

Aurora Energy 2023 Feedback Summary



Introduction

Aurora Energy's annual Disclosure Statement against the Energy Charter principles was released publicly in October 2023 and describes the customer outcomes demonstrated by Aurora Energy against the five Charter principles as at 30 June 2023, and identifies areas of continuous improvement for the coming 12 months.

The Charter Disclosure Statement operates under decentralised accountability model that requires signatories to facilitate feedback on their performance against the five principles, principally through engaging with 'customer councils'. This is the second year in which the de-centralised accountability model is in place.

For 2022-23, Aurora Energy continued to operate a Dedicated Feedback Group as its customer council but also utilised 'lived experience' feedback as a further input. As in its 2022 Disclosure Statement process, Aurora Energy again held a joint forum with TasNetworks to ensure broader Tasmanian energy sector issues could be elevated such as ongoing affordability issues and the transition of the Australian energy system as it relates to Tasmania.

Accordingly, this 2023 Energy Charter Feedback Summary (Feedback Summary) captures the range of comments, interactions and inputs received by Aurora Energy as it prepared and delivered its 2023 Disclosure Statement.

We look forward to our continual engagement with the Energy Charter in 2024.

Approach to Feedback

Process Summary

At the completion of the 2022 Disclosure Statement process, Aurora Energy reviewed its approach to the first year of the de-centralised accountability model. Insights on performance of signatories under this approach was provided through key meetings of the Energy Charter Measures, Metrics and Maturity (MMM) Working Group and through the 'Review of the decentralised accountability approach for the 2022 Energy Charter Disclosure Process' (December 2022) by the former Chair of the Independent Accountability Panel, Clare Petre.¹

Overall feedback on the approach taken by Aurora Energy was that it delivered the intent of the decentralised accountability model with clearly stated roles and processes that facilitated key inputs to shape the 2022 Disclosure Statement. With this as a starting point, Aurora Energy sought to replicate the 2022 approach whilst delivering on its enhancement commitments.

Further supporting the 2023 process was the guidance provided by the Energy Charter secretariat with Disclosure Statement Guidance published in April 2023 (Guidance). Aurora Energy notes it has followed the steps outlined in the Guidance support information as much as practically possible, in particular, it has continued to have a strong level of

¹ Review of the decentralised accountability approach for the 2022 Energy Charter Disclosure Process, Clare Petre, December 2022

involvement in the preparation of the Statement by noting only its executive but also its Board, meeting one of the key Guidance recommendations.

The following steps were followed across the 2023 Disclosure Statement process.



Lived Experience Approach

A key change to the 2022 process was the plan to establish a customer council comprising representatives from the Aurora Energy customer base as additional to organisational stakeholders with the 2023 approach to be a blended model of customer and customer advocate feedback. On 24 May 2023, Aurora Energy held a ‘lived experience session’ with dedicated lived experience partners to gather their feedback on our performance with participants coming from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, including those with Aurora Energy.

This session was overwhelmingly constructive and positive and will serve as the basis for ongoing review by Aurora Energy on the optimal manner in which to obtain and use customer feedback into its Disclosure Statement performance, both from the lived experience vantage point and from use of broader mass customer segment feedback.

Dedicated Feedback Group

In support of the decentralised approach to accountability, Aurora Energy convened a ‘Dedicated Energy Charter Feedback Group’ (Feedback Group) comprised of key Tasmanian customer and community organisations including:



We thank this group for their involvement and feedback throughout the preparation of our 2023 Disclosure Statement and this Feedback Summary.

Feedback Summary Endorsement

This Feedback Summary has been circulated and endorsed by the members of the Aurora Energy Dedicated Feedback Group.

Disclosure Statement Feedback

Aurora Energy sought and received feedback throughout the preparation of its 2023 Disclosure Statement with this instrumental in shaping not only our maturity ratings and disclosure reporting but other actions not directly captured through our Energy Charter involvement.

The following is a summary of feedback provided by our Feedback Group across email and in person at the various engagement points.

Theme	Stakeholder Feedback	Our Response
<i>Engagement</i>	Government aren't adequately funding advocates to sufficiently contribute. "I feel like I'm not contributing as I would like as I'm spread too thin across multiple groups and forums."	Aurora will raise this with Government and will be considering it as part of a broader review of its engagement approach with stakeholders for the Energy Charter, set to commence in late November 2023.
<i>Lived Experience Utilisation</i>	Advocates supported the use of lived experience feedback as a strong input but also challenged whether there needed to be a broader source of client feedback.	As above, Aurora Energy is reviewing its approach to use of a lived experience Feedback and a Customer Council to ensure to a balanced approach.
<i>Working poor representing more</i>	Advocates have started to see people who are working but are struggling. A different kind of community member seeking help than previously.	Aurora Energy took action recently to help address aspects of this situation with the contribution to the Energy Hardship fund administered by the Salvation Army.

