

Indigenous Communities Assistance Network (ICAN)

ICAN holds significant concerns regarding the application by Telstra's application for an energy retailer authorisation given Telstra's very poor track record in selling its mobile phone plans and services to remote Indigenous communities. We would want to ensure, at a minimum, that approval of the application was contingent on Telstra proving that it will ensure the following systems and processes are in place to ensure such misconduct does not occur, should Telstra be allowed to operate within the energy sector.

- *ICAN would like Telstra Energy to have robust back-end systems and processes to protect vulnerable customers from disconnections (and ensuring they can be reconnected efficiently). To get a new service connected is difficult for telecommunications customers. If repeated in energy, this would create significant issues for customers.*
- *ICAN would like to see from Telstra Energy:*
 - *Dedicated vulnerable customer teams. This is to ensure a good hardship response process to ensure protections,*
 - *Good response times for phone calls, it can be difficult customers to reach a contact centre when they need assistance,*
 - *No hard-selling.*
- *Reiteration of the importance of training for front line staff in understanding and responding to vulnerable customers.*
- *There were concerns/questions about the potential for, and impacts of, 'bundling' of their energy & telecommunications and what this could mean for those who then find themselves in financial hardship. Non payment of phone bill should not impact on current or future electricity supply for example.*
- *Staff noted the importance of maintaining a suite of payment options. Not everyone is able to or has access to online services. Equally the management of direct debits can be very challenging for many in our community.*