

ElectraNet Consumer Advisory Panel Evaluation Report

25 October 2023

Prepared by Strategic Matters and ElectraNet's Consumer Advisory Panel

ElectraNet’s Consumer Advisory Panel acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which we meet, work and live.

We respect and value the diversity and wisdom of Aboriginal people and their ongoing culture and connections to the land and waters of Australia.

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DOCUMENT REVIEW

process	date
Lead Author: Strategic Matters	17/10/23
Initial review: Mark Henley, Vikram Kenjle, and Prof Simon Maddocks (CAP members)	19/10/23
Second review: All CAP members	23/10/23
Comments received: ElectraNet	24/10/23
Final document review: Strategic Matters	25/10/13

1. Executive Summary

The Consumer Advisory Panel acknowledges ElectraNet's commitment to active, participatory, early, and transparent stakeholder engagement processes.

This **Evaluation Report** process is an intentional and important component of that commitment. This document also forms the annual report of the Consumer Advisory Panel to ElectraNet's Board in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

ElectraNet's Consumer Advisory Panel (hereafter referred to as *the CAP*) is operating within a framework of a national objective to realise **net zero carbon emissions** by 2050. Many competing needs and considerations are part of their work. At a macro level, these include rising energy costs and cost of living and / or the cost of doing business, climate change adaptation (and changing risk profile), Environmental Social Governance issues and Social Licence.

In their role, CAP members consider many energy specific issues including national, state, and regional network planning, reliability of supply, distribution of supply, equity of cost, equity of access, energy storage, renewable energy, and stakeholder perceptions and needs.

Reflections of the last 12 months indicate the *Consumer Advisory Panel* is operating well; and the interface with ElectraNet is perceived to be strong, professional, respectful, and valuable.

CAP members recognise and value the manner in which ElectraNet invites the CAP to test ElectraNet's assumptions and thinking. The CAP also continues to support ElectraNet's commitment to ongoing engagement with the CAP in its annual planning process.

It is also identified that meetings are well organised and informative, the five **Values** identified by the CAP have been integrated into the CAP's work ethos, and that collaborative efforts between ElectraNet staff and the CAP have resulted in "a high functioning consumer body".

Having stated this, CAP members are seeking opportunities to contribute more dynamically as *Thought Leaders*. They do not perceive that the *impact of their work* can be clearly seen and are seeking to understand both how their contributions have assisted in outcomes and to play a more active role in influencing decisions.

Members identified opportunity for ongoing input into strategic positioning, forward planning, and decision making. This includes stronger interface with ElectraNet's Board of Directors to discuss consumer issues.

While recognising that continuous improvement is an ongoing process, CAP members perceive benefits will result from more direct feedback loops on the Consumer Advisory Panel's input. Moreover, CAP members believe an increase in early and continuous engagement on significant policy, planning and statutory matters will result in both more timely and improved input from the CAP.

Over the coming 12 – 24 months the Consumer Advisory Panel perceives opportunity to focus on:

- Transition to renewable based electrification - including transport (opportunities and potential pitfalls),
- Electricity costs (both cost of electricity and market intervention costs),
- Regional community relationships,
- Hardship and cost of living impacts on vulnerable customers,

- Broadening engagement to include topics such as Social Licence,
 - Possibly strengthening the relationship with [The Energy Charter](#), and
- Developing measurable success criteria for engagement practices.
 - Measuring engagement practices strengthens a company’s ability to build trust, adjust through continuous improvement, achieve effective results, and adopt a proactive position, ultimately strengthening stakeholder relationships.
 - Both ElectraNet and the Consumer Advisory Panel members recognise the importance of measuring process and impact across engagement activities.

