



Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement

Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report

Produced for: Powercor

April 2023





Image above: From left to right, Renate Vogt, General Manager Regulation, Powercor; & Tegan Miller, Engagement Lead, Powercor First Peoples Engagement Team

Introduction



Acknowledgement

Powercor & Forethought acknowledges and pays our respects to Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and recognises them as the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of this land. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we engaged.

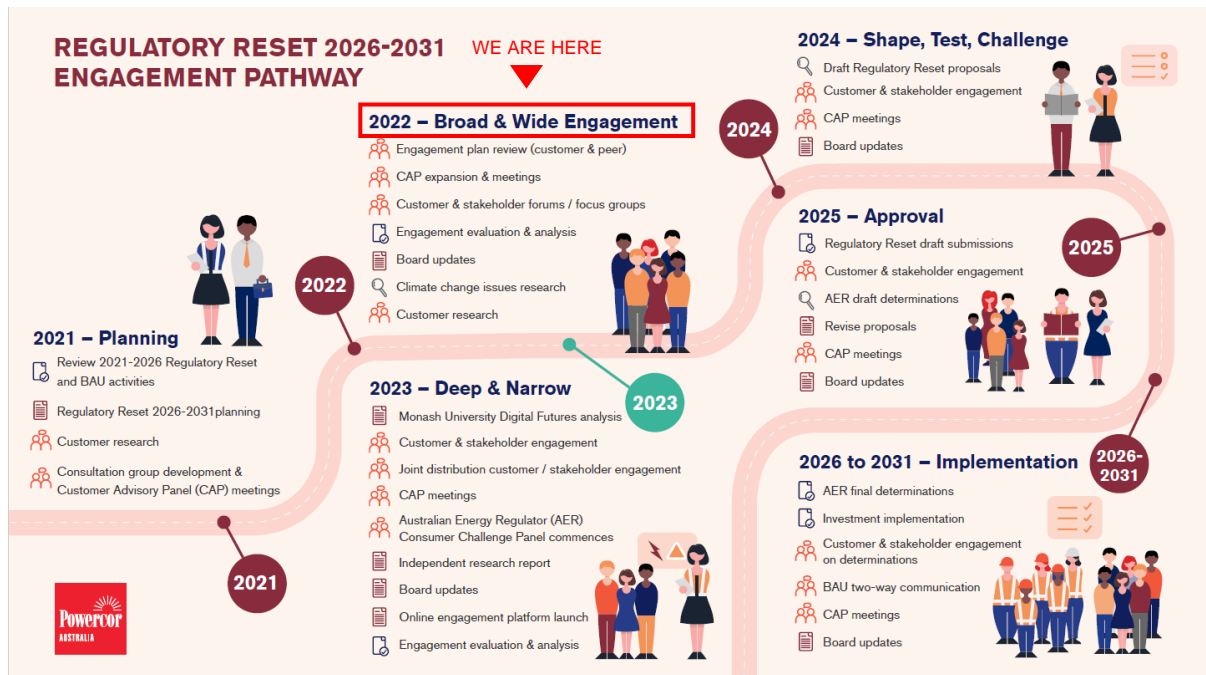
In developing this report, we consulted First Peoples from the community and Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative who helped us to better understand and identify issues important to First Peoples and how we can best meet community needs and expectations through the Regulatory Reset.

Introduction

Regulatory Reset Proposal Program

To support the development of the 2026-2031 Regulatory Reset Proposal, a Foundational Program of Community Engagement was conducted to identify what was important to Powercor customers, prior to engaging on more specific topics to develop the Proposal.

The below diagram explains the full Proposal Program. This report includes insights from the ‘2022 - Broad & Wide Engagement’.



Broad & Wide Engagement

A broad and wide program of community engagement was essential to the development of the regulatory reset proposal to ensure it genuinely reflected the needs and preferences of all customers.

This program was designed to ensure that all customer voices could be heard across the network. This included customers of varying geographies, age groups, socio-economic status, as well as those from ethnic, linguistic and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Forethought's Involvement

Forethought is a Marketing, Analytics and Strategy organisation with teams that specialise in Research and Engagement within multiple industries including Utilities.

Forethought's experience in the energy industry involves conducting customer and stakeholder research and engagement with organisations across the full value chain including electricity generation, distribution, transmission and retail services. They partner 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 both Utilities and Research/Engagement capability to design, capture the engagement forum and objectively report back on the needs and preferences of customers across the network.

Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Involvement

Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative are a leading provider of community-controlled whole of life services that support, honour and respect First Peoples. Rumbalara is committed to strengthening connections to Country, culture, and community through opportunities to belong and receive quality health and wellbeing support.

Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative supported this consultation by providing the engagement venue in Mooroopna, and providing support through the recruitment process. We extend our gratitude to Aunty Cheryl Bourke and Uncle Lance James for sharing their cultural knowledge and practices.

First Peoples Engagement Team Involvement

Michelle Isles, Senior Advisor, and Tegan Miller, Engagement Lead from Powercor's First Peoples Engagement Team, are experts in facilitating and engaging with First Peoples. Their role within this consultation included advising on:

- Engagement design
- Invitation drafting
- Objective reporting
- Feedback capture
- Ensuring culturally appropriateness and safety of the engagement
- Building longer-term relationships between First Peoples and Powercor



Image above: Yorta Yorta Community Member



Image above: From left to right: Tegan Miller, Engagement Lead, and Michelle Isles, Senior Advisor, Powercor First Peoples Engagement Team and Yorta Yorta Community Member

Objectives & Methodology

Objectives & Methodology

The Broad & Wide Engagement program is the foundational engagement program in the development of the 2026-2031 regulatory reset proposal. This reflects Powercor's genuine commitment to develop a proposal that is anchored in customer needs and preferences for the immediate and longer-term future of the network. To ensure the Broad & Wide program includes customer representation across Powercor's diverse population, a First Peoples consultation was held. This consultation was specific to the Yorta Yorta community in and surrounding Mooroopna.

This program sought to achieve the objectives set out below.

2026-2031 Regulatory Reset Objective

Develop a Regulatory Reset Proposal for the 2026-2031 period that aligns with the needs and preferences of the Powercor customer base.

Yorta Yorta Country Engagement Objectives

- Support Powercor's longer term goal to establish strong relationships with First Peoples
- Identify and understand customers' current needs and preferences for the immediate and longer-term
- Understand how customers' unmet needs could be met through investment or divestment in our network
- Identify the key themes and areas that customers prioritise investment in

Approach

Who

Forums were attended by members of Powercor's senior executive and leadership team to listen and answer customer questions without biasing or leading the conversation. This face-to-face consultation was attended by:

- | |
|---|
| 1. General Manager Regulation |
| 2. Head of Regulatory Policy & Compliance |

This forum on Yorta Yorta Country was attended by First Peoples across the Powercor network.

Consideration was given to bringing a diverse cross-section of the community together, whilst understanding that the stories and experiences shared by participants not only included individual's feedback, but also extended to their families and the broader community.

Forethought also conducted separate forums with customers across the Powercor network in Bendigo, Ballarat, Torquay and an online rural forum (inclusive of Horsham customers); as well as specific consultation for participants aged 18-25 (Youth). Forethought worked alongside the LOTE Agency to facilitate culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) engagements across the Indian, Arabic and Chinese people which included customers who resided within the Powercor network. Separate forums were held for these individuals to support specific cultural and demographic needs, and a mix of face-to-face and online approaches were implemented to support ease of attending the sessions. The findings from these sessions are detailed in a separate report.

Participation

Customer Group	Engagement	Consultation Date & Time	Number of Attendees
Yorta Yorta Country	Face-to-face	15 March 2023 12:15pm – 3:15pm (3 hours)	Customer total: 24 CAP members: 0 AER representation: 0

Recruitment

There were two main channels used to recruit participants. These were chosen to ensure that the avenue utilised was able to reach and attract a diverse group of customers to participate from within the community. These two channels were:

1. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Facebook group
 - Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative have a Facebook group with 4,200 followers. Working closely with the Communications team, we were able to share a consultation invite via this social platform to support a broad reach of First Peoples who reside on Yorta Yorta Country.
2. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative staff email
 - Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative employ 300-350 staff, many whom identify as First Peoples. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative staff hold careers that span across the medical centre, childcare centre, and an Elders group.

Compensation & Local Charity Donation

As consultations were held over a lengthy timeframe (3 hours), participants were compensated for time spent (\$300).

In addition to the individual compensation payment, Powercor also gave a donation following the engagement. A donation of \$500 was donated to Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative.

Below outlines the total donations across the Powercor engagement program:

- \$500 Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative
- \$400 Bendigo Foodshare
- \$450 Foodbank
- \$200 Feedme Surf Coast
- \$200 Geelong Mums



Image above: Yorta Yorta Community Members

Session Methodology

The Yorta Yorta Country consultation commenced with a Welcome to Country by Yorta Yorta Elders Aunty Cheryl Bourke and Uncle Lance James. This included participation from all individuals involved in the session.

When returning to the facility to commence the conversation, the session facilitators, the First People's Engagement Team, started with introductions and a conversation about the role of Powercor through a visual activity. Powercor's General Manager of Regulation shared an overview of Powercor and provided context on the topics of the session.

