



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

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

## Acknowledgement of Country

United Energy acknowledges and respects the Bunurong and Wurundjeri People as the original Custodians of the lands and waters our network covers; lands First Peoples have occupied for tens of thousands of years.

United Energy 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.

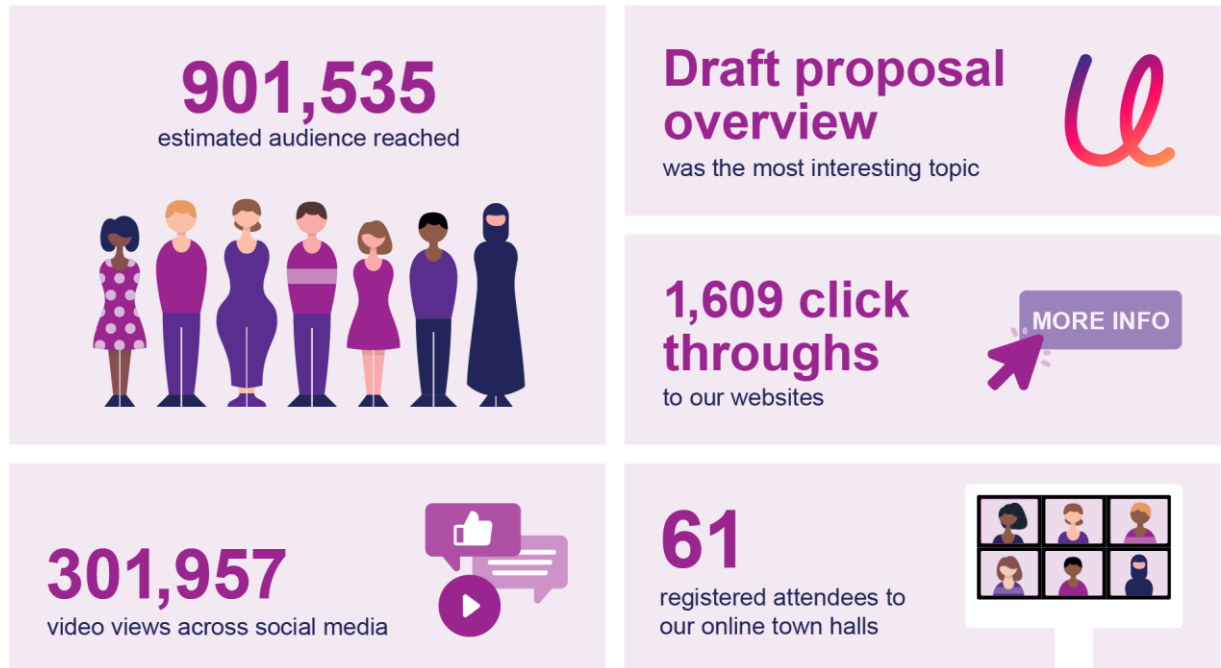


Participants and United Energy executive, Adam Gellie, General Manager Network Services participating in the CER Summit.

### 1.3 Reaching our customers and communities

We've utilised a wide range of engagement channels and techniques to reach a broad range of customers and stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of their current and future energy needs. 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 experiment as a constantly evolving practice.

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:

- 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 to hear and challenge our views on energy and demand forecasts
- resilience focused roundtables to ensure the unique needs of the community were raised by special interest group stakeholders who held deep knowledge of the community's resilience needs
- our first deep dive study into the preferences and priorities of vulnerable customers.

### 1.4.1 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 included 508 United Energy 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.

**508 UNITED  
ENERGY  
CUSTOMERS  
ENGAGED**

### 1.4.2 Community Roundtables – Resilience

Our community roundtable program was essential to support plans for the unique geography of the regional and rural areas of the network.

The first engagement was delivered as a joint distributor workshop alongside Powercor, CitiPower, Ausnet and Jemena and had 43 special interest group stakeholders attend. The purpose of the engagement was to communicate the distributors’ rationale and intention for developing joint resilience investment principles and inform stakeholders on the regulatory framework for resilience. This included the work being undertaken to improve network resilience. This workshop also provided the opportunity for stakeholders to share their knowledge and experiences of related issues. This allowed the distributors to identify gaps in their understanding of community needs, and pressure test their principles against stakeholder feedback to then be refined.