<i>Affordability</i>	Price increases are progressively adding up, particularly for concessions customers. Aurora should watch out for a built-up impact.	Aurora Energy will continue to monitor pricing impacts and participate in sector wide reviews currently under the oversight of the Tasmanian Parliament. Aurora Energy also worked with the State Government on delivering energy price relief for the 2023-24 period.
<i>aurora+ uptake</i>	Do you think there's a fear for customers to move to aurora+ because there's going to be a charge at some point such as with the previous product service fee?	Noted and we are mindful of keeping up the comms on aurora+ with pop-ups and roadshows.
<i>Access to advanced meters</i>	No access to advanced meters widens the divide of support for vulnerable customers. For those with behind the meter issues the Government needs a plan to support customers but also not end up with subsidising one group over another. There should be a wide range of options, interest free loans, no penalty if they stay on the meter for some time and flexibility on the 2026 deadline.	Aurora Energy is working with the State Government on actions to help it meet the 2026 commitment to complete the rollout of advanced meters. This includes preparing a framework to enable customers the opportunity to have an advanced meter installed despite challenging individual circumstances.
<i>Anxiety over engagement</i>	Lived experience partners consistently highlighted there was much initial anxiety when contacting Aurora Energy but that this dissipated once they were engaged with case officers in the Your Energy Support Team.	Aurora Energy is examining ways to assist in communicating to those vulnerable customers in need of our support that there will be friendly, positive and helpful support measures in place to assist them in a non-judgmental environment.
<i>Your Energy Support program uptake</i>	All instances of need for assistance should be heard and considered by Aurora Energy, regardless of the circumstances of individual customers, even for difficult or challenging customers.	Aurora Energy has recently reviewed its YES program and expanded its criteria of support.
<i>Energy efficiency</i>	Energy efficiency appears to be a gap for Aurora Energy with the ability to save on consumption being a great benefit to customers.	Aurora Energy is soon to commence its Voices for Power equivalent literacy program along with TasNetworks that will assist in the growing energy knowledge on how best to manage customer usage.
<i>Extension of energy rebates and concession.</i>	Given the expanded cohort of recipients under the Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government Energy Price Relief Payments, could the standard concession payments also be expanded beyond the current criteria. It would also be good to see Concessions registration automated.	Aurora Energy will raise this matter with the State Government noting the large complexity of delivering the EPRPs has been challenging and costly.

<i>Business customer support</i>	Advocates flagged that businesses were struggling to access and/or meet the criteria of governmental support programs. Small businesses in particular were facing a difficult period where cost of living issues for residential customer was having a knock on effect to business viability.	Aurora Energy will raise this concern with the Tasmanian Government and look at what information is has that can be communicated to businesses to better assist and direct them to avenues of support.
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The Draft 2023 Disclosure Statement reflects a high level of maturity against the Energy Charter’s five key principles, built up over a five-year period of Energy Charter membership. However, it also reflects a realistic view of constraints placed on Aurora Energy through external pressures such as high prices and internal challenges. In this context, the maturity ratings outlined in the Draft 2023 Disclosure Statement remain at 2022 levels. Both internal review steps and external stakeholders such as the Dedicated Energy Charter Feedback Group broadly agreed with this assessment.

Collaborative focus on Cost of Living

On 24 October 2022, Aurora Energy and TasNetworks hosted a Joint Feedback Forum aimed at facilitating feedback on:

- The performance of each business under the Energy Charter key principles.
- Areas for improvement for in operating environments and engagement practises.
- How to align customer needs and industry challenges.
- Key priorities for 2023-24

The forum was attended by both Aurora Energy and TasNetworks Executive teams with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) leading the discussion for each business. Customer advocate representation was high with attendees from not only Aurora Energy and TasNetworks’ feedback groups but also other TasNetworks stakeholder working groups, ensuring a diverse range of residential and business customer representatives.

The Forum outlined that the energy industry is experiencing an unprecedented amount of change which creates both challenges and opportunities with customers facing two critical issues of energy affordability and equitably managing the ongoing transition of the Australian energy system.

Executives from the two energy businesses highlighted key challenges and received insights from advocates that are summarised across the following three themes and points:

Theme 1: Greater communication needed to improve energy literacy

- LOTE (Languages Other Than English) issues in broader community on the rise with increased population growth.

- Meeting customer needs will require complimentary engagement approaches as digital transformation progresses. Businesses should look to enhance the literacy levels of those customers not able to participate in new service solutions.
- The aging community is also a factor in reduced literacy and access to digital information.
- 46% of Tasmanian adult population have grade 7 reading levels adding to the challenge of understanding complex energy industry.
- Challenging to communicate the need for network growth, without getting lost in the complexity of the need for a solution noting that do nothing is not an option.

Theme 2: Impact of cost of living increases, especially for vulnerable customers

- Maintaining downwards pressure on all elements of the supply chain is more important than ever given ongoing cost of living challenges. However, there needs to be equal focus on the demand side with tariff reform which is a key area that can help customers manage ongoing costs.
- Lessons could be learned from systems on the mainland as part of ‘Thriving Communities’ where information is shared across multiple utilities (with the approval of the individual) and their story does not have to be re-told multiple times to a variety of service providers.
- There is need for greater protection for individuals who are put into challenging situations, such as by– allowing flexibility for connection and payments where hardship is identified.
- Challenges are being faced by all utility providers (not just energy) as they move on from COVID-19 created debt practices. The community has become accustomed to flexibility in payment practices and it is going to be difficult to re-train customer mentality in a post-COVID environment.
- Price shock remains a critical issue for customers as well as businesses and remains a driver to why they may seek help outside of Aurora Energy. Connection issues also remain a challenge and driver for customers to seek assistance outside of TasNetworks.
- The recent focus on rising costs has been on wholesale inputs whereas the next ten years is expected to be on network costs.
- Proactive engagement with customers can help address cost of living impacts with use of enhanced data a potential gateway to earlier identification of vulnerable customers and improving support initiatives.
- Demand management and energy efficiency programs for the vulnerable have worked in other jurisdictions and examples should be researched and examined for use in Tasmania.

Theme 3: Improving stakeholder trust

- There is a need to ‘tell the whole story’ for major energy projects that have complex drivers and diverse outcomes. Without a clear explanation of problem and benefits, it can become difficult for customers to broadly accept major energy initiatives, particularly for those directly impacted.

- When communicating on major projects, advocates sought to have this information shared earlier noting that the advocates are likely the parties who can best communicate the messages associated with those projects to their community or members.
- As government owned businesses, Aurora Energy and TasNetworks should look to be trusted parties, communicate with evidence-based arguments and use less 'spin' in our messages in order to build customer trust (which is currently low).
- Business partners and community advocates aren't feeling 'needed' for feedback, rather they are consulted as a tick a box exercise.
- Despite the predominantly renewable status of Tasmania, there remains confusion over how all generation inputs, including Basslink and natural gas, align with Tasmania's renewable energy status.
- A call to communicate with evidence-based arguments and less 'spin' in our messages to build customer trust (which is currently low).

Commitment to collaboration

Aurora Energy and TasNetworks will work together in taking these insights forward into their broader work programs and strategic planning across the coming year. This collaborative approach reflects a broader engagement throughout the 2022-23 period with a notable increased level of collaboration between the two businesses compared to previous years.

The past year has seen both businesses successfully collaborate on Priority #BetterTogether initiatives such as, 'Knock to Stay Connected' and the 'Cost of Living' including the June 2023 Concessions Awareness Campaign. Aurora Energy and TasNetworks have also progressed their commitment to the development of an energy literacy program to train key community representatives to deliver pre-defined energy education programs. The Tasmanian Men's Shed Network has been chosen as the partner to deliver a pilot program to test both the content and delivery methods of the new program that is set to be called 'Power People'. More information on Power People will be released in early 2024.

Appendix A – Joint CEO Forum

Energy Charter	Amy Abraham
Reset Advisory Committee	Richard Bevan
Reset Advisory Commiittee	Leigh Darcy
Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Michael Bailey
Small Business Council	Robert Mallett
Renewables, Climate and Future Industries Tasmania (RecFIT)	Sharon Raymond
Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS)	Stephen Durney
Tasmanian Renewable Energy Alliance (TREA)	Jack Gilding
Anglicare Tasmania	Mark Mason
TasWater	Samuel Paske
Goanna Energy	Marc White
Hydro Tasmania	Georgie Prenter
Australian Electric Vehicle Association (AEVA)	Penny Cocker
Launceston Chamber of Commerce	William Cassidy