The four themes for discussion were:

- Affordability and Equity
- Energy Transformation
- Customer Experience
- Reliability and Resilience

In smaller working groups (~10 individuals), these four themes¹ were explored in more detail to understand what was important to First Peoples. These smaller working groups ensured that everyone had an opportunity to discuss and share their feedback.

Within each discussion, customers were asked about their community and household electricity needs and preferences today and into the future. They were also asked to share ideas on what they wanted Powercor to focus on in relation to that specific theme.

In instances where customers had queries or required further context and detail about the theme, further information was provided (this was general information about electricity, selected purposely to educate without biasing the participants). Care was taken to ensure that information was presented in easy-to-understand language and format and did not bias customers' views. Facilitators moderated these conversations to allow the information to be shared, whilst ensuring that the main discussion involved all customers sharing their feedback and ideas.

After covering all themes, some customers nominated topics that were most important to them, and then shared ideas for how Powercor could best include customer views going forward.

Customers then filled out a feedback survey to support Forethought and Powercor in improving performance in future forums.

Following the consultations, Forethought undertook facilitated reporting workshops with key staff present and internal quality checks to ensure information captured was accurate and reflected the sentiment of the discussion across themes and preferences that are captured in this document.

¹ The four themes of focus were developed by a Meta-analysis of CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy Customer Insights to understand what overarching areas were important to customers.

IAP2 Spectrum

The level of customer participation in this program was intentional and is highlighted below. Within this consultation, customers were involved in shaping the direction of focus for Powercor by discussing a wide range of issues, and then voting on the area they thought was most important.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation²

	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.

Methodology Refinements

In earlier consultations, a larger amount of information was provided to customers relating to the four themes (affordability and equity, energy transformation, customer experience and reliability and resilience). However, we observed that this could be overwhelming for participants and limited the discussion time. Therefore, for the Powercor sessions, the information provided was reduced and only shared as required throughout the conversation³.

Another refinement made to the consultation was specific to ensure a considered approach to engaging with First Peoples. Forethought and Powercor engaged Powercor's First Peoples Engagement Team to support facilitating and engaging with First Peoples.

Their role within this consultation included advising on:

- Engagement design
- Invitation drafting
- Objective reporting
- Feedback capture
- Ensuring culturally appropriateness and safety of the engagement
- Building longer-term relationships between First Peoples and Powercor

² IAP2, 2018, IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, accessed 22 November 2022, https://iap2.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2018_IAP2_Spectrum.pdf

³ Methodology refinements was made to all engagements across the CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy consultations, and not specific to this network.

Engagement Context

During the period of consultation, there were various factors influencing the lives of customers and across the broader electricity industry. We hypothesise these events had an impact on the needs and preferences of customers.

At the time of engagement, the following events occurred or continued to occur:

- Well-publicised cyber-attacks on Optus (22/9/22⁴) and Medibank (12/10/22⁵)
- Federal Government budget release that announced that “Electricity and gas will rise sharply as the cost is passed on to households, the budget said, with power bills set to rise 20 per cent in the second half of 2022 and a further 30 per cent in 2023-24.”⁶
- Severe rainfall and flooding across Victoria from 11 October 2022 ⁷
- Shepparton experienced severe flooding that was documented as the area’s worst in decades⁸
- War in the Ukraine with the Russian invasion impacting Australian energy prices⁹
- Media reports of “the annual inflation rate in Australia climbed to 7.3% in Q3 of 2022 from 6.1% in Q2, above market forecasts of 7.0%. This was the highest since Q2 1990”.¹⁰
- In July - September 2022, all living cost indexes rose¹¹. This included:
 1. Mortgage interest
 2. Food and non-alcoholic beverages
 3. Housing – including rents, utilities and other housing
 4. Furnishings, household equipment and services
 5. Remaining contributors (i.e., alcohol, tobacco, clothing, footwear, transport, communication, recreation, education, insurance and financial services)
- Victorian Government Election campaigns in late 2022 including the announcement to re-establish the State Electricity Commission of Victoria¹²

⁴ ASIC, 2022, *Guidance for consumers impacted by the Optus data breach*, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://asic.gov.au/about-asic/news-centre/news-items/guidance-for-consumers-impacted-by-the-optus-data-breach/#:~:text=On%202022%20September%202022%2C%20Optus,numbers%2C%20may%20have%20been%20exposed>.

⁵ Krester, A, Smith, P, 25 October 2022, *Minister preps for Medibank hack fallout*, Australian Financial Review, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://www.afr.com/companies/financial-services/medibank-says-more-customers-hit-by-cyberattack-20221025-p5bsl9>.

⁶ Mizen, R, 25 October 2022, *Labour’s power prices promise dead: energy costs to spike 56pc*, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/labor-s-power-prices-promise-dead-energy-costs-to-spike-56pc-20221024-p5bscz#:~:text=Electricity%20and%20gas%20will%20rise,per%20cent%20in%202023%2D24>.

⁷ Abbott, L, Ilanbey, S, Schelle, C, 11 October 2022, *People in flood risk areas told to prepare for up to 72 hours of isolation as heavy rains loom*, The Age, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/calm-before-the-storm-victoria-prepares-for-more-floods-20221011-p5botc.html>.

⁸ The Guardian, October 2022, *Victorian floods: Shepparton and Mooroopna ‘too late to leave’ as man found dead in Rochester backyard*, accessed 21st March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/15/victoria-floods-man-found-dead-in-rochester-backyard-as-shepparton-and-echuca-told-to-evacuate>.

⁹ Mercer, D, 26 February 2022, *Russian invasion of Ukraine drives up energy costs and Australians will feel the pain*, ABC News, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-26/russia-invasion-of-ukraine-to-drive-up-energy-costs-for-all/100861246>.

¹⁰ Trading Economics, September 2022, *Australian Inflation Rate*, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/australia/inflation-cpi>.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 2022, *Selected Living Cost Indexes Australia*, accessed 8 November 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>.

¹² ABC News, November 2022, *Victorian state election campaign officially begins with promises on V/Line and water bills*, accessed 8 November, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-02/victorian-state-election-first-day-of-campaign/101607624>.

Evaluation

At the conclusion of the consultation, customers were asked to complete a feedback survey to support refinement of the engagement process. The results for the Yorta Yorta Country consultation are as below.

Location/ customer group	Overall satisfaction (Out of 5)	Customer comments
Yorta Yorta Country	4.75	<p><i>"Was a great forum and I felt really comfortable to participate. Thank you" -Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p> <p><i>"I listened a lot to others and felt I could relate to a lot. I feel that Powercor staff did listen well and respected all opinions. Great session and an important one." -Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p> <p><i>"Presenters knew their stuff, delivered well and allowed for discussion. Minor [feedback to] have books/pens available before session starts." -Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe a good idea to provide some info[rmation] beforehand about the discussion points. Just to be a little bit better prepared. Thank you" -Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p> <p><i>"More workshops, preferably morning. Loved the hospitality" - Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p> <p><i>"Session was great, friendly, very welcoming." -Yorta Yorta Community member</i></p>



Image above: Yorta Yorta Community Members



Image above: Yorta Yorta Community Members

Customer Perspectives on Engagement Themes

Customer Perspective on Engagement Themes

Each consultation required customers to discuss four specific themes. At the conclusion of the discussion, customers were invited to vote on what they felt to be the most important topic for Powercor to focus on.

At an overall level, the most important topic was Affordability and Equity.

Specifically, customers were concerned about the high price of electricity, understanding how to reduce their electricity bills, with solar seen to be part of this solution. Strong feedback was shared regarding compensation to First Peoples for the use of their Country for Powercor assets and operation and the community wanted Powercor to facilitate greater contribution to their community.

To understand more information about customer views on Affordability and Equity, please refer to page 15.



Image above: Yorta Yorta Community Members

Customer Perspective on Affordability and Equity

Introduction

Affordability and equity were the most important themes across Yorta Yorta community members. Within the discussion, we learned that Powercor customers prioritised the following areas of focus:

- High and rising electricity prices
- Lack of clarity on how to read an electricity bill
- Understanding how electricity bills could be reduced through solar
- Compensation to First Peoples for using Country for infrastructure and minerals
- Powercor's role in giving back to First Peoples communities

Customer priorities and concerns

High and rising electricity prices

A large concern within the community was the high prices of electricity, especially as the cost of living overall was increasing. This was the sentiment felt across working households, as well as vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people in hardship programs and those living in commission homes.

"Back in the day we didn't have to pay for water in commission homes, and now we do. We pay for gas, electricity, internet... it was free, why are we paying now?" (Yorta Yorta Community member)

It was felt that there should be lower electricity prices for everyone, including working households who in some instances were experiencing more hardship compared to those on Centrelink. This also included vulnerable individuals, for example, those living with a disability and the elderly.

"The cost of living is expensive, even for those with jobs. People who don't work don't get anything, and we still run families." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

"We sometimes have to pay clients bills because they can't pay their bills. We don't want to see kids sitting in the dark, and that's what a lot of families do. Kids go to school without food in their stomachs... We have to think about the whole picture." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

"We're at work all day, and you still get a big bill." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

"Everyone is struggling, and we are all trying to support our families and mob." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

"My great grandmother is 94/95 and... a few weeks ago it was hot and I went to visit her; it was hotter in the house than inside... she's too scared to run her coolers because of the price of electricity. She is 94 and [overheating or the cold] could kill her. It gets hot out there. It was 32 outside and in Nan's house it was 38 degrees." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

"If we had been given back lands, and we owned our houses, we wouldn't be in such big debt which keeps contributing to all our issues." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Lack of clarity on how to read an electricity bill

The Yorta Yorta community identified support required to understand what contributes to their high bills, and how to reduce their bills through payment solutions and everyday actions.

The community wanted to be informed of the electricity bill ahead of time and to be aware of the upcoming cost. The idea of a payment plan was prioritised to support working households, as well as vulnerable individuals to pay their bill. Smaller payments on a more regular frequency were seen by some to be easier to manage compared to one off big bills. The main challenge with large payments was that once an individual misses a bill, it was challenging to find the resources to pay previous bills, as well as the upcoming bill.

"It's about having that plan in place before the bill comes..." (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Despite active management of electricity consumption at home, customers were frustrated that this did not manifest in lower bill prices. Some challenges identified that could contribute to a high bill included families hosting lots of people in their home, overpopulated homes, as well as timing of usage (i.e. usage of appliances at night). It was understood that in summer and winter, households had increased usage and therefore the bill would be higher. However, there was concern as large bills occurred for individuals whose family worked during the day, and for those who were particular about switching off power plugs and lights which neither contributed to a low bill. There was clarity wanted to understand what actions or activities would impact the bill.

“You can go around the house and turn all the switches at the back and you still get hit with a big power bill.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“At home I go around and turn off every single power point, but it doesn’t make a difference; whether it’s in the bathroom, the microwave...” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Detailed information was wanted to help with reducing the bill, for example, an individual shared that they found out that their old fridge in the shed was more costly to run, as well as old appliances compared to new appliances. Another suggestion came from an individual who knew about community members who would heat up water once a day and keep the water in a thermos to reduce the need to continue to boil the kettle throughout the day. Tailored and actionable examples were felt to help individuals reduce their bill.

In terms of the optimal setting for Powercor to share information on how to reduce electricity bills, there wasn’t hesitation to a group setting i.e. individuals were comfortable to share their bill information, however there was acknowledgement that there would be groups of people who need general support, hardship support, as well as individuals who would require one-on-one advice i.e. how to optimise solar, or how to reduce my bill based on my household activities. As well as individual and group advice, online as well as hardcopy information (i.e. brochures) was wanted.

Some felt that apps could be a solution to help keep track of bill usage, however this came with challenges that included some apps being hard to manage, and that some individuals such as the elderly, may not have mobiles or internet service.

“Some of the Elders don’t have a mobile phone or don’t know how to use the Apps... How are they supposed to know how much they are using or what their electricity bill will be?” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Another solution shared was prioritising energy efficiency when building homes. It was suggested that government housing needed to have insulation, as that would reduce the need for excess heating and cooling. Older homes were also a concern and not considered to have adequate insulation to maintain the home temperature, especially given the temperatures in summer and across winter.

“I grew up in a commission house that wasn’t insulated. We froze in winter because the heater didn’t get past the front door.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

There was frustration and negative sentiment within the community regarding retailers. They learnt that searching for a competitive price would be a way to help reduce their energy bill, however, it was felt that there were so many to choose from and it was understood that a lot of time would be required to find a cheaper deal. There was also a negative sentiment with retailers who were seen as a big business who were trying to exploit this community. An example shared was individuals who were being charged \$2.50 for paper bills, which further added to the cost of electricity.

Understanding how electricity bills could be reduced through solar

Many community members had installed solar on their homes to help with reducing the electricity bill, however it was felt that they were not seeing a return on their investment, which was thought to be mainly due to the low feed in tariff. To support this concern, there was a desire to understand how to optimise this asset to reduce their bills.

“We expected solar panels to generate income for our community.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Some individuals were unsure if their solar panels were working, and others were concerned that their energy bill had not reduced enough. When Powercor shared that batteries could optimise solar use, (which some individuals had already started to look into), it was felt that the price of the batteries were too expensive. Despite this, there was interest from individuals without solar panels to understand more about deals or incentives to installing solar on their homes. Yet, some individuals were told not to install solar panels as they would have to pay for line upgrades in their area.

“I don’t know half the time if [the solar panels are] working or not. It was difficult to read the app and since the solar had been installed in November the electricity bill has increased, rather than reduced.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“No one teaches you this stuff.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“We were quoted \$25,000 to install a battery for our house.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“I was told by a solar installer, that I couldn’t install solar unless my line was upgraded from 2-phase to 3-phase.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

It was suggested that it be compulsory for all government housing to have solar and batteries (currently government housing had standard solar systems, however this was not sufficient for First Peoples households who regularly host large families) installed to minimise their bill.

Compensation to First Peoples for using Country for infrastructure and minerals

The community spoke about compensation for First Peoples for the use of their Country and resources.

Infrastructure providers had dug up First Peoples Country to house assets, or minerals for generation and then charged First Peoples for energy that they could not afford. The term “double dipping” was used to explain how Country resources were being used against the community in order to make more money off them.

“All Indigenous people should get a discount for what they’ve done to us – ripping up our land and destroying our lives.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Questions asked from the community were to understand what infrastructure existed on Country, and who was responsible for operating the infrastructure.

The community wanted a return for the land they were giving up to Powercor.

Powercor’s role in giving back to First Peoples communities

There were questions from the community about the role Powercor played to support First Peoples economic, social and environmental health of communities and Country. Individuals shared that they wanted investment in protection of their local cultural heritage rather than destroying land and environment from business operations.

Solutions suggested included facilitating a First Peoples Reference Group who would advise on and pressure test investment in capital allocation, develop employment strategies for young First Peoples and more broadly, by giving opportunity to First Peoples to participate key conversations and decision making.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers’ priorities and concerns

With the cost of living increasing, high electricity prices within a complex system, were all factors adding another strain to First Peoples livelihood. The sentiment felt within the discussion was that without clear knowledge on how to reduce the bill, it left individuals in an uninformed and disempowered. The community wanted to be educated to support decision making for their households and the broader Yorta Yorta community.

There was frustration felt about being locked into a complex system that previously was not a concern to community members for those who had experienced life without electricity.

A negative sentiment was felt towards big business who were seen to be exploiting First Peoples and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds for their own gain. This was not appreciated or accepted within the community, and more was wanted from Powercor and other utility providers to acknowledge these actions and for steps to be taken to compensate the community from suffering the injustice experienced.

Customer questions to solve for

When reflecting on the affordability and equity conversation, Forethought reviewed customer preferences and phrased the key questions and concerns to support priority focus. Across the most important issues, the following questions and statements were developed:

High and rising electricity prices

- How can you ensure that everyone is able to afford the cost of electricity?

Lack of clarity on how to read an electricity bill

- Can you make it easier for me to plan and pay for my bill?
- Can you help me understand the complexity of the market and my bill?

Compensation to First Peoples for using Country for infrastructure and minerals

- Can you ensure that First Peoples are being remunerated for your use of their resources?

Understanding how electricity bills could be reduced through solar

- Can you help me understand solar and how I can optimise my experience with solar?

Powercor’s role in giving back to First Peoples communities

- How can Powercor contribute to Yorta Yorta and First Peoples communities?

Customer Perspective on Reliability and Resilience

Introduction

Feedback regarding reliability and resilience was anchored in recent experiences of blackouts and wanting to understand how Powercor would learn from past experiences to support improved reliability. In our discussions, we learned that Powercor customers priorities and concerns included the following:

- Mitigation activities to stop power outages during extreme weather events
- Reducing frequent outages in the community

Customer priorities and concerns

Mitigation activities to stop power outages during extreme weather events

Many community members experienced flooding in October 2022 where unplanned outages occurred for individuals which spanned from 2 hours to several days. Within the town, all generators were bought and for those without power it meant that food was spoilt, heating and cooling could not be used, and phones could not be charged to understand when the power would be back on.

“I feel for all the women who went through the flood and without power for 2,4,5 hours.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

There was recognition that Mooroopna and Shepparton were located in a flood prone area, and therefore, the community wanted Powercor to put in place mitigation plans to prevent outages occurring during floods. Solutions such as raising the infrastructure or ways to prevent the assets from getting flooded was suggested. Ultimately the community did not want weather events to negatively impact the infrastructure in the future.

A related concern was that being located in a flood prone location negatively impacted their housing prices.

“Mooroopna was the poor cousin to Shepparton.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

The community shared the following stories in relation to the flooding in October 2022.

“We lit the fire up somewhere different every night because there was water everywhere, our house was like an island... We also couldn’t check on Elders...” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“We didn’t see anything either and couldn’t leave our house, we were just stuck at home.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Reducing frequent outages in the community

For some customers unplanned outages were regular and recent stories were shared about the power going out frequently at work, schools, and homes. This negatively impacted the community and day to day living, especially when running households with family and children. For some families this caused financial strain and an example shared was having to re-purchase food that had spoiled or needing to drive home (from a relative’s house) to check if the electricity had come back on. Affected areas that were shared in this consultation included Nagambie, Barmah and Euroa.

There was empathy felt for vulnerable individuals and those with high reliance on electricity (i.e. those with sleep apnoea) and agreement that there should be a minimum standard of electricity for everyone, with vulnerable individuals being prioritised during outages.

When discussing solutions, there was some confusion about the benefits of underground power and if this would reduce outages across the community. Community batteries were also raised to assist with continuity of power.

There was general consensus that the responsibility to upgrade the grid rested on Powercor and the regulator.

The community shared the following stories.

“My sister is living in Nagambie, and they found out that if everyone in the town is running their electricity, the whole town shuts down for 4-5 hours because there is too much consumption. They need an upgrade out there.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“Brown and black outs are happening in regional towns... when the power outages started happening [was] when the coal plant shut down... It’s also a good thing because it’s saving our environment.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“Living in Murch[ison], we had a [blackout] because a powerline fell down because a guy in a truck had hit a power pole... For about 5 days [we experienced a blackout] because no one would come out because it’s a smaller town. Murchison had 1.5 weeks without power. We had to pack bags, heat bottles, give kids baths, cook, especially when you have electric cooking, it doesn’t help. There was no communication from Powercor... Hubby or I would check and drive down [from a family members home to their home]... which uses petrol just to check... This was about 6.5 years ago.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“You get frustrated with electricity and bills especially if you just did your shopping.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“Barmah, just down the road gets cut out every month.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“I know my kids at school get affected a bit... [the children would say] the power is out at school again.” (Yorta Yorta Community member) This happened in Euroa in a school that does not have solar or batteries.

“I went to get the kids and they said they had power off at school as well... They said it was the end of the world because the kids didn't have the internet... our cooktop is electric, so every time the power goes out, we can't cook. We have to then set up all of our camp stuff.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“Last Monday [the power] was off for 2 hours [at Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative].. it went off at 2pm and came back on.” (Yorta Yorta Community member) This was an unplanned outage where the communications said it would come back at 6pm, however it ended up coming back on at 4pm (ahead of what was communicated). *“The boom gate was going up and down and everyone was playing chicken”* (Yorta Yorta Community member) when this outage happened and trying to anticipate when they could drive their car out.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

The underlying sentiment driving these priorities and concerns included the following.

The Yorta Yorta community wanted to reduce interruptions to day-to-day life and lessen the financial stress that resulted from outages, in the interim this could be achieved with clear communication, however a more viable mitigation strategy was prioritised.

It was expected that the regulator and Powercor support upgrades to the infrastructure, as well as improve and learn based on past experiences to optimise the electricity supply.

In addition to everyday life interruptions, there was community concern for Elders who required electricity for their health and this uninterrupted supply had greater negative consequences if not resolved quickly.

Customer questions to solve for

When reflecting on the reliability and resilience conversation, Forethought reviewed customer preferences and phrased the key questions and concerns to support priority focus. Across the most important issues, the following questions and statements were developed:

Mitigation activities to stop power outages during extreme weather events

- Can you give me more access to communication and information when blackouts occur?
- What can you do to prevent outages in the future?

Reducing frequent outages in the community

- How can you reduce outages for areas who are regularly affected?
- How can you reduce interruptions to day-to-day life?
- Will undergrounding power cables reduce some of the current outages being experienced?

Customer Perspective on Energy Transformation

Introduction

In our discussions we learned that Powercor First Peoples prioritised the following with regards to the future of electricity and environmental issues:

- Proactive environmental management
- Infrastructure upgrades to support more solar
- Increased penetration of community batteries
- Transitioning away from gas

Customer priorities and concerns

Proactive environmental management

The community held a desire to progress with new electricity infrastructure that would support decarbonisation of supply, particularly given the impact of climate change, on the eco-system and Country. There was also awareness that these enhancements came at a price. With further education about possible options, the optimal decision could be made for this community.

The community shared the following related stories.

“The area where the sea meets the river in Darebin, there are a lot of dead fish that are causing people to be sick.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“We have to think about our kids, these little ones are our future.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

The community was turning to Powercor to share solutions and support to fix some of the environmental problems experienced. There was resentment towards organisations such as mining and the government who dig up the land and wreck the earth.

“You guys come up with solutions to fix these problems.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Infrastructure upgrades to support more solar

There was interest in infrastructure upgrades that could support homes and communities have their own solar source to supply energy and store these in batteries (community or individual batteries). Although an attractive concept, the community was aware that this came at a price. It was suggested that the government should support infrastructure upgrades as many individuals had already taken the initiative to put solar on their roofs.

“We pay a lot anyway for someone who needs three phase power.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“I just got a quote for \$24,000 [for a battery], but in 5 years we’ll be self-sufficient.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

“I run a property and Powercor quoted me \$100,000 for upgrades. I told them to forget it. I went off grid for \$25k”. (Yorta Yorta Community member)

If solar were the renewable energy source of choice, consideration was wanted about the land-mass this required, and although there were farm properties in the area, this needed to be thought through.

“There is lots of land in the outback..., there can be solar panels.” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Increased penetration of community batteries

There was interest in understanding more about how community batteries could reduce the cost of electricity and improve reliability of power. When discussing this topic, feedback was shared about how this community felt they were always on the “back burner and the last to get up to the mark”. (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Education was wanted around community batteries including answers to questions such as “What does it mean, and how many houses does that cater for?” (Yorta Yorta Community member)

Regarding where this solution should be prioritised, it was noted that the age-care and hospitals needed to be a priority. This was because it is dark around the aged-care homes and people need light when coming home or to have people come in to deliver goods, especially in the winter.

There was interest in understanding more about this infrastructure, especially being a shared resource.

Transitioning away from gas

There were mixed views on the transition away from gas. It was felt to be cost prohibitive and reduced the community’s energy resilience to switch away from the current fuel sources to renewable. Concerns were raised about fracking on farms and moving communities off land in order to source this energy, as well as hesitation felt if another unplanned outage was to occur, and households not having an alternate energy source to undertake everyday activities i.e., cook on a gas stove.

The group acknowledged that if they had solar panels and batteries, that this may be a viable solution in the future.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

The underlying sentiment driving these priorities leaned towards the community not wanting to be left behind, rather to have empowerment to manage their own energy and follow in the footsteps of Elders to fulfill their self-determined aspirations in setting up their own services.

It was felt that the Yorta Yorta Community wanted to be empowered through education by Powercor and understand options in order to develop a plan with Powercor to optimise electricity infrastructure that aligned to their needs. Part of these needs included protection for future generations and managing cultural heritage.

Customer questions to solve for

When reflecting on the energy transformation conversation, Forethought reviewed customer preferences and phrased the key questions and concerns to support priority focus. Across the most important issues, the following questions and statements were developed:

Proactive environmental management

- How can power companies reduce their impact on the environment and Cultural Heritage?

Upgrading infrastructure to support more solar

- How can we learn more about solar?
- How can we learn more about Community Energy?

Increased penetration of community batteries

- How can we learn more about batteries and how this can help our community?

Transitioning away from gas

- Will transitioning away from gas mean my utility bills will be more expensive?
- What are the implications of transitioning away from gas on my everyday life, when experiencing an outage?

Customer Perspective on Customer Experience

Introduction

When discussing customer experience, we learned that Powercor customers prioritised the following:

- Accurate and proactive communication across different mediums

Customer priorities and concerns

Accurate and proactive communication across different mediums

There was mixed feedback from the group on the communication they had received from Powercor. Examples were shared about calling the call centre, as well as whether they received text message or letters in the mail for unplanned or planned outages respectively.

A positive experience was shared about a tree that had fallen at night which cut out a home and the childcare facility power. Powercor was said to respond well when restoring the power by keeping the family informed whilst they were on the ground. The Powercor team was also felt to go above what was required when they supported this family by going into their home and fixing appliances that had stopped working because of the outage.

Another positive experience was shared by an individual who explained that when the power went off, they were always contacted by Powercor.

Community members felt that Powercor had improved their service since the flooding last year, with some now experiencing more proactive text messages. Some of these text messages were accurate however some required improvement. It was suggested that the community could be grouped into categories to help with accuracy and prioritisation on what message to send to whom. It was also advised that all members of the household should be shared this information, and not just the individual on the bill.

When discussing the optimal communication method, it was difficult to recommend only one, as a text message were seen to be efficient for some community members, however not an overarching solution. This was particularly true for Elders, who may be unable to read a text message or use a mobile a phone. A phone call or someone face-to-face was suggested as a good medium to connect with Elders.

When contacting Powercor, most customers called the call centre. Many spoke of the empathy received from Powercor representatives. An example shared was of someone being cut from their power supply by a retailer, and that the Powercor team member was considerate in their conversation and provided advice that aligned to their needs.

Some individuals found it easy to look online to gather the information they needed i.e., power outages and estimated time of supply, however, proactive communication would be appreciated to refrain from needing to go online or searching for information.

Access to information and consideration given to the channel of distribution was wanted. Hardcopy information such as education packages that included ways to reduce their bill would support individuals build their energy knowledge, especially for individuals who are hearing impaired, or did not have access to the internet or a mobile phone.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

The underlying sentiment driving these priorities leant towards individuals wanting to be informed so they can mitigate interruptions to their day.

Being informed proactively and accurately means they can plan around incidences occurring and maintain their productivity and livelihoods.

Customer questions to solve for

When reflecting on the customer experience conversation, Forethought reviewed customer preferences and phrased the key questions and concerns to support priority focus. Across the most important issues, the following questions and statements were developed:

Accurate and proactive communication across different mediums

- How can you better inform me to reduce interruptions to day-to-day life?
- How can you give me the information I need in the format I need it in?

