

Electricity Authority Advisory Group meeting notes

Sub Group – Digitalisation

9.30-10.30am Wednesday

24 July 2025

Attendees

Electricity Authority

Carl Billington - Principal Advisor Advisory Groups; Lisa Rautenback – Senior Advisor; Will Goldsmith – Manager Engagement; Larissa Lutchman – Manager, Strategy Planning & Performance; Jolene Williams – Principal Advisor, Communications.

Advisory Group

Jamie Silk (Chair); Steven Graham; Liz Kilduff; Jason Larkin; Jeremy Adamson; Fiona Wiseman; Miranda Struthers; Sam Elder; Gareth Cartwright; Helen Tua;

Apologies

Jodi Gardner

Confidentiality

The confidentiality status for this engagement was set as open, limited – which means that participants are welcome to indicate to peers and colleagues they are engaged on this topic and share high-level information in confidence and invite feedback.

Confidentiality status may change at later stages of this work and the Authority will advise if this occurs.

EAAG – Confidentiality & Information Sharing Rubric			
OPEN		CLOSED	
1. No restriction: share openly & widely	2. Limited: share in-confidence with a pre-agreed circulation. This might also mean we are open about the topic we are discussing but not the detail yet.	3. Temporary: will become open for sharing soon, but hold til then.	4. Confidential: Don't share.

Introduction and context

The Chair and the Authority Representative provided a brief introduction and reminder of engagement process and confidentiality parameters.

The Chair clarified the focus of the EAAG's advice for this workshop as "validating how and when the EA might best engage with consumers at this early stage".

The Authority then provided a high-level overview of the initiative, its purpose (enabling "effortless energy management" in a decentralised system), and the key process milestones and high-level timeframes.

The Authority had recently released its "[Our future is digital](#)" discussion paper. Feedback to date has identified four key issues to address:

1. Storage and privacy
2. Equity
3. Interoperability
4. Balancing simplification against necessary complexity

Additional information links recommended by EAAG members

- [Consumer Data Right](#)
- [Open Synth smart meter data repository](#)
- [Australia Digital Energy Futures](#)

Key summary from the Authority's high-level overview

The Authority provided the following key points as a high-level summary:

- Working to serve a consumer of the future who wants effortless energy management with control over costs.
It requires incentives to participate in electricity markets and to potentially have relationships with many retailers and traders if desired.
- In a decentralised electricity system, the role of consumers and communities shifts as well - with greater involvement in planning, ownership, trading and generating energy for those who wish it.
- This can't happen without data or digitalization.
- Data visibility speaks to increasing the amount of data that people can access to support decision making, and also that no one is gaining an unfair advantage from asymmetrical access.

Key themes and summary from workshop discussion

Part One: What is the best way to involve consumers in the development of the digitalisation programme?

We then moved into open discussion and dialogue with EAAG members. Below is a summary of the key points of clarification and discussion that followed.

The Authority was asked to clarify the issues regarding storage, sharing and privacy and whether the existing registry didn't prevent an appropriate starting point for this. The Authority clarified the issues here are not technical (there are excellent options available), but more ensuring the issues of scope and process are canvassed not just for immediate needs, but with the long-term evolution in mind. This work is also closely linked to the development of the Consumer Data Right.

What we mean by 'consumer'

There was significant discussion about what exactly we mean by the term 'consumer' – noting that this phrase is often used in particular, specific ways across the sector (most commonly alluding to household consumers of electricity services).

There seemed to be a consensus across the group for the recommendation to adopt the term “consumer of data” for this initiative. It makes it much clearer what is being consumed but also opens the way for much clearer stakeholder segmentation:

- Individual consumers (households, communities/collectives, corporates)
- The 'prosumer'
- Innovators who want to develop and offer new products from this data
- Others who want to use the data to inform various research and policy questions.
- The retailers and commercial operators who will consume the data for their own commercial purposes.
- And are consumers of the data now, and in the future the same? How might things change?

Focusing on consumers in terms of their data needs was seen as a more useful way of thinking of the stakeholders for this work.

The project needs to clearly define its consumers and stakeholders and then ask: What do they actually want/need?