Consumer Advisory Panel members have indicated a desire to enhance **strategic input** through the following possible avenues:

- Ongoing engagement in ElectraNet’s annual planning cycle including increased CAP input to ElectraNet’s Transmission Annual Planning Report (TAPR) process,
- CAP working together with ElectraNet to provide input on relevant regulatory and policy matters, such as the [Australian Energy Market Commission](#) (AEMC) rule changes and development of the [Integrated System Plan](#) lead by the [Australian Energy Market Operator](#) (AEMO),
- Collaborative work with South Australian Power Networks (SAPN) [Community Advisory Board](#) e.g. on demand forecasting and clean energy acceleration,
- CAP engaging with the ElectraNet Board on periodic basis to discuss consumer issues,
- Input to ongoing development of ElectraNet’s Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and
- Ongoing early and continuous engagement on significant policy, planning and statutory matters will result in improved input from the CAP, and prospectively avoid high pressured situations that are often paired with compressed timeframes.

2. Report information and context

2.1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is both to inform the ElectraNet Board on the role and effectiveness of ElectraNet’s Consumer Advisory Panel during the period September 2022 – October 2023, and to position the CAP for the coming 12 – 24 months.

The report focuses on three key dimensions:

1. The background and role of the Consumer Advisory Panel
2. Review of the effectiveness of the “new” Consumer Advisory Panel over the past 12 months, and
3. Ideas to enhance stakeholder engagement and contribution to decision making and / or collaborative work with ElectraNet over the coming 12 – 24 months.

2.2 Process and timing

The report has been authored by the Independent Facilitator, with input from three Consumer Advisory Panel (hereafter referred to as CAP) members in the first instance, and thereafter the entire current CAP membership.

Findings in the report have been informed by the following research:

- Discussion with CAP members over September 2022- October 2023 (inclusive),
- Notes from the CAP’s workshop in April 2023. This workshop resulted in amongst other things the articulation of five values for the Consumer Advisory Panel,
- Previous written reports: ElectraNet *Customer Engagement Outcome Report* [January 2022] Seed advisory *Engagement Report for The Revenue Proposal* [February 2022]
- International Association of Public Participation [IAP2] best practice, and
- The design, distribution, and analysis of a survey, prepared by the Independent Facilitator and distributed to CAP members. CAP members had a period of 10 days to complete the survey.

2.3 Societal Context and expectations

The Consumer Advisory Panel provides a range of consumer perspectives to the complex set of circumstances within which ElectraNet operates. These circumstances include:

- The rising energy costs and cost of living and cost of doing business, the Australia Energy Regulator’s (AER) Default Market Offer (DMO) for 2023-24 is 22.5% higher than 2022-23 for residential customers with controlled load,
- The National Energy Objective being changed to factor in **net zero carbon emissions** by 2050 which includes transitioning energy systems to renewably generated electrification. This includes an increasing Government focus – which is still lacking an overarching plan, and growing consumer concerns relating to the costs of the transition, and the impact of infrastructure developments associated with this transition
 - A key component of the Transmission planning is the biennial Integrated System Plan (ISP) with the Commonwealth Government currently conducting a review to ‘supercharge the ISP’,

- An important association with South Australian Power Networks (SAPN), the principal electricity distributor in the state of South Australia
 - SAPN delivers electricity to more than 860,000 customers and has a Consumer Advisory Board who play a key role in shaping SAPN's service delivery and decision-making process,
- A growing focus for businesses to follow *Environmental, Social and Governance* (ESG) practices, such as gender diversity, indigenous cultural awareness, carbon accounting, natural resource conservation (water, air and / or biodiversity), and community relations, and
- An increased focus on *Social License*, as businesses consider and learn from the level of acceptance and / or approval that stakeholders and / or communities extend to their work.
 - This is a significant and growing topic in other states of Australia.
 - It is anticipated that ElectraNet will encounter increasing interface with Social Licence matters over the short – medium term.

3. ElectraNet’s commitment

3.1 ElectraNet’s commitment to engagement

ElectraNet is committed to an active, participatory, early, and transparent stakeholder engagement processes. In 2017 ElectraNet was awarded the inaugural Energy Networks Australia (ENA) - Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) [Consumer Engagement award](#).

ElectraNet was one of the earlier network businesses in Australia (and amongst the first Transmission Network Service Providers) to seek active consumer engagement in decision making, in line with the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) [Consumer Engagement Guideline](#) of 2013.

ElectraNet’s has sustained a Consumer Advisory Panel (CAP) of varied membership since 2015.