**77 SPECIAL  
INTEREST  
GROUP  
STAKEHOLDERS  
ENGAGED**

The second roundtable was conducted in 2022 to understand the community definition of resilience, what they expected from the network relating to resilience, and understand specific resilience community needs, including communication. This engagement was facilitated in Red Hill and consisted of 25 attendees.

The third resilience roundtable with special interest group stakeholders, was facilitated in 2024 with nine participants in attendance. The purpose of these sessions was to gain feedback on the network’s response to resilience solutions across two areas including, community and network hardening. The feedback shared with United Energy would then build into refining these solutions to align more closely with community needs.



United Energy special interest group participants and a Forethought facilitator participating in the resilience roundtable.

### 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 by across income, linguistic diversity, household type and technology ownership. also selected across each reflect the respective distribution area. In included 12 United households, 14 Powercor and 10 CitPower 25. as were contacted by where participants also, a replacement that as closely as possible a iterative process in participant pools, 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 through attending key community events and conducted an online survey that received 5 responses from within the United Energy network. We have engaged with a Registered Aboriginal Party and one community organisation on their energy related priorities. In addition, we attended the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy roundtable where we heard about the need for capacity building including energy literacy and First Peoples want to build, own and maintain renewable energy projects.

In September 2024, we attended the Nairn Marr Djambana Aboriginal Gathering Place's where we engaged with 42 community members at the BayMob Expo on the regulatory reset.

### 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 469 residential and 114 SMB United Energy 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.

**469 RESIDENTIAL  
AND 114 SMB  
UNITED ENERGY  
CUSTOMERS ENGAGED**





United Energy customers prioritisation of discretionary initiatives at a deliberative forum and a Forethought facilitator.

**“Facilitators were well informed and professional. Appreciate that employees of United Energy were involved and gave insight.”**

*Residential customer, 2024*

**“Loved the opportunity to present my perspectives and views. Helps to get more of an understanding of what is being done to improve how our electricity is provided and the improved reliability.”**

*Residential customer, 2024*

**“Was very interesting, interactive, great group and I felt heard in my opinions.”**

*Residential customer, 2024*

### 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

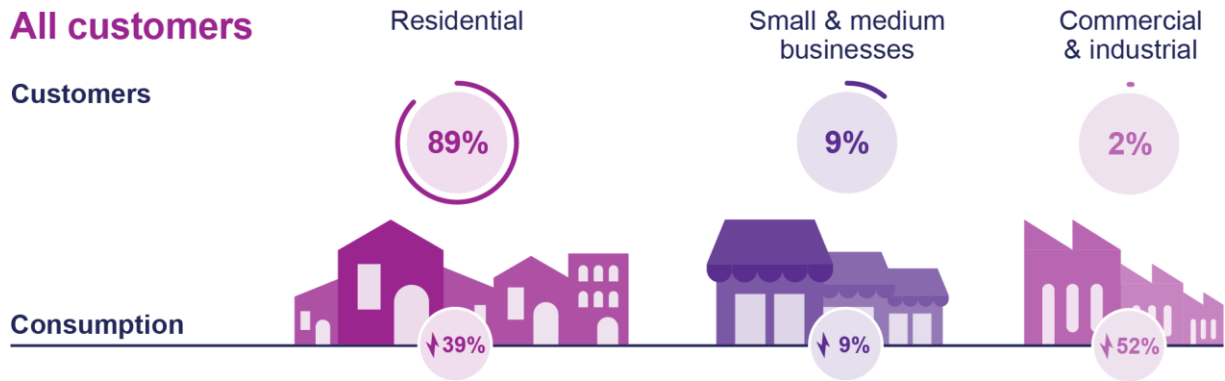
Throughout the engagement program we endeavoured to engage with wide range of our customers and that those customers were reflective of what we know about the demographics of our customer base. Our knowledge was informed by utilisation of ABS databases including the latest census information and our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

**68%**  
own their own home

**27%**  
customers facing mortgage or rental stress

**5,728**  
First People's customers

**13,105**  
life-support customers

**63**  
languages spoken

### Commercial & industrial – customers

**16%**  
Construction

**15%**  
Professional, scientific and technical services

**13%**  
Rental, hiring and real estate services

**9%**  
Health care and social assistance

**8%**  
Retail trade

### Commercial & industrial – consumption

**23%**  
Manufacturing

**20%**  
Electricity, gas, water and waste

**16%**  
Retail trade

**7%**  
Rental, hiring and real estate services

**6%**  
Health care and social assistance

### 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
- 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 stakeholders deliberating in the CER 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'.

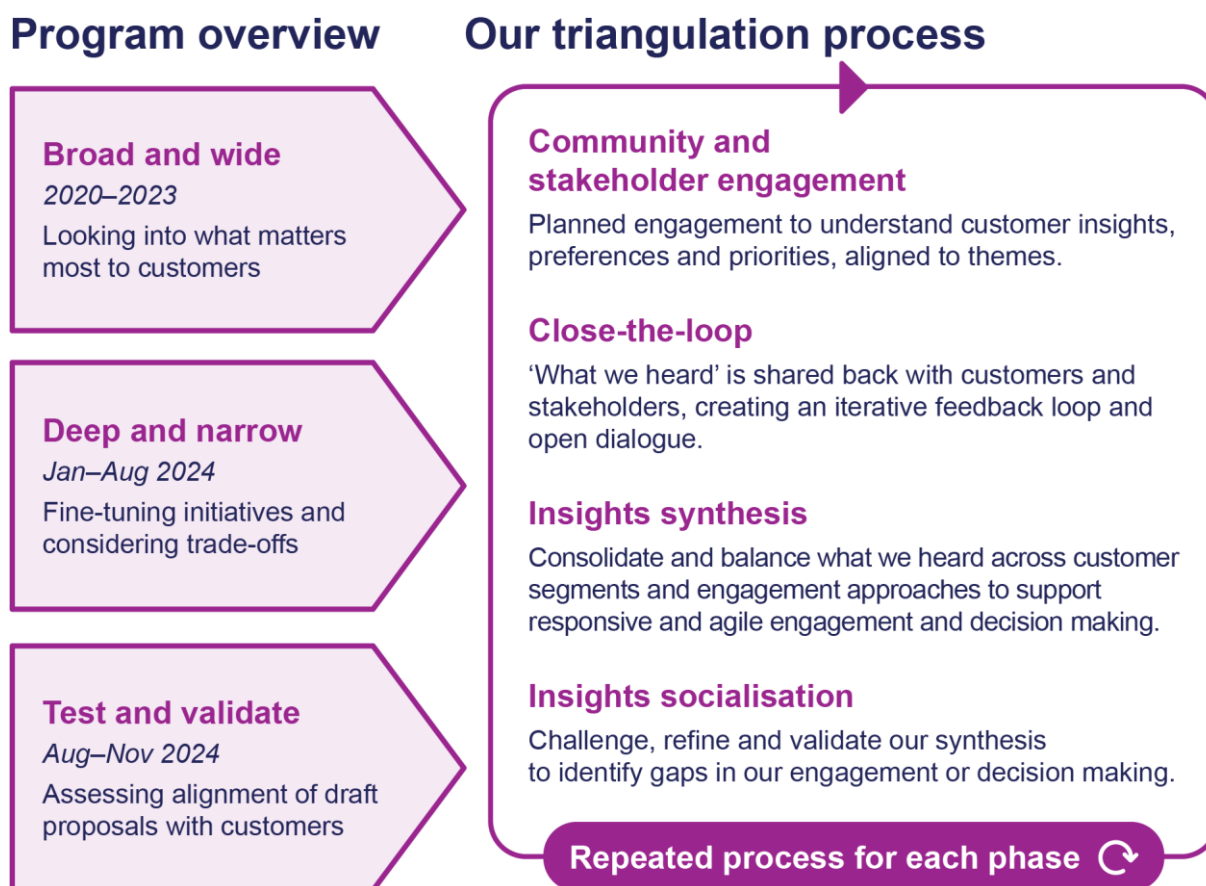


Participants and United Energy Executive Renate Vogt, GM Regulation participating in a roundtable.

## 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.

Key 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: United Energy \(2022\)](#)
- [Broad and Wide: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community \(2022\)](#)
- [Broad and Wide: Youth \(2022\)](#)



Residential customers participating in the broad and wide engagement.

### 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 \(2023\)](#)
- [Customer Values Analysis Refresh \(2023\)](#)
- [Vulnerable Customer Engagement \(2023\)](#)
- [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 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**

United Energy's customer base is both broad and uniquely distinct compared to other networks in Victoria. Understanding the specific needs and preferences of United Energy 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 United Energy stakeholders.

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:

- Red Hill
- Rosebud
- Sandringham
- Frankston
- Hampton

## 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).

**"The facilitators were fantastic in drawing out information about each topic."**

*Residential customer, 2022*

**"I learnt a lot about what United Energy actually do & provide to the community as well as their customers that I wouldn't ordinarily come across."**

*Residential customer 2022*

**"Expertise from [United Energy] reps [was] extremely helpful."**

*Special interest group, 2024*

## 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 qualitative customer feedback and behavioural trends to identify service level expectations</p>	<p>Electrification was a key theme in our broad and wide engagement, and our 'Customer energy futures' service level options paper sought to understand expectations regarding EV charging</p> <p>The Monash University Future Home Demand report also captured customers' expectations for future energy use and electrification, including preferences relating to automation and control</p>
 <p><b>Options assessment</b> Using quantitative customer feedback and trade-off preferences to prioritise options</p>	<p>Our options paper outlined six EV scenarios; stakeholders preferred 'charging abundance' with some control and high access to fast charging</p> <p>At our trade-off forum, 73% of customers supported \$45–80m of investment to facilitate EV charging and reduce EV-related outages. 69% of residential and business customers also supported maintaining or improving reliability</p>
 <p><b>Value to customers</b> Using customer values to quantify economic benefits</p>	<p>Actual customer charging profiles from our smart meters show that without intervention, 26,000 customers will experience adverse impacts due to non-compliant voltage levels by 2031</p> <p>We valued constraints using AER values of customer reliability and emissions reduction</p>
TOP-DOWN PRINCIPLES	
Our principles	How we applied to our proposal
 <p><b>Affordability</b> No material price increases</p>	<p>Our draft proposal value (\$75m) aligned with trade-off forum feedback and was supported by customers in our test and validate engagement</p>
 <p><b>Equity</b> Reducing systemic service level imbalances and improving vulnerable customer outcomes</p>	<p>Our regulatory proposal, however, further considered the balance of proactive and reactive investments across three options—deteriorating, maintaining, or improving service levels</p>
 <p><b>Future-focus</b> Considering how potential solutions meet future customer needs, and 'why now'</p>	<p>Although improving service levels was economic, we have proposed a 'maintain' option to better ensure affordability and align with the range of investment deemed acceptable to our customers</p>
 <p><b>Acceptability</b> Considering the capability of acceptance by customers, regulators and government</p>	<p>Relative to a deterioration option, with mostly reactive investments, proactive approaches also benefit more customers, resulting in more equitable outcomes</p>
 <p><b>Deliverability</b> Only proposing what we can deliver</p>	<p>As our regulatory proposal investment of \$66m reflects the most recent AEMO electrification forecasts, our proposal is consistent with the level of customer-driven electrification we will likely need to accommodate and 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

### Our community engagement journey so far

Our community engagement journey ensured learnings were taken from each phase and were built on as we progressed

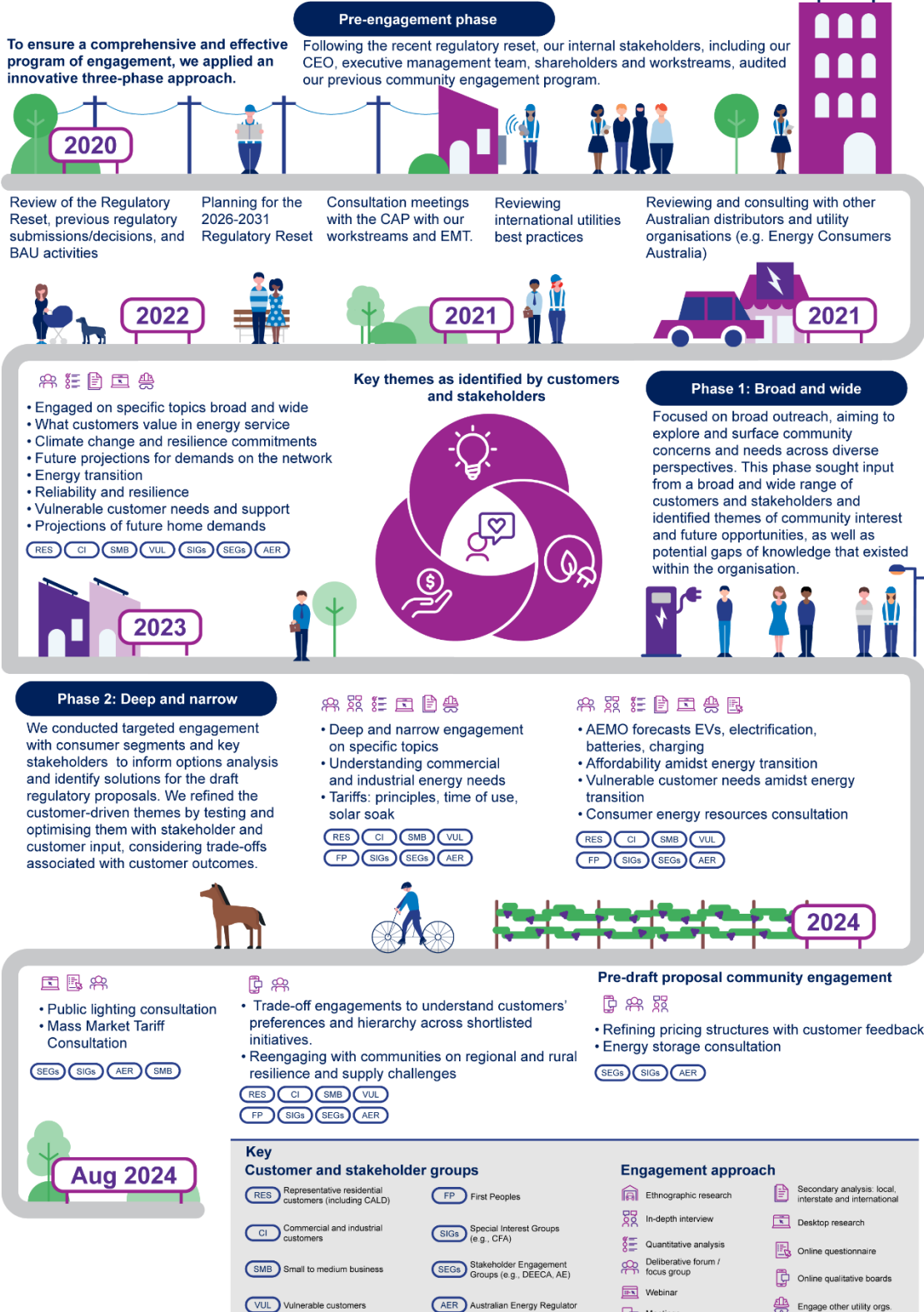
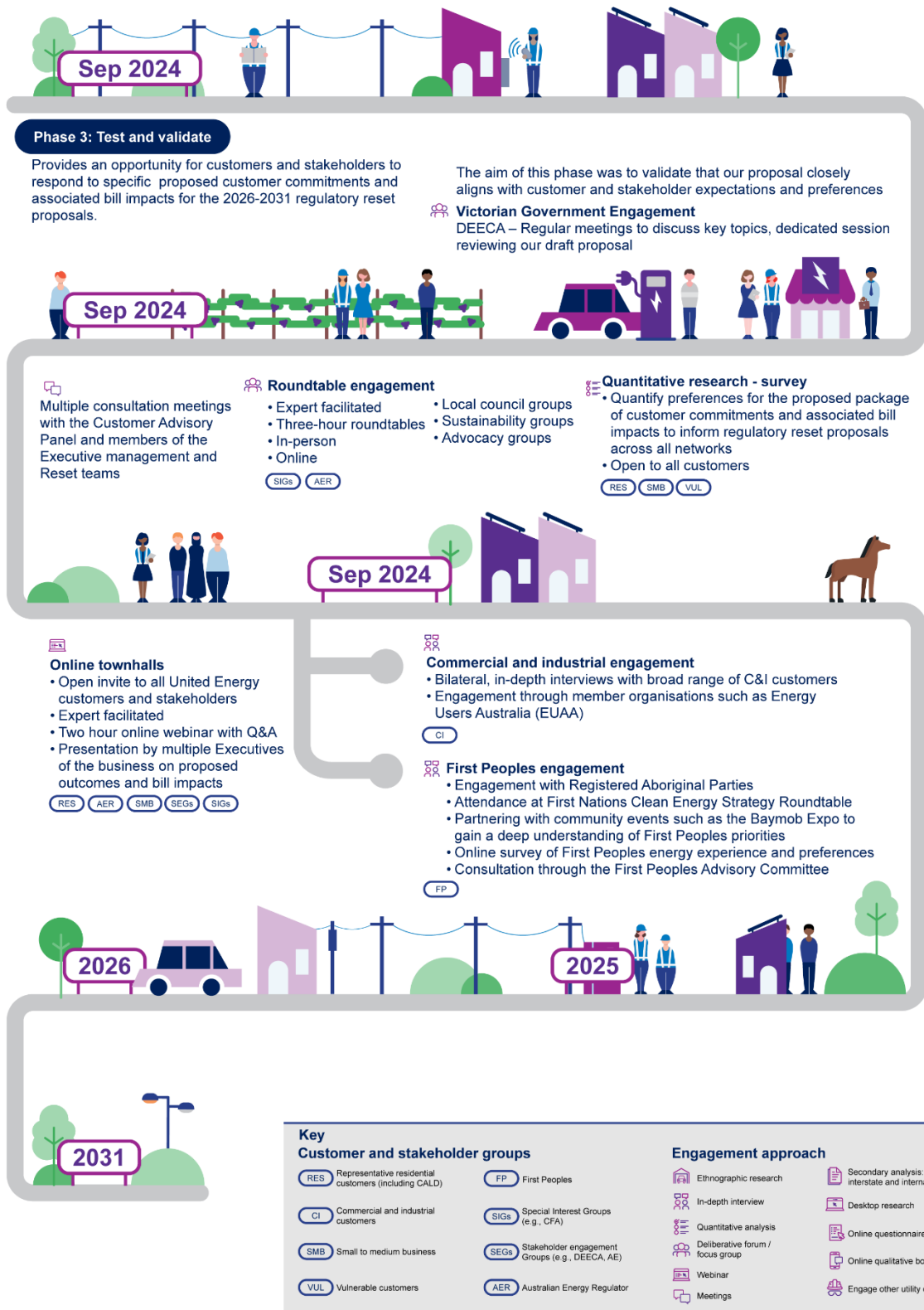


FIGURE 5B OUR ENGAGEMENT JOURNEY FOLLOWING THE DRAFT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

## 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 United Energy 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 were a critical factor in this document to support decision making for United Energy 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, 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.



Residential customers and Brent Cleeve, United Energy Head of Regulatory Policy and Compliance 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

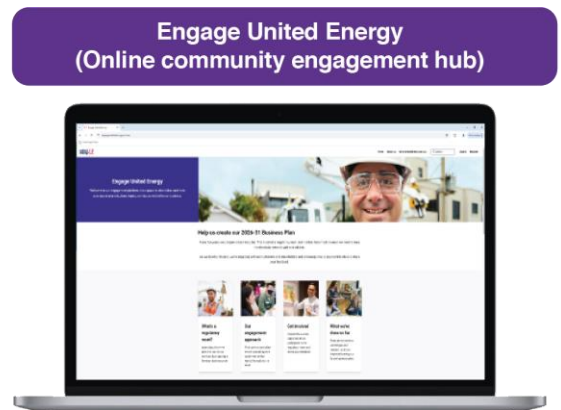


We are proud that our program has been sufficiently flexible to adapt to customers' varying levels of interest. We leveraged the spectrum as a guide to foster more meaningful relationships with our customers and stakeholders and bring clarity to their level of influence on the topics being engaged on.

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

### Engage United Energy

Our customers and stakeholders have many channels through which they can engage with us. This includes our digital platform Engage United Energy, 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 United Energy 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

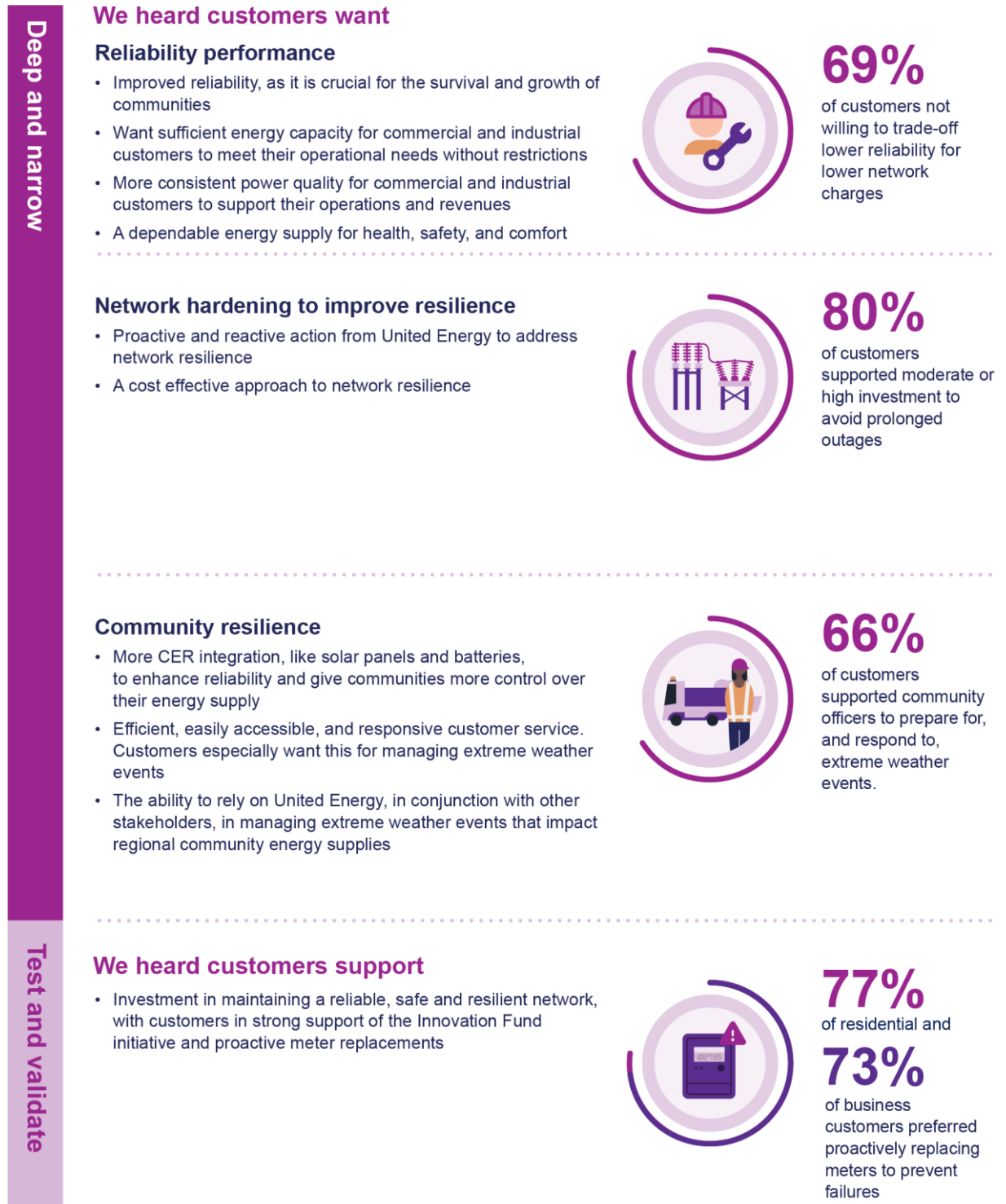


FIGURE 8 WHAT WE HEARD: ENERGY TRANSITION

Deep and narrow

**We heard customers want**

**Enabling electrification**

- Reliable service to be prioritised during the energy transition
- Fair access to renewable energy to be provided to all customers
- United Energy to reduce its emissions and provide progress updates
- Reassurance the network can handle increased demand due to electrification, citing concern with network stability/capacity and high retrofitting costs for homes
- Efficient network operation, which they see demand management as a tool to support this



**73%**

of customers support \$45–80m investment to proactively address network constraints due to electrification

**Integrating CER**

- To maximise solar energy export, but with government support
- Greater access to be provided to solar benefits and network investments to promote renewable energy integration
- New network and tariff management strategies to accommodate customers being both producers and consumers of energy
- Improvements to the network’s ability to handle increased demand from electric vehicles
- Capacity to enable customers to charge electric vehicles overnight at home



**79%**

of customers supported bill increases to enable more solar exports for all customers



**82%**

of customers prefer to charge their EV at home

Test and validate

**We heard customers support**

- Our CER and electrification strategy, with significant number of customers intending to electrify their homes in the next 5 years
- Customers express barriers to electrification and adoption of time-of-use tariffs in the short term but point to education and price incentives as key motivators for demand adjustments



**53%**

of residential customers were not willing for their distributor to control their energy usage



**72%**

of businesses and

**44%**

of residential customers plan to electricify gas appliances within 5 years

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 to assist them manage their energy bills, especially those experiencing vulnerability
- Improvements in grid resilience to be fair, with a focus on supporting vulnerable customers
- Stronger safeguards to assist customers experiencing vulnerability reduce their energy bill



**63%**

of customers were willing to pay to support improvements for customers experiencing vulnerability

**Low-cost and fair outcomes**

- Network improvements to be affordable
- Any necessary cost increases to be introduced gradually
- New investments to provide clear value
- In some cases, the visual amenity of network assets addressed
- Access to the benefits of renewable energy to be available to all customers
- To ensure that the financial burden of transitioning to renewable energy sources is equitable
- To be included in decision-making processes around resilience and energy transition initiatives



**62%**

of residential customers want more information to manage their electricity costs



**72%**

of customers were concerned about affordability and impacts on future generations

Test and validate

**We heard customers support**

- Network augmentation but note affordability as a key concern in the next regulatory period, leading to customers favouring low-cost solutions over expensive augmentation
- The Customer Assistance Package initiatives, seeking equity for vulnerable customers in the network

**“These programs are welcome and needed to support a just energy transition but will need to be coordinated, responsive to customer and community needs and well resourced to be effective”**

Source: Customer Advisory Panel report on Draft Proposals for the 2026–31 Reset

## 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.unitedenergy.com.au](https://engage.unitedenergy.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 3 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.



United Energy 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. 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.

Recruitment for larger customer sessions was another challenge with most sessions having to be bilateral. This was also sometimes seen with special interest group stakeholders, including council attendance, advocacy group members including vulnerable customer advocates, and business advocates. It is essential for us to build on our relationships with these stakeholders to enhance attendance and community insights.



Commercial and industrial customers and United Energy's Head of Regulatory Finance, Modelling and Pricing participating in a roundtable.

A recruitment technique called "snowballing" was utilised with success for special interest group recruitment. This technique is used when inviting stakeholders to an engagement and involves asking

the invited stakeholder to document information of any other stakeholder(s) who they think would be interested in the engagement, and would meet the criteria for who we're looking to speak with. This snowballing technique was used with every invited stakeholder to ensure that we maximised the reach of attendees in our special interest group events.

## 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.unitedenergy.com.au](https://engage.unitedenergy.com.au)

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