Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement

United Energy Summary Report

December 2022

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Image above: Michael Meraklis, Head of Asset Management

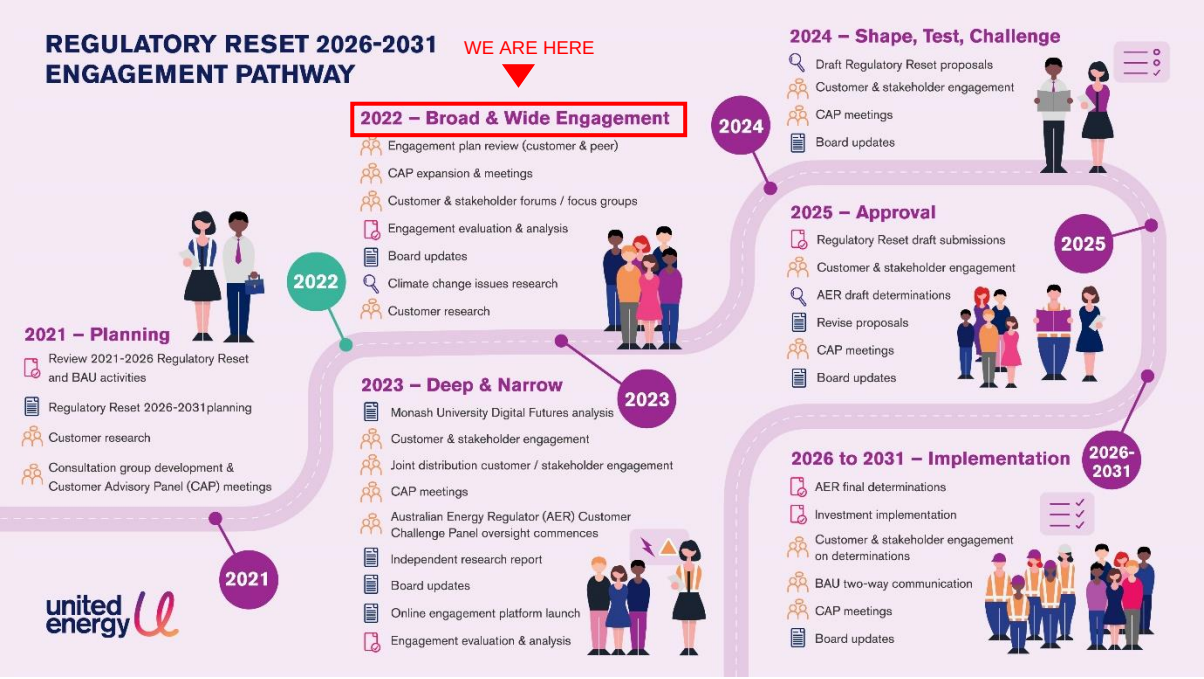
Introduction

Introduction

Regulatory Reset Proposal Program

To support the development of the Regulatory Reset Proposal, a Foundational Program of Community Engagement was conducted to identify what was important to United Energy customers prior to engaging on more specific topics in the next stages of developing the Proposal.

The below diagram explains the full Engagement Program prior to submission to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). We are currently at '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 that genuinely reflected the needs and preferences of all customers.

This program was developed 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, as well as a team that specialises in the Utilities industry.

Forethought 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. Forethought partners with clients to provide an independent customer voice, ensuring that the customer is always at the forefront of organisational decision making.

Forethought was selected for this program based on their industry knowledge in the Utilities industry and their Research/Engagement capability to design and facilitate engagement forums and objectively report back on the needs and preferences of customers across the network.

Image above: Renate Vogt, General Manager Regulation

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 United Energy's genuine commitment to develop a plan that is anchored in customer needs and preferences for the immediate and longer-term future of the network.

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 United Energy customer base.

Engagement Objectives

- 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 United Energy senior executives to listen to customers and help answer questions of customers without biasing or leading the conversation. The Sandringham and Rosebud face-to-face consultations were attended by the following United Energy representatives:

1. Chief Information Officer	8. Head of Regulatory Policy & Compliance
2. Chief Financial Officer	9. Head of Asset Management
3, General Manager Regulation	10. Strategy, Programs & Change Manager
4. General Manager Corporate Affairs	11. Regulatory Financial Analyst
5. Head of Regulatory Finance, Modelling & Regulation	12. Project Coordinator
6. Head of Network Strategy & Non-Network Strategy	13. Senior Regulatory Analyst
7. Head of Network Performance & Management	14. Compliance Analyst

Additionally, these forums were attended by customers across the United Energy network alongside interested members of the United Energy Customer Advisory Panel (CAP) and the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) who were invited to attend the forums in a viewing-only capacity.