Based on learnings from previous CAP members, the membership of the CAP, including the Independent Facilitator’s role was refreshed in 2022. The CAP update was an active process of widening the representation of the Panel. At the same time, the CAP’s work was aligned more closely with the principles of International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)¹. (Described further in this report).

3.2 Role of the Consumer Advisory Panel

ElectraNet’s Consumer Advisory Panel plays an important role to better inform ElectraNet’s decision making processes and policy decisions, with a clear emphasis on consumer perspectives, households, and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Commercial and Industrial (C+I) energy users. As stated in ElectraNet’s [CAP’s Terms of Reference](#):

The CAP is part of ElectraNet’s commitment to consumer engagement and the vehicle through which ElectraNet engages and collaborates with consumer representatives on the safety, affordability, and reliability of electricity transmission services in South Australia and the sustainability of ElectraNet’s operations.

ElectraNet’s engagement approach is also guided by the **International Association for Public Participation** [IAP2] principles. The IAP2 principles require that engagement is shaped by the following practices:



¹ The IAP2’s Mission is to: “promote and advance public participation / community engagement globally through targeted initiatives that are guided by culturally adaptive standards of practise and core values”.

4. The Consumer Advisory Panel

4.1 The CAP membership

The CAP's members represent a broad range of customer interests, bringing together peak representative organisations, business interests, industry, small business, the mining sector, general customers, Research + Development and the national energy market. The CAP also advocates gender diversity, age and cultural diversity.

Current members of the CAP bring expertise through individual CAP members employment or affiliation that captures a broad range of stakeholder interests and diverse backgrounds. These are listed below in alphabetical order :

- Ai Group;
- Business SA;
- Central Irrigation Trust;
- Consumers: Community sector
- Consumers: Environmental sector
- Energy Users Association of Australia
- Primary Producers South Australia;
- South Australian Chamber of Mines and Energy (SACOME);
- South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS);
- The University of Adelaide (Energy User & R+D)

4.2 The Independent Facilitator

Members of the previous CAP stressed the importance of an Independent Facilitator role to ElectraNet during the engagement leading to lodging the 2023-28 regulatory proposal.

The role of the Independent Facilitator is to work closely with the CAP to lead and guide its meetings and play a broader role in actively contributing to the engagement culture of ElectraNet and the Panel.

In June 2022, Leanne Muffet of Strategic Matters was awarded the position of *Independent Facilitator* for ElectraNet's Consumer Advisory Panel. This is a multi-year commitment to demonstrate consistency, and to create enhanced stability within the CAP membership.

One of the first tasks of the Independent Facilitator was to work with ElectraNet on the following items:

- updating the CAP's Terms of Reference (ToR);
- briefing the Executive Team; and
- recruiting for new CAP members.

4.3 CAP work to date

Since their re-formation in September 2022, the CAP has focused on several key items:

- 1) From late September 2022 to January 2023 the CAP responded to ElectraNet's **Revised Revenue Proposal 2023-28** submitted to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).

Given their formation in late September 2023, CAP members had a very condensed timeframe in which to respond to the AER and consequently invested significant time and energy to increase their familiarity with and acquire new skills to understand the process.

During this time, the CAP members were well supported by ElectraNet's staff.

The CAP's involvement in the *Revised Revenue Proposal 2023-28* process focused on:

- presentations from ElectraNet's staff over several meetings;
- representation by the CAP at the national online forum (the Independent Facilitator and one CAP member)
- written response to the AER by the CAP submitted in January 2023.

A copy of the CAP's submission to the Revised Revenue Proposal can be found [here](#).

- 2) Strengthening their relationship with South Australian Power Networks (SAPN). SAPN is South Australia's regulated electricity distributor. SAPN delivers electricity to more than 860,000 customers.
- 3) Developed the CAP's Values and working relationship with ElectraNet
- 4) Explored ElectraNet's Transmission Annual Planning Report (TAPR), providing feedback where relevant. The TAPR provides a 10 year outlook on the current capacity (and emerging limitations) of the SA Transmission Network.

4.4 The CAP's Values

In April 2023, a workshop was held with the CAP members to articulate amongst other things the Values by which the CAP would like to conduct business.

These values are articulated below:

Trust

Respect

Transparency

Candor

Inclusivity

[here](#)

4.5 Changes to CAP membership

During the period September 2022 to October 2023, the Consumer Advisory Panel experienced several changes of personnel. These principally occurred as individual members changed employment.

The result has been introducing and integrating three new members throughout 2023 (up until the time of writing of this report). This has resulted in the gradual development of group dynamics and cohesion. Nonetheless, until August 2023, the CAP has had six consistent members, which assisted significantly with the CAP's group formulation and unity. At the time of writing this report the filling of a fourth vacancy is required due to the interstate relocation of one member

5. Findings

5.1 Background and methodology

The following section summarises key findings from the CAP survey, CAP only meeting, and CAP April 2023 workshop. More information pertaining to detailed findings of the survey is available separately.

NOTE: In the interests of transparency and Co-Design, prior to distribution the survey was provided to two CAP members and two ElectraNet staff members for review and comment. Minimal changes resulted from this.

5.2 April 2023 CAP workshop outcomes

In their April 2023 workshop the CAP members identified the following items as their key areas of focus over the coming 12 – 18 months:

CONSUMERS AND / OR RELATIONSHIP MATTERS

- The energy transition process:
 - explaining impacts + the why + complexity + costs
 - creating a narrative for consumers over both the short and longer term
- Keeping cost of energy affordable for industrial users and other consumers
- Social Licence matters

INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Developing a cost-effective, flexible, adaptive and climate change resilient energy transition roadmap
- Increased focus on and leverage points to influence the national Integrated System Plan
- Minimising costs to end customers
- Enhanced energy storage on the grid
- Social licence including exploration of possible compensation to landholders and / or host communities

5.3 Key Survey reflections

Key findings demonstrate a range of common trends pertaining to the operations and functionality of ElectraNet's Consumer Advisory Panel. Results from these questions indicate that:

MOTIVATION OF CAP MEMBERS

- Overwhelmingly, CAP members identified their reason for being part of the CAP is to **advocate on behalf of consumers**. Other notable reasons for CAP members to be involved in this work concern the ability to influence local energy decisions and, the ability to influence innovation across the energy sector.

- Others made the following observations on their objectives:

To advocate on behalf of regional community and improve community understanding

To ensure environmental considerations are prioritised in decision-making

To promote the needs and challenges of lower income and disadvantaged customers, household and (very) small business

ESG matters are important to me and I would hope they are part of future CAP focus

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Survey findings clearly illustrate the CAP is pleased with the general level and focus of engagement by ElectraNet with, and by members within, the Consumer Advisory Panel. This includes the meeting format, the independent facilitator, access to ElectraNet technical staff and communication of issues.

- Over the past 12 months CAP members perceive they have had constructive input into developing a strong working relationship with ElectraNet, and input to the **Revised Revenue Proposal**.
- The CAP is pleased with the process ElectraNet has developed for engagement with them. They also perceive that they have worked collaboratively with ElectraNet to develop a high functioning consumer body.
- Most CAP members believe that members have been able to influence topics for engagement with ElectraNet (70% of all CAP members). It is also recognised by the CAP that ElectraNet *encourages the CAP to test assumptions and thinking*, which is valued by CAP members.
- Overwhelmingly, CAP members believe that the embedding of CAP's agreed values in their work has occurred.
- Half of the CAP members [5 of 10 members], indicated that input to network planning at the state level had been advanced throughout 2023 and one third perceive that input to networking planning at the national level had been advanced.

Overwhelmingly CAP members believe that their five values of *Trust, Respect, Transparency, Candour, and Inclusivity* are being embedded in the work that they undertake with ElectraNet.

THE CAP'S INFLUENCE

Survey findings clearly illustrate scope for improvement across the CAP's impact and influence in final decision making processes within ElectraNet.

- Many CAP members *do not* perceive that the impact of CAP's work can be clearly seen. This is an opportunity for ongoing review and refinement and collaborative efforts with the CAP and ElectraNet.
- The three questions of: ***influencing outcomes for consumers, acting as thought leaders, and influencing ElectraNet's decisions*** all ranked modestly / inadequately in the survey.
- Overall CAP members perceived there is opportunity for greater collaboration with ElectraNet to both understand where and how the CAP could more actively influence outcomes.

Some observations from CAP members are provided below:

Whilst there has been information and knowledge sharing and the major issues from both sides have been discussed, how this has impacted actions and outcomes by ElectraNet remains less clear.

I think we (the CAP) is still developing an internal understanding and developing a relationship of trust with ElectraNet that will be the basis for thought leadership. (Not saying there is not trust, just that it takes time to build enough for robust debate and challenge).

The CAP was always treated respectfully; however it is hard to know whether any CAP input influenced decisions that wouldn't have been made anyway.

Clearer direction from ElectraNet on what they would like feedback on specifically.

I think we are still working out what is possible and what the areas of response are.

I think ElectraNet's intentions are positive and the group is well attended. There needs to be clear identification of issues where CAP can have influence.

PROCESS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

- The meeting format, external content experts, internal content expert's, quality of information, and the independent facilitator are items the CAP would like to see retained over the coming 12 to 24 months.

Key observations from CAP members are provided below:

I cannot stress too strongly how important the independent facilitator is for maintaining good process, particularly outside of meetings. I also think that some more discussion with external experts will be really helpful.

The meetings are well organised and informative, it is the opportunities for influence that could improve.

Opportunity exists for enhanced feedback and communication loops to the CAP on where and how their input has influenced decision making. This warrants further exploration over the short term.

The CAP would like to see the following administrative and subject issues improved over the coming 12 to 24 months: quality of information, meeting format (collaborative conversations), external and internal content experts.

- It was noted that turnaround times on provision of some documents and length of time for feedback could also be improved.
- As busy professionals, members also indicated a desire for streamlining of information and communication to assist them work through key issues and items.
- (some) CAP members recognise their lack of energy sector expertise and have indicated a desire for increased clarity on specific energy matters, including improved unpacking of complex information.

As many CAP members are not energy experts per se, opportunity exists for increased 'unpacking' of complex information and ongoing background briefings on electricity matters.

5.4 Strategic contribution

STRATEGIC IMPACT

Overwhelmingly, CAP members are seeking ways to increase their strategic influence.

Members articulated their desire to better understand ElectraNet’s forward strategic agenda to be able to contribute more effectively to discussions and decisions. Members would value increased feedback loops and communication from ElectraNet pertaining to the effectiveness and usefulness of the CAP membership to ElectraNet’s decision making.

If CAP is to be strategic, we need to better understand ElectraNet’s strategic agenda, and be working ahead of that.

[It is not] *clear if the CAP are providing the level of input required by ElectraNet to achieve the best outcome at times....are we providing the level of input they require or expect?*

CAP members are seeking more time to share areas of concerns and positions on advice prospectively and external to ElectraNet formal sessions. The recently introduced “CAP only” session was perceived as a high value opportunity for members to meet and explore issues outside officials meetings. Opportunity exists to extend these into the future.

CAP members are seeking stronger links with the ElectraNet Board and Executive. This includes prospectively engaging with the Board (or representatives of) on periodic basis to discuss consumer issues.

CAP members also perceived a role for the Panel to play working collaboratively with ElectraNet to provide input on relevant regulatory and policy matters, including AEMC rule changes and the Integrated System Plan development process – the latter of which is led by AEMO.

CAP members are seeking to both work more actively with ElectraNet on strategic matters, and be more impactful with their contributions. Members perceive increased scope exists to incorporate their expertise as *Thought Leaders* into decision making processes.

STRATEGIC CONTENT

Looking to the future (coming 12 to 24 months) the CAP identifies the following items to focus on:

affordability and equity (90% of all CAP)

- A focus on nuanced items such as **solar and landholder compensation; and the integrated System Plan process** have also been identified as items worthy of increased attention.
- The issue of landholder compensation has an interface with social licence as well as Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) responsibilities.
- A review of ElectraNet’s relationship with the Energy Charter. The CAP is not seeing full membership of the Energy Charter as an immediate priority at this time but is keen to understand more of its purpose and operation and the potential benefits membership may offer.
 - More specifically the CAP is interested in whether the ElectraNet Board and / or Executive sees a *Social Licence* value in moving to be a full signatory to the Energy Charter.
- The issues of Electrification and the ongoing enhancement of the relationship with South Australian Power Networks (SAPN) both scored moderately across the CAP membership.
- Meetings and connections with other parties to continuously improve relationships and / or strategic understanding of issues. For example: meeting with interstate CAPs - Meeting with AEMO to understand the ISP and their considerations (if any) of passing on costs to

communities within each State, and engagement with SAPN to understand duplication of planning (if any).