What needs to be done (enablers, barriers etc) to meet those needs?

Ways of engaging

EAAG members referred to the electricity price review process as a potential source of information and learning for successful consumer engagement.

Another EAAG member suggested that a key avenue isn't necessarily consumers themselves, but those they go to for advice – identifying the 'energy advisors' and advocates: those that assist people to understand their bills and contracts and services. A number of the individuals these people support might be reluctant to engage directly with the Authority, but their advocates would have valuable insight.

Several EAAG members also recommended add a technical 'cheat sheet' for household consumers to help explain key terms and industry language if engaging with energy users through surveys or workshops, who might not have much technical knowledge of the sector. Similarly the team spoke favourably of a series of animated explainer videos MBIE produced, as another approach.

Others referred to some of the alternate submission methods the Authority has recently employed to support its consultation processes – verbal submissions, video interviews, collective workshops and focus groups. Using the Authority's resources to lift the admin or process burden off participants.

Where to find the insight we need

In addition to the individual energy users and their advocates, the tech companies were suggested as another key audience to engage. These are the ones who will be using the data to develop products and services for energy users – so what do they need to be able to invest, what are they looking for? They'll also have expertise in how to market their product to the target users and consumers.

This led to a discussion about other parties that might use the data to enhance or inform the services they provide – local councils, community organisations and NGOs/NFPs, innovators and others. These groups will also have their own modes of engaging with their stakeholders and their own insights. Most individual users don't care about the backend, they just want the service so trying to engage them on the fine detail behind the system is unlikely to be fruitful.

However many consumers do care about who has access to their data.

So another way to think about it is in terms of two conversation topics: a privacy conversation and a services conversation (user-side and developer-side).

The 'Open Synth' project was cited as a point of comparison. It anonymizes everything and then makes the useful data publicly available at the lowest granularity whilst protecting identities.

Equity

Another EAAG member observed that 7% of households don't have access to smart metres. So there are inequities already present across the system with regards to digital data and access. Others in remote locations face connectivity issues. The project will need to be cognisant of this.

Do consumers want to participate more?

Another group member noted that, while this work assumes decentralisation, not all consumers desire this. Some just want to access affordable energy and then be hands-off on the detail, expecting their provider to solve any issues behind the scenes for them. The group agreed that it was important the diverse types of energy consumer are kept in mind, and that any adopted solution/outcome doesn't cater to one perspective at the detriment of others.

Group members raised the assumption that consumers want to participate more, and reflected that isn't true in all cases.

Interoperability & early signals for developers

The group then moved on to discuss the challenge of needing to set standards early in order to enable or encourage consistency for developers. Developers of future products and services want to know what the playing field will look like in the future to have confidence what they are building will be fit for purpose in the future market environment. We need to think about how we enable developer confidence also. How do we quickly get to the point where we've defined the standards by which we operate and provide platforms and services?

We need to bring the lens of future consumer personas to our planning here also.

And while the individual might not engage, there are advocates who are engaged for consumers and community groups and organisations, NGOs and others who are working actively with all sorts of different types of consumers, from the energy hardship through to the really proactive energy communities. These groups and advocates could have a lot of insight to offer. How do we target them?

That can provide a perspective on this and I would encourage targeting those groups rather than trying to get to Mrs. Jones next door perhaps.

The group also observed that, although a number of individual consumers are disengaged currently, that doesn't mean this will always be the case – especially as everything in the future becomes more digital. The current state isn't always an accurate barometer for the future.

Innovators and the developers need certainty. They've been given signals and statements in the past and then these haven't been enforced. There's been a series of \$1,000,000 investments and start-ups based on expectations about the outcomes from Authority action and market participant indications that have not been realised and some of those investments have gone bust and the product has been abandoned. If the Authority is serious about this it must enforce its decisions.

Even just agreeing some core principles could help move the sector forward on some of these things. Giving innovators such as those who are interested in providing flexibility services or other offerings on the fringes enough clarity and certainty about the principles we are working to would help.

Part Two: what is the best way to test the key challenges and benefits with consumers or consumer advocates and researchers?

One EAAