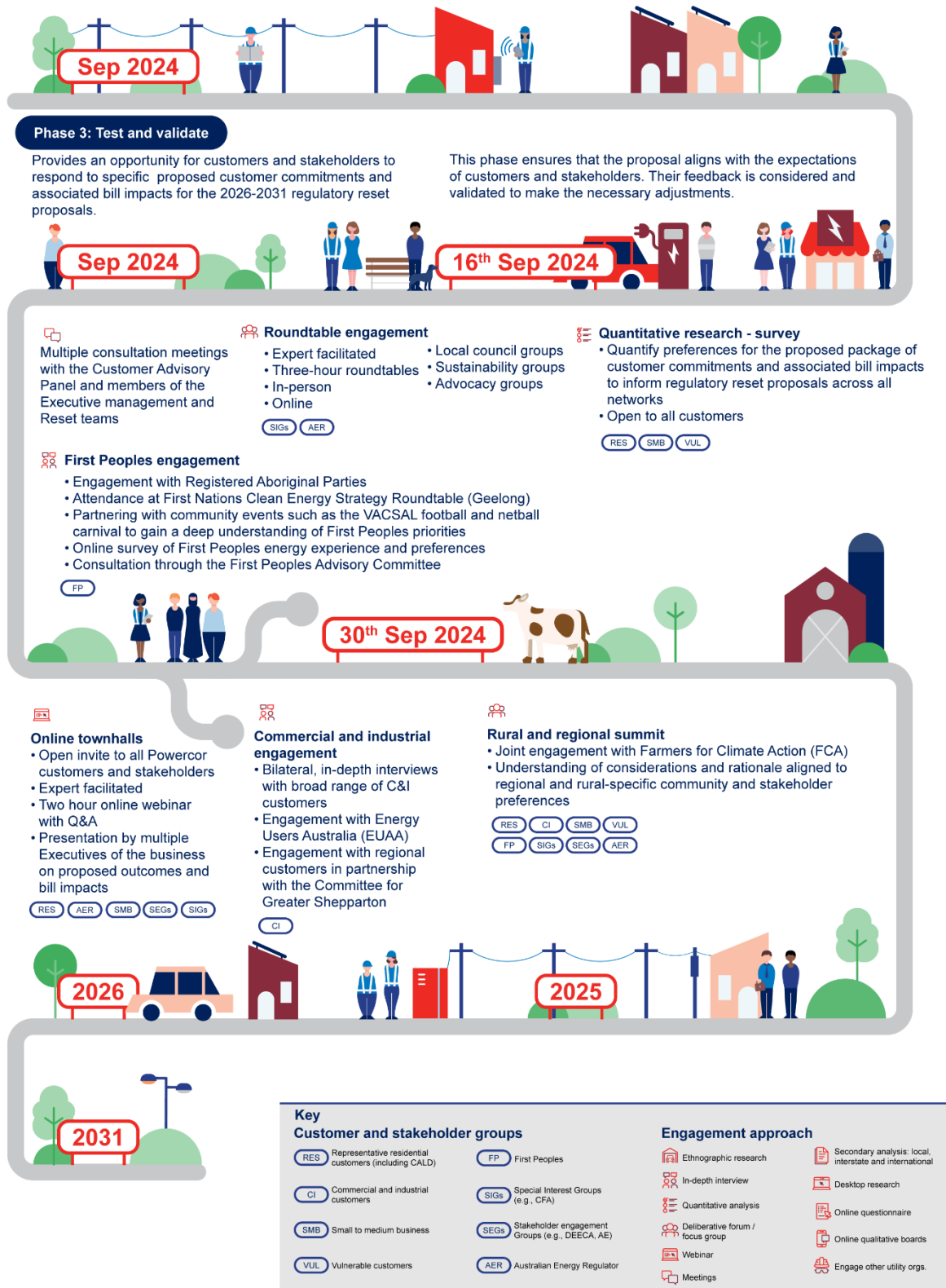
FIGURE 5A OUR ENGAGEMENT JOURNEY PRIOR TO THE DRAFT PROPOSAL



**FIGURE 5B OUR ENGAGEMENT JOURNEY FOLLOWING THE DRAFT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

## Engagement following our draft proposal

The final phase, test and validate, was designed to receive direct input from customers and stakeholders into the final proposal



## 5.5 Triangulation as a key process in our engagement approach

Following a review of approaches in other jurisdictions, we adopted the principle of triangulation that had been applied by various water businesses in the United Kingdom. Triangulation was attractive as it applied a unique iterative approach, and a dynamic synthesis, that tracked how thinking evolved and was overlaid with new information and/or evidence as the program evolved.

