

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Consumer engagement and innovation recognised in new energy awards

Australia's best energy innovators and consumer engagement practice will be recognised by two new awards at Energy Networks Australia's Annual Dinner on 29 November 2017: the Energy Network Industry Innovation Award; and the Energy Consumers Australia, Consumer Engagement Award.

Finalists in the Energy Network Industry Innovation Award category include projects to foster the energy experts of the future, trial battery storage systems in 100 homes in South Australia, pilot ways to make power more reliable in regional Australia and to better configure stand-alone power systems operating independently of the grid.

Finalists in the Energy Consumers Australia, Consumer Engagement Award include initiatives by network businesses to engage with customers about their needs and preferences early and well-ahead of the formal revenue setting process, to explore new deliberative techniques to drive a better, more open conversation between networks and customers, and to partner with local groups on community power projects.

Energy Networks Australia Chief Executive Officer Andrew Dillon said the finalists in this year's Innovation Awards category reflect the rapid pace at which technology is moving in the Australian energy sector and the opportunities for energy customers.

"A key part of our work is to innovate and develop the opportunities presented by the changes in the energy system so we can provide better services for our customers. "These projects offer a glimpse of the innovation that is possible and what can be delivered for customers and the energy system if we get the right regulatory and policy settings to unlock opportunities."

Rosemary Sinclair, CEO of Energy Consumers Australia said that the strong field of applications was evidence of a new and developing culture within electricity and gas network businesses.

"The common theme running through each of the shortlisted projects is a willingness by the network business to meet their customers where they are, to try new ways to engage on a set of complex and technical issues, and to learn and refine along the way.

"This is leading practice that is helping define the role that networks can and will play in providing essential services for consumers in a rapidly transforming market."

#### ***Energy Network Industry Innovation Award Finalists***

An Innovation Hub that serves as a liaison and collaboration point between innovation and education, the **Australasian Transformer Innovation Centre** initiative brings together the brightest minds from academia and industry to focus on break-through transformer research and develop the experts of the future.

**Horizon Power's** System Blueprint project responded to entire communities on the West Coast in Western Australia devastated by disaster. Stand-alone power system technologies employed ground-breaking methods to reconnect electricity to large farming communities after power lines were destroyed by the Esperance bushfires.

**SA Power Networks' 'Salisbury Trial'** explored how residential solar and batteries might be an alternative to investing in a network upgrade in Adelaide as well as providing insights into the network impacts of large-scale deployment of residential batteries. 100 customers

received battery storage systems at a discounted price in exchange for providing SA Power Networks the ability to utilise the batteries on peak demand days for network support. Salisbury Trial customers have enjoyed reduced bills and backup power, while SA Power Networks has deferred a \$2.9M upgrade.

**Western Power's** pilot providing six regional West Australian customers with Stand-alone power systems through battery storage, solar panels and on-property backup generators has proved a success technically, economically, and environmentally. The trial also achieved such great levels of customer satisfaction that Western Power committed to supplying these customers for a further 3 years through the stand-alone systems, with an eye to the future and potential wider adoption of the service.

### ***Energy Consumers Australia Consumer Engagement Finalists***

At the start of its Victoria and Albury engagement program **Australian Gas Networks** set a clear objective to develop a plan that delivered for customers and was underpinned by effective stakeholder engagement. Setting to clear objectives, talking to customers and stakeholders early, strong senior executive buy-in, and an open and genuine approach, driven by the release of a Draft Plan, defined Australian Gas Networks' award nomination.

**ElectraNet** engaged early, with Board-level backing to explore ways to improve the value of electricity transmission services for South Australian customers. Featuring the release of a preliminary Revenue Proposal, ElectraNet's principled, robust and early engagement approach helped it navigate the impacts of the September 2016 system black event.

The partnership between **AusNet Services, Mondo Power and Totally Renewable Yackandandah** in Victoria has helped deliver a leading example of what collaboration can achieve. Mondo Power is helping the community achieve its goal of powering Yackandandah with 100 per cent renewable energy by 2022.

**SA Power Networks** engaged extensively with consumers in 2015/16 about the move to new pricing structures from 2017. Using innovative deliberative forums, and in conjunction with consumers and their representatives, it developed 'Customer Impact Principles' to assess pricing options and implementation strategies. Of note in this entry was the clear commitment from the beginning to implement what customers and stakeholders developed.

A commitment to engage in a real and open way was central to **TasNetworks' 'Voice of the Customer'** program. Focusing on engagement, consultation, communication and measuring satisfaction, its objectives were clear: to improve prices, drive up service and reliability, build trust, and deliver tangible outcomes for TasNetworks energy customers.

*The recipients will be announced at the Energy Networks Australia Annual Dinner in Canberra on 29 November 2017.*

**ENDS**

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***Energy Networks Australia** represents Australia's electricity transmission and distribution networks and gas distribution networks. Our members provide energy to virtually every household and business in Australia.*

***Energy Consumers Australia** is the national voice for residential and small business energy consumers. Established by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2015, our objective is to promote the long-term interests of consumers with respect to price, quality, reliability, safety and security of supply.*