Consideration was given to recruit participants from a diverse cross-section of the community. This ensured that we had representation across age gender, geography and socio-economic status. Furthermore, participants were varied in their engagement levels with the electricity industry to ensure that all consumers were represented in this conversation, not just interested and engaged customers.

Forethought also conducted digital forums with participants aged 18-25 (Youth) and worked alongside the LOTE Agency to facilitate culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities across the Indian, Arabic and Chinese people, who resided within the United Energy network. Separate forums were held for these individuals to support specific cultural and demographic needs, and an online approach was implemented to support an ease of attending the session. The findings from these sessions are referenced in a separate report.

Participation

Customer Group	Engagement	Consultation Date & Time	Number of Attendees
Rosebud	Face-to-face	20 November 5:30pm – 9.00pm (3.5 hours)	Customer total: 21 CAP members: 1 External stakeholders: 2
Sandringham	Face-to-face	26 November 5:30pm – 9.00pm (3.5 hours)	Customer total: 49 CAP members: 2 External stakeholders: 1 AER representation: 1

Recruitment

There were three main channels used to recruit participants. These were chosen to ensure that every possible avenue was utilised to attract a diverse group of customers to participate. Our recruitment process included:

1. Our field partner panel, Askable.
    - Askable is a platform who hosts over 135,000 participants on their panel and leverages social media to promote attendance at market research forums and engagement sessions.
2. The invite was also extended to engaged individuals including council members and community organisations. These invites were sent to stakeholders whose information was supplied by United Energy. Furthermore, each invite was encouraged to be extended to other interested parties if the recipient desired.
3. Social media was also used to share the consultation details and access to a link to sign up for this consultation.
    - United Energy shared social media posts to further promote the consultations to the general public across the network.
4. There were no exclusions to attendance which meant that anyone who was interested and willing to participate were invited to participate.

Compensation & Local Charity Donation

As consultations were held over a lengthy timeframe (3.5 hours), participants were compensated for time spent ($250).

In addition to the individual compensation payment, United Energy also shortlisted local charities. At the conclusion of each session, the relevant customer groups were afforded the opportunity to complete a short survey during which they were asked to nominate their preferred charity from this list. A donation of $10 was donated for to the most preferred charity (overall) on behalf every customer who attended the consultations.

Below outlines the total donations across the United Energy engagement program:

- $250 for Mums Supporting Families in Need
- $500 The Smith Family

Session Methodology

Each session commenced with an introduction conducted by Forethought and scene setting undertaken by representatives from United Energy to inform customers about the context of the session and areas for discussion.

The four themes for discussion were:

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

In smaller working groups (~8 – 13 customers/stakeholders), these four themes[1] were explored in more detail to understand what was important to customers. These smaller working groups ensured that everyone had an opportunity to discuss and share their feedback which would not have been possible in a larger forum.

Within each discussion, customers were asked about their electricity needs and preferences today and into the future. They were also asked to ideate what they wanted United Energy to focus on in relation to that specific theme area.

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 an easy-to-understand language and format and did not bias customers' views. Publicly sourced data and as well as network data were used in these information packs. Facilitators moderated these conversations to allow the information to be shared, whilst ensuring that the main discussion involved customers sharing their feedback and ideas.

After covering all themes, customers voted on which topics were most important, and then shared ideas for how United Energy could best include customer views going forward.

The last stage was for customers to fill out a feedback survey to support Forethought and United Energy in adjusting the engagement methodology where necessary to support the most effective consultation.

Following the consultations, Forethought undertook various reporting workshops and internal quality checks to align on the customer themes and preferences that are reported on within 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 in our depiction of the IAP2 Spectrum shown below. Within this consultation, customers were involved in shaping the direction of focus for United Energy by discussing a wide range of issues, and then voting on the area they thought was most important.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation[2]

	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[3]

In earlier consultations, a larger amount of information was provided to customers relating to the 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 United Energy sessions the information provided was reduced considerably and shared as needed throughout the conversation.