Another key aspect was that the process brought together executives, workstream leads, the engagement team and advisors to arrive at a common understanding of what we had seen and heard in the evidence.

The dynamic synthesis consisted of an ongoing meta-analysis that included all engagements and insights Powercor had undertaken over this reset period (and previous relevant reset information), as well as other organisational supporting insights. This document was articulate in identifying customer needs and preferences across each customer (residential, small-medium business as well as commercial and industrial organisations). The nuances between customers groups was a critical factor in this document to support decision making for Powercor team members.

This process ensured all information and evidence was thoroughly tested and evaluated before being incorporated in our final proposal.

**FIGURE 6: OUR TRIANGULATION APPROACH**



Advantages of our approach includes:

- Reduction of bias through cross-referencing information from diverse sources.
- Surfacing any misalignments in feedback between grassroots customers, customer representatives and stakeholders.

- Development of customer-responsive strategies based on contemporary knowledge of customers' needs, preferences and experiences.
- Design relevant customer engagement strategies that address specific concerns and desires.
- Trust building:
  - by delivering on what we say
  - keeps us accountable to customers and stakeholders, and
  - maintains an ongoing relationship with the community after engagement.
- Facilitates continuous improvement, encouraging innovation to meet evolving customer expectations and market dynamics.

## **5.6 Using innovative methods and core engagement practices to seek feedback from customers and stakeholders**

### **Core quantitative techniques**

#### **Inferred preference**

- We used inferred analytical techniques, rather than stated, to understand and quantify individuals' preferences. For example, this related to ascertaining customer preferences across priorities and initiatives, as well as specific willingness to pay.
- This quantitative technique includes choice modelling, choice experiments, willingness to pay, and willingness to accept.

### **Core qualitative techniques**

#### **Deliberative**

- We conducted deliberative forums to examine community perspectives on key themes.
- Used extensive, in-person workshops to give customers and stakeholders time and information to make informed judgments.

#### **Qualitative methods: Online boards, forums, summits, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews**

- We utilised both online and in-person methods to enable maximum participation from customers.
- Online methods provided accessibility and flexibility.
- In-person methods offered rich interaction and controlled environments.
- We chose methods based on research objectives, target audience, and engagement nature for maximum accessibility.

#### **Ethnographic research**

- Involved systematic observation and recording of customer behaviour in natural settings (e.g., in-home observations of energy consumption).
- Included in-depth studies through participant observation, interviews, and analysis of qualitative data such as field notes and documents.





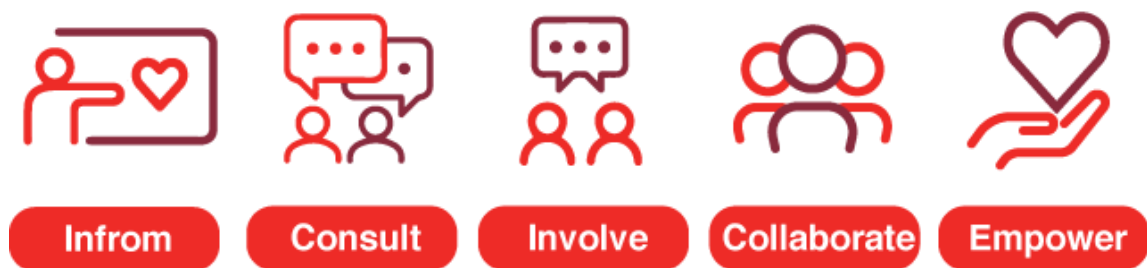
Special interest group stakeholder participating in a deliberative forum.

## 5.7 Leveraging the IAP2 spectrum

Different issues and customer or stakeholder groups require different engagement methods. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. The level of customer participation we employed was informed by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. We understand that some issues may not interest customers or could be non-negotiable such as compliance matters. If this was the case we focused on 'informing'. For topics of greater interest, where customers had more influence, we aimed to involve or collaborate, to ensure their views were reflected in our proposals.

We employ a breadth of research and engagement methods tailored to the target audience leveraging the IAP2 Engagement spectrum.

### IAP2 SPECTRUM

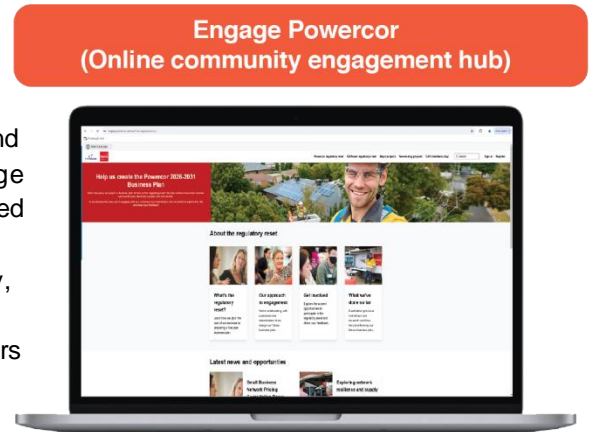


We are proud that our program has been sufficiently flexible to adapt to customers' varying levels of interest. We leveraged the spectrum as a guide to foster more meaningful relationships with our customers and stakeholders and bring clarity to their level of influence on the topics being engaged on.

## 5.8 Keeping our community informed and ensuring we are ready to receive and integrate feedback

### Engage Powercor

Our customers and stakeholders have many channels through which they can engage with us. This includes our digital platform Engage Powercor, launched in May 2023. This acts as an online hub for all aspects of our engagement program, keeping our customers informed and the ability to consult on topics. This platform offers a range of resources, including information about the reset, detailed on our engagement approach and access to all related reports from each stage of engagement. More importantly, this provides customers and stakeholders with the opportunity to have their say and actively participate. Users can sign up for events, review past research and events, and provide feedback to us. This has been critical in ensuring customer and stakeholder voices are heard.



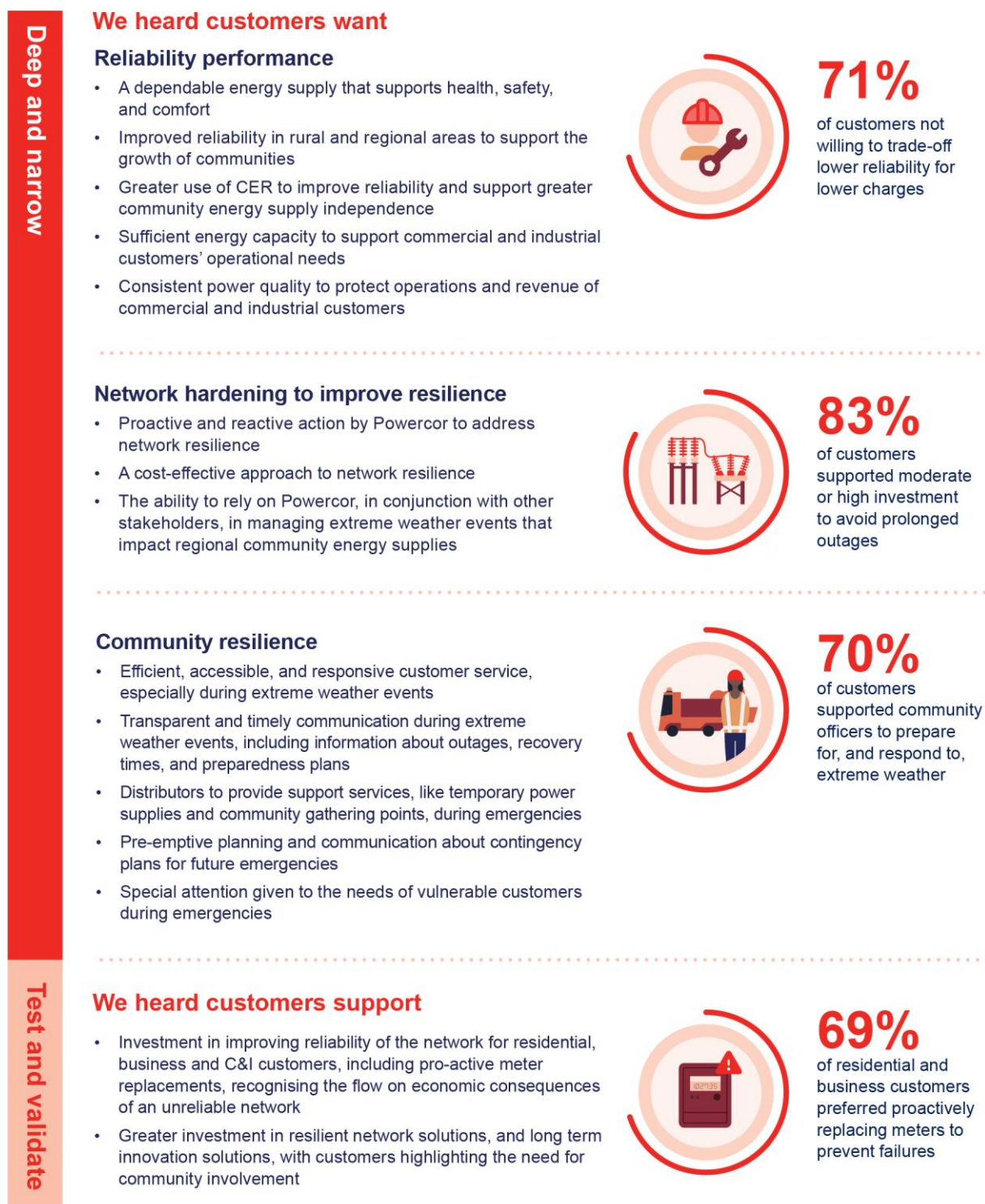
### Social Media Channels

Channels such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube have played a key role in ensuring our customers are kept informed on our investment proposals and encourages our customers and to utilise Engage Powercor to have their say. The social media impressions and views shown in Figure 1.

## 6. Customer insights and learning

The tables below provide an overview of the key learnings and insights from our engagement program. To develop this overview, our team leveraged our dynamic synthesis report that captured granular feedback aligned to each customer cohort including residential, small-medium businesses, commercial and industrial customers and stakeholder groups over our reset engagement journey.

**FIGURE 7 WHAT WE HEARD: RELIABILITY, SAFETY AND RESILIENCE**



**FIGURE 8 WHAT WE HEARD: ENERGY TRANSITION**

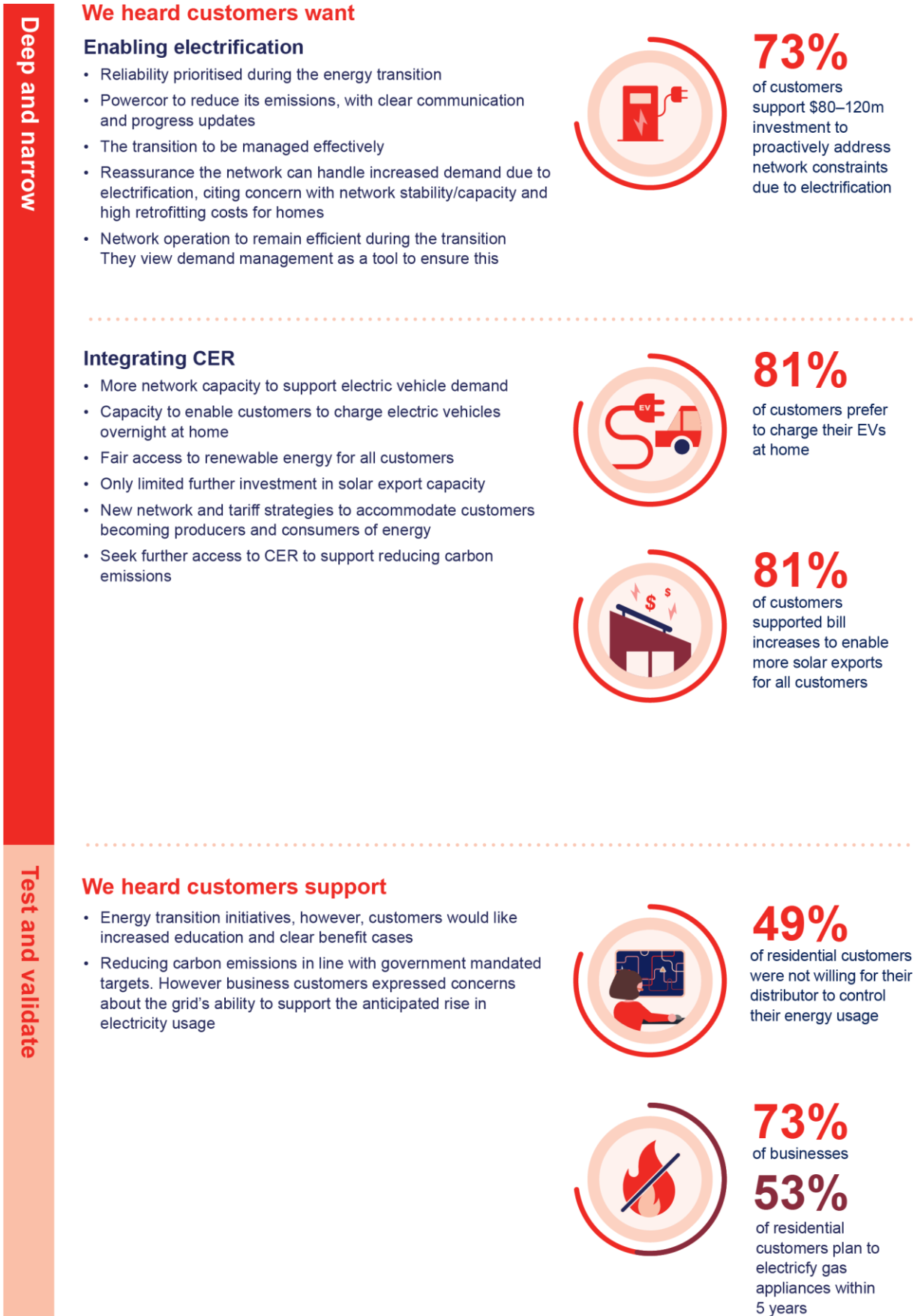


FIGURE 9 WHAT WE HEARD: AFFORDABILITY AND EQUITY

Deep and narrow

### We heard customers want

#### Supporting vulnerable customers

- Simpler and clearer energy information and resources, especially for those experiencing vulnerability, to assist them in managing their energy bills
- Improvements in network resilience to be fair, with a focus on supporting vulnerable customers
- Stronger safeguards to assist customers experiencing vulnerability reduce their energy bill



**23%**

of customers are under rental or mortgage stress

#### Low-cost and fair outcomes

- Network improvements to be affordable
- Any necessary cost increases to be introduced gradually
- New investments to provide clear value and be transparent
- The burden of transitioning to renewable energy sources to be equitable
- Future tariff structures to be more adaptable to accommodate evolving energy consumption patterns
- All customers to have access to the benefits of renewable energy
- A basic minimum reliability service to manage the differences in services with their metropolitan counterparts
- To be included in decision-making processes around resilience and energy transition initiatives



**74%**

of customers were willing to invest \$50–70m in enhancing service levels in regional and rural areas



**78%**

of customers were willing to pay to improve performance for worst-served customers

Test and validate

### We heard customers support

- Increased augmentation investment in regional and rural communities to enable all Victorians to participate in the energy transition
- Customer assistance packages, increasing equity in the network, with customers suggesting an increase in dollar amount to increase value for customers
- Low-cost solutions enabling a small increase in bill impact, with customers seeking additional and clear information on customer benefits as well as the risk of bill adjustments in the future.

**“If investment is made, then rural and regional communities could thrive”**

**“Together, we can ensure a brighter, more sustainable future for our rural and regional communities”**

Source: *Powercor Rural and Regional Summit October 2024*

## 7. Our engagement partners

Recognising the identified improvement opportunities from the previous reset, we have sought for this review to supplement our internal resources with specialist independent engagement expertise. We are aware throughout this engagement program; we have relied heavily on external expertise. A key requirement however of our engaged external advisors has been skills transfer to internal staff and we believe in future use of external expertise will be limited to circumstances where independence and transparency are essential.

### 7.1 Forethought

Throughout the entirety of the engagement program, we partnered with Forethought, an independent market research and community engagement firm, to bolster our skills and expertise and provide independent oversight.

Forethought's role involved the design of our stakeholder sessions, including qualitative and quantitative research activities.

Forethought acted solely as an independent advisor and executor, playing a crucial role in offering customer insights and market



Forethought facilitators at various community engagements.

research aligned with best practice. Forethought's reports on all engagement sessions are publicly available at [engage.powercor.com.au](https://engage.powercor.com.au).

It should be noted that whilst Forethought was consulted on the engagement program itself, the development of the strategy underlying program was the responsibility of the business.

### 7.2 Customer Advisory Panel

A further finding from the 2021–2026 regulatory reset was the need for a more robust independent customer feedback mechanism. We therefore created a customer representation body, the Customer Advisory Panel (CAP). The CAP has represented our customers for the past three years. Its primary role has been critiquing our engagement program and approach, challenging customer feedback and sentiment, advising on customer outcomes and refining both problems and solutions.

The CAP comprises of eleven diverse and unbiased members, including an independent Chair and Deputy Chair. A total of 16 formal CAP meetings were held across 2023 and 2024, in addition to fortnightly progress meetings with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

CAP members brought a diverse skills and experience. This included, amongst other things, consumer advocacy, technical knowledge, regulatory expertise and engagement skills.

In November 2024 the CAP produced a report on our draft proposal that is available on our website. It is anticipated they will produce a further report following release of the regulatory proposal in March 2025.



Powercor Customer Advisory Panel members.

### 7.3 Joint Victorian distributor engagement

In conjunction with other Victorian networks, we held joint engagements on shared issues to avoid customer and stakeholder fatigue. The goals were to inform the 2026–2031 framework and approach paper, develop resilience investment principles, address evolving customer vulnerability issues and create a unified approach to network tariffs for residential and small and medium business customers. The key outcomes from the joint engagement included alignment on service gaps, a common approach to assessing climate change impacts, standard network tariff structures, and a joint position on regulatory challenges. Specialist consultancies involved in the engagements included BD Infrastructure, RPS Group, and Nation Partners.



Special interest group stakeholders participating at community engagement events.

## 8. What have we learnt?

We understand that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to engagement. Keeping informed of industry engagement strategies both locally and globally will always be essential.

We've made efforts to improve our engagement for this reset, building upon feedback from the last reset, however we recognise that we need to continue to build on what we have learnt and what we need to better.

### 8.1 Recruitment and sampling

Significant resources were required in recruitment of engagements, especially for qualitative sessions and face-to-face engagements in rural areas of the network. This attributable to several challenges we are looking to improve on including customers/stakeholders having other priorities, apathy in relation to energy, absence of trust, engagement fatigue and not necessarily understanding the role of distributors. Many sessions involved payment of incentives which became increasingly significant the longer the proposed session.

For special interest group stakeholders, recruitment in some regional and rural areas was sometimes challenging. If we had low uptake on a planned engagement, or were receiving feedback about the dates not aligning to community members' schedule, hosting an online session was found to be an effective option and would maximise attendance. This was successfully used in this engagement period and an option we will initial plan for when establishing future engagements.

Recruitment for larger customer sessions was another challenge with most sessions having to be bilateral.

Going forward, we are exploring the feasibility of a permanent customer panel similar to approaches used by distributors in the United Kingdom.



Powercor commercial and industrial customers and Powercor GM Regulation, Renate Vogt, participating in a deliberative forum.

### 8.2 Engagement fatigue

Utility regulation in general is increasing its focus on the need for greater customer and stakeholder engagement. There is however only a finite level of interest and willingness to engage with an associated incentive. This is particularly the case where engagement required is lengthy or impacts on work or leisure activities.



Whilst we explored joint distributor engagement on several common issues, we found that this process often masked the unique concerns of customers within our network. Further consideration is needed as to how we address this issue but possibilities under consideration include greater use of business-as-usual material and further consolidation of engagement activities.

### **8.3 Understanding**

We had success throughout this reset with the provision of pre-read material and funding customer time to absorb that pre-read. We also used testing of understanding in several activities which was also successful. This approach will continue however, as mentioned, the feasibility of a permanent customer panel is under consideration which would greatly assist understanding.

### **8.4 Breadth of material**

It was difficult to explain the complete package of investments to customers unless they were industry stakeholders with prior knowledge. What we found was more successful was explaining the proposal in terms of customer outcomes and whether these outcomes represented value.

There is work to be done in collaborating with AER to improve understanding of what customers will and will not engage with, and for our engagement methods to shift focus to outcomes and customer commitments, as opposed to investment.

### **8.5 Engagement channels**

The broadest reach and most accessible channels customers found during our engagement program was via the internet. For this engagement program, we established our Engage website in 2023 and then refreshed it again in late 2024. For the first time, we also sought to use targeted social media included Facebook and LinkedIn.

Internet based engagement an avenue we plan to grow. It is extremely cost effective and has wide reach. We believe high quality content and prudent targeting can deliver robust and rigorous evidence.

### **8.6 Quantitative work**

There will always be a place for qualitative engagement however we have found that for some customer segments and topics that the evidence captured at these sessions is more subjective, and open to challenge by regulators. It has often proven more difficult for the business to apply, especially in the preparation of business cases to support investment analysis.

Moving forward we see ourselves continuing to shift resourcing more towards quantitative based analysis in continuation of the trend in this engagement program.



For further information visit:

 [engage.CitiPower.com.au](https://engage.CitiPower.com.au)

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