The following items have been noted by CAP members

The rapidly rising cost of energy and cost of living has been a huge issue during 2023, not sure how well ElectraNet understands this. Also there is more to be done on ESG, for example on developing a Reconciliation Action Plan and better understanding the transition issues associated with electrification for net zero.

Equitable transition / distribution of electricity costs

Using distributed energy resources and excess generation at a local level to meet demand

Minimising expensive infrastructure where possible

Focus on costs to consumers and how to deliver benefits through the energy transition at least-long-term-cost to consumers (avoiding expensive infrastructure)

I think a useful 'cultural role' that CAP can play is helping to think through the immense uncertainty in current energy markets and associated risks that consumers (small and large) face.

CAP members identified the issues of economic development and regional community relationships and extension as areas of ongoing focus. This could extend to the hosting of a face to face CAP meeting in regional South Australia

6. Key Reflections and opportunities

The following section highlights key reflections and opportunities for continuous improvement. The CAP acknowledges these as important to ElectraNet's ongoing commitment to and maturation of effective stakeholder engagement. It is anticipated that the items below will form the basis of a Forward Plan to be jointly designed by ElectraNet and the CAP.

- 1) CAP members are keen to develop metrics (a system of measurement) for engagement that can be used both by the Consumer Advisory Panel and prospectively ElectraNet more broadly.
- 2) CAP members support further and ongoing engagement both with internal and external stakeholders as part of the transition to renewables in alignment with the national **net zero carbon emissions** by 2050.
- 3) CAP members wish to contribute more actively to regulatory and policy matters, including the EMC rule changes and AEMO's Integrated System Plan development process.
- 4) CAP members identified the importance of meetings and connections with other parties (e.g.: AEMO, other CAPS, and SAPN) to continuously improve relationships and / or strategic understanding of issues.
- 5) CAP members advocate a broadening of engagement to topics such as ESG and Social Licence. The CAP anticipates both issues will require more attention over the short – medium term.
 - This may include a possible strengthening of relationship with The Energy Charter.
- 6) CAP members identified issues of economic development, the cost of living and of business, rising energy costs, and regional community relationships as topics of ongoing interest.
 - The possible hosting of a regional South Australia CAP meeting formed part of the thinking
- 7) CAP members perceive that collaborative efforts between ElectraNet staff and the CAP have resulted in “a high functioning consumer body”. The CAP also continues to support ElectraNet's commitment to ongoing engagement of the CAP in its annual planning process.
- 8) CAP members believe that the CAP is operating well; and the interface with ElectraNet is perceived to be strong, professional, respectful, and valuable.
- 9) Overwhelmingly CAP members believe that their five values of *Trust, Respect, Transparency, Candour, and Inclusivity* are being embedded in the work that they undertake with ElectraNet.
- 10) CAP members are seeking to both work more actively with ElectraNet on strategic matters and be more impactful with their contributions. Members perceive increased scope exists to incorporate their expertise as *Thought Leaders* into decision making processes.
- 11) CAP members identified opportunity for ongoing input into strategic positioning, forward planning, and decision making on a range of specific matters (such as the ISP and TAPR).
- 12) CAP members see an opportunity for stronger interface with ElectraNet's Board of Directors.
- 13) CAP members support the idea of enhanced feedback and communication loops particularly regarding where and *how their input has influenced decision making*.
- 14) CAP members believe an increase in early and continuous engagement on significant policy, planning and statutory matters will result in improved and timely input from the CAP.
- 15) As many CAP members are not energy experts, the CAP supports the ongoing simplification of complex information and background briefings on electricity matters. **END**