[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 unprecedented events occurring in the lives of customers and across the broader electricity industry. We hypothesise that 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 (22/9/22[4]) and Medibank (12/10/22[5])
- 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]
- War in the Ukraine with the Russian invasion impacting Australian energy prices[8]
- 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".[9]
- In July - September 2022, all living cost indexes rose[10]. 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 Victoria [11]

[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%2022%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, accesses 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] 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.
[9] Trading Economics, September 2022, *Australian Inflation Rate*, accessed 8 November 2022, https://tradingeconomics.com/australia/inflation-cpi.
[10] 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.
[11] 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 United Energy consultations are below.

Location/ customer group	Overall satisfaction (Out of 5)	Customer comments
Sandringham	4.6	"Was a good session. You have many problems to solve. But mainly all influenced through AEMO. Reduce the parties involved will help. And spend more money on tech automation and reduce operational costs. People just want cheaper electricity and to know it's good for the environment as sustainable and renewable. Which means it will be cheaper to produce energy in future."- Residential Customer
Rosebud	4.7	"I learnt a lot about what United Energy actually do and provide to the community as well as their customers that I wouldn't ordinarily come across." - Residential Customer "Very well run and facilitated." - Residential Customer

Image above: Joanne Pafumi, General Manager Corporate Affairs

Customer Perspectives on Engagement Themes

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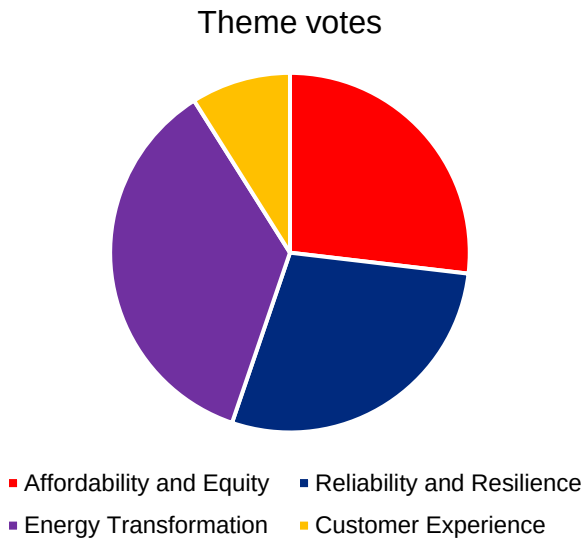
Customer Perspective on Engagement Themes

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 United Energy to focus on.

At an overall level, the most important topic was planning for Energy Transformation.



Specifically, customers were concerned about the future of network reliability and energy supply in context of increased electrification and penetration of renewables. Customers sought leadership in creating and executing a plan for the future to mitigate these concerns. They felt that United Energy would be the right entity to do this predominantly as they were seen as the technical experts. To understand more information about customer needs on Energy Transformation, please refer to page 17.

Customer Perspective on Affordability and Equity

Introduction

When discussing the affordability and equity of electricity supply, customers felt the following issues were most important were:

- Reducing electricity bills
- Smoothing costs over time for pricing stability
- Equal access to electricity supply and renewables

Customers' priorities and concerns

Reducing electricity bills

Affordability of electricity was a concern which appeared to be heightened by recent (at the time of engagement) increases in the cost of living. This was of particular concern for customers in Rosebud. Conversely, Sandringham customers were less concerned about this topic.

Many felt as though they could reduce their bills through everyday actions, rather than relying on the distributor and other entities (e.g., their retailer). This was most evident in Rosebud where participants shared ideas and examples of how they had already taken actions to alter their usage and reduce their bills. Consequently, many customers highlighted a desire for further information, incentives, 'tips to reduce costs' and/or subsidies to promote decreasing consumption and overall cost.

Ideas to support the reduction in electricity prices included apps which would provide more information about their usage, information that showed peak times and when households should use less energy, as well as information about which appliances in the household were contributing most to their overall bill. Customers stated that they would change their usage behaviour based on this information to support reducing electricity costs.

Across the network, there was also a desire to financially support vulnerable customers. Ideas such as subsidies and means-tested pricing (i.e., pricing according to income) were shared.

Although most customers wanted equity of supply across both regional and metropolitan areas, customers were not all aligned on how this should be funded. Whilst some customers felt that these costs should be spread, others were unwilling to personally absorb these costs. For example, Sandringham customers argued that regional Victorians benefited from other financial benefits (such as cheaper property prices) and felt that they could therefore pay for the improvements to network reliability. They suggested that an alternative to this might be to reduce the cost that regional Victorians paid – given their reliability was worse, this would be more equitable without increasing the costs for everyone.

Smoothing costs over time for pricing stability

The topic of affordability and equity was influenced by discussions around energy transformation. Customers (particularly those in Rosebud) were able to connect the need for increased investment in infrastructure to support greater renewables to the subject of affordability and were concerned about the impact that this might have on their bills. It became evident that whilst customers do want the network to be fit for the future, and accepted that would require investment, they appeared to prefer smoothing these costs over time, rather than experiencing large and immediate price increases.

Equal access to electricity supply and renewables

Equal ability to access electricity, and the ability to access future technology including renewables, was a common discussion point.

For example, customers felt investing in renewable energy options, such as solar, were unaffordable even with the assistance of a government rebate. Customers were particularly mindful of those individuals that might be unable to participate in the energy transition and be "left behind". This might include access to green energy that would in turn reduce costs for those of low socio-economic status or those excluded due to property type or home ownership status (e.g., apartment living, renting). Customers therefore wanted United Energy to take this into consideration when planning and hoped that there would be some initiatives that would address this potential inequity into the future.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

Whilst this report is directed on the common responses for the network, some important geographical nuances were observed. Most notably there were substantial variations in sentiment for Rosebud compared to Sandringham on the subject of equity.

In Rosebud, a strong community focus was observed. There was a strong belief that increases in the cost of living were already impacting the local area and there existed a genuine desire to band together to prevent any disruption to everyday living. Conversely, in Sandringham, the concept of equity was spoken about in terms of paying for the level of service received, rather than sharing costs and everyone receiving an equal level of supply.

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 of focus. Across the most important issues, the following questions and statements were developed:

<u>Reducing electricity bills</u>

- How might I get better visibility about my usage and costs so I can reduce my usage (and therefore my bills)?
- Can you provide with incentives to use less energy so I can save on my bill?
- Can you make the system fairer by means-testing charges so those who can afford to pay more can support those who can't?

<u>Smoothing costs over time for pricing stability</u>

- How can I get better visibility of cost increases so I can manage my expenses?
- Can we smooth out any network investment so that it helps with my bill stability over time?

<u>Equal access to electricity supply and renewables</u>

- How do we make sure that everyone (even those that can't afford it) can participate in the energy transition?
- How might we make supply equitable by reducing the costs for those who have poorer reliability, as opposed to increasing reliability and burdening everyone with that cost?
- How can we protect vulnerable customers from experiencing significant price increases, without increasing price significantly for everyone else?

Customer Perspective on Reliability and Resilience

Introduction

Many customers were mindful of their increased reliance on technology and other factors increasing the salience of reliable supply such as the working from home trend. This created a sense of importance on the topic of managing for reliability and resilience.

In the short-term, there were questions about how customers can manage their current energy supply in peak periods to mitigate unplanned outages. When discussing electricity resilience into the future, the main concerns surrounded the management of the network in the context of increased demand for electricity, an increase in renewables and how the network will endure extreme weather events. Customers wanted United Energy to have a plan for this and wanted these plans to be communicated.

Customer priorities and concerns

Reliability today: Managing usage

For customers who had experienced significant outages, the reliability of electricity was top of mind. However, for other customers who had experienced fewer outages (e.g., Rosebud) or no outages (e.g., Sandringham) reliability about electricity today was not a concern.

Rosebud customers were particularly interested in how they might use less electricity, especially during peak times to reduce disruptions – particularly during summer periods when outages more frequently occurred.

Resilience tomorrow: Network management with increased energy demand due to electrification, increased populations and two-way flow of electricity

United Energy was expected to proactively look at supply and demand trends that exist today, and project needs into the future to provide customers with continuous electricity supply. For example, frequent outages occurred in Rosebud in the summer due to higher demand driven by increased tourism and customers wanted 'confidence over the summer' regarding their electricity supply. This was common every year for this community and so it was expected that United Energy could see similar trends. Ideally United Energy would therefore propose solutions to the community to support ongoing supply during a time of frequent outages.

Customers were also concerned about the future of electrification (e.g., the onset of electric vehicles (EVs) and the need for two-way flow of electricity with increased uptake of solar panels). They were concerned about the infrastructure not being as robust as it could be to support this change as it was built for different times and may not be fit for the future needs.

Resilience tomorrow: Enduring extreme weather events

There was a general consensus that extreme weather events would likely increase into the future and customers wanted structurally-sound infrastructure to withstand these events. At the time of the Sandringham consultation, there was significant flooding occurring in Melbourne. Without information or well-informed ideas, undergrounding assets and community batteries were the suggested solutions to ensure that disruptions were minimised and supply continuous. However, the cost of undergrounded infrastructure was expected to be an expensive investment which customers did not want to commit to.

