



**Sarah Proudfoot**

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**Title- Bringing the consumer voice into our decisions: encouraging meaningful participation in a complex regulatory framework**

Energy prices have become a major concern for the Australian community in recent years, largely due to significant price rises in energy bills. Electricity price increases put a spotlight on network regulation and have led to a range of energy market reforms, one of the main focuses of which has been increased consumer participation and engagement.

The complexity of the energy market and the regulatory processes that make up much of the AER's work have made it difficult for consumers, or even their representatives, to participate meaningfully. As a regulator, we have had to become more flexible and to listen to what consumers were saying – to find ways of addressing the issues they were raising in our work and to stop requiring them to use our language before we would engage with their information.

We are working on a number of fronts to give consumers a greater voice in our regulatory processes. We have set up jurisdictional consumer reference groups for some of our network pricing reviews and provided training to stakeholders to increase their knowledge and expertise. Equally, if not more importantly, we have made changes to our own processes, run staff seminars and discussion groups and reviewed how we engage with consumers. We are starting to see the benefits of this new way of working but need to build on this foundation, stay open to new approaches and keep listening to what our stakeholders are telling us.