Community batteries were theoretically seen as a viable solution however customers were largely uninformed and sought more details and assurance that this would actually improve the reliability of the network and not make electricity bills unaffordable.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

Across all customers, there was a concern that increasing demand for electricity and the transition to renewable technologies would impact their ability to live a frictionless, productive life and contribute to their communities and the economy.

Customer questions to solve for

After listening to customers, we summarised the following key concerns relating to reliability and resilience. These statements will serve as a set of guiding questions to inform the next stage of developing the regulatory reset proposal and help United Energy identify the top priorities for future investment and improvement:

Reliability today: Managing usage

- What can we do to manage usage in peak times to prevent frequent outages?

Resilience tomorrow: Network management with increased energy demand

- How can you give me confidence that there will be enough new energy to replace the traditional generation that is closing down?
- How can you make sure that the network will cope with the increased demand that will come with electrification?

Resilience tomorrow: Enduring extreme weather events

- How can we make sure that when an extreme event happens, we have a continuous supply of energy?
- How can we solve for resilience tomorrow without making my energy bills unaffordable today?

Customer Perspective on Energy Transformation

Introduction

Customers believed that in the future, there would be significantly more usage of electricity and there was a real concern that the network would not cope with the increased demand. The priority areas customers wanted attention on were:

- Reliable supply during the transition from traditional electricity sources to renewable electricity
- An experienced leader, such as United Energy, to lead the transition
- Ensuring that customers were not being left behind in the transition

Customers' priorities and concerns

Reliable supply during the energy transition

Customers believed they would become more reliant on electricity into the future, driven by their increased use of equipment and appliances relying entirely on electricity and more households and businesses switching away from gas as a supply source. Overall, customers lacked confidence that the network was able to support increased demand.

With the recent announcements of coal-fired power plants shutting down, there were mixed views across demographics on how the industry should manage the transition to a greener future.

Typically, feedback from younger customers was that the pace and transition to a renewable future should be done at pace. Conversely, the older cohort felt that a more conservative transition was required to ensure continued reliability of electricity supply.

This was driven by anxiety that the network does not have the storage capacity to harness renewables, particularly at times of peak demand. These customers prioritised technological solutions that would manage this such that reliability was not impacted.

To aid discussion, customers were provided with additional information about the potential of future investment. Community batteries were the most popular solution for the future as they provided the ability to empower communities and provide a decentralised network.

Transition in leadership

Generally, customers were unsure about what the future of electricity (and energy more broadly) would or could look like and were eager to hear ideas or ask for more information to understand. This led to difficulty in determining who should pay for these investments without truly comprehending what these possible solutions entailed. Simple, easy-to-understand information shared with communities was an idea to help find appropriate solutions and informed feedback.

Customers were looking for a leader to take charge of this transition to share what the plan was, the process and who was responsible. There was typically confusion from customers whether the distributor, the government or another entity in the supply chain would be the best fit for this role. However, the more energy-educated customers held an expectation that the distributor would hold the technical expertise and was seen as a credible leader to support and communicate the energy transition, especially when compared to a retailer.

Ensuring that customers were not being left behind in the transition

Regardless of age or customer type, there was a genuine desire to participate in the energy transition. Customers raised questions such as 'who is left behind?' and were eager to respond to ensure that vulnerable groups such as low-income households, people renting or living in apartments, rural customers, and elderly pensioners also had access to future innovation was important, particularly for the Rosebud group.

EVs and solar panels were the most commonly discussed technology within the subject of energy transition, both of which customers preferred greater proliferation of. This, typically led to customers asking questions about who would pay for the upgrade in infrastructure required to cope with increases in uptake of both these technologies. Customers generally failed to reach consensus as to who should pay for these upgrades, whether it be everyone, just EV owners or a means-tested approach.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

When reflecting on the underlying sentiment of customers, the desire to not be left behind was clear, particularly as being able to participate in the energy transformation meant they could participate in a low-cost energy future. It also provided them with options and access to the possibilities that electrification holds such as access to EVs or working from home productively. Without this investment, climate change impacts, reliability and outdated technology was felt to be a significant inhibitor to the benefits outlined above.

Customer questions to solve for

When reflecting on the Energy Transformation conversation, Forethought reviewed key concerns raised. These questions and concerns feed into the regulatory reset proposal to support the top priorities of focus:

Reliable supply during supply transition

- How can we ensure that vulnerable people are supported to participate in the energy transition?
- How can I be confident that the network will be able to cope with increased demand?

Transition leadership

- Can you help me to understand what innovation is possible in energy transformation so I can make informed decisions?
- Can United Energy utilise their technical expertise to develop a roadmap for this transition and help lead us into the future?

No one left behind

- Can you help me (and others less fortunate than me) to participate in the future of energy?

Customer Perspective on Customer Experience

Introduction

The subject of Customer Experience was a difficult subject for customers to discuss. This was generally due to the fact that there was a lack of current or hypothesised future pain-points to solve for. In other words, their levels of satisfaction with United Energy's service high.

The priority areas customers wanted attention on included:

- Higher level of service
- An aesthetically pleasing community environment
- Inclusivity of communication content and channels
- Higher level of value seen in the bill paid

Customer priorities and concerns

High level of service

During general communications, new connections, and unplanned/planned outages, there were high expectations of customer service delivery. It was expected that communication was 'timely' and 'easy to understand' and that 'multiple channels of support' be made available to customers if they chose to communicate with United Energy (dependent on their personal preferences and situation).

Most customers reported a good experience with United Energy, explaining that text messages on outages were clear. Many also mentioned that it was simply a good experience not needing to have any interaction with United Energy, because that meant that the power was reliable.

Minimal improvements were suggested and limited to: earlier communication where possible for planned outages, empathy across contact medium (e.g., webchat, on the phone) for the situation someone is experiencing and clearer estimated restored time to help customers plan their day. For example, in an unplanned outage, it was considered more helpful to communicate with customers that an unplanned outage had occurred, and a team was visiting the site to share an accurate restoration time. Transparency, and honesty was more important than a quick, overstated restoration time which is what customers felt was currently communicated. This was even in instances if the team overdelivered (a planned or unplanned restoration time) and the power was working sooner than expected. The importance placed on all communication improvements was because customers wanted as much control as possible when it came to planning their day and were heavily reliant on these communications.

Higher level of value seen in the bill paid

After receiving unprompted feedback, some customers were shown a diagram which depicted the number of activities United Energy undertook to support electricity distribution. There was high level of interest across: utilising drones to inspect infrastructure and check for faults, vegetation management, as customers wanted to understand who was responsible for cutting down trees, and cyber security which was particularly important given the recent cyber-attack experienced at Optus.

The conversation revealed that many customers did not know of United Energy (or their role) prior to the engagement. This was perceived as problematic because customers would not have naturally known who to call or where to go for information relating to an outage. They believed it was important that customers knew when to contact United Energy, however, they did not want excessive communication to build awareness. They believed that communication such as ads on the television would help with this challenge.

Inclusivity of communication content and channels

Customers were also keen to ensure that the level of customer service provided by United Energy were as inclusive as possible. This meant that it was flexible for the hearing impaired, vision impaired, cultural and linguistically diverse communities, elderly, and customers who may not have internet or mobile phone access.

Aesthetically pleasing community environment

When thinking about the experience of United Energy, aesthetics of the local community was an important topic raised (more prominently by Sandringham customers). Ideas for United Energy to support this topic included using community art or moving assets underground.

The sentiment that underpinned some customers' priorities and concerns

From the feedback shared, being progressive and productive was felt to be underlying customer priorities. This was reflected in their desire to receive a high level of customer service and the importance placed on uninterrupted services. Customers wanted to plan, be efficient with their time and for problems to be solved quickly.

We found the customers were largely unaware of the activities undertaken by United Energy. During this discussion, it was necessary to share this information and we observed customers reach consensus that they felt the network was providing good value for money.

Customer questions to solve for

Following this consultation, Forethought summarised the following key concerns relating to Customer Experience. These statements would support the next stages of the regulatory reset proposal and identification of the top priorities of focus:

<u>High level of service</u>

- How can you ensure I know how and where to access and contact United Energy when needed?
- How do you ensure that communication is clear about outages and other services that may disrupt supply in a way that allows me to plan ahead?
- How can you ensure a seamless and transparent experience when outages occur so I can plan my day effectively?

<u>Aesthetically pleasing community environment</u>

- How can United Energy reduce the impact of infrastructure on the aesthetics in my neighbourhood?

<u>Inclusivity of communication content and channels</u>

- How can we make sure that we have accessible and equitable customer service for all customers with different needs?

<u>Higher level of value seen in the bill paid</u>

- How can I have more visibility of the services provided by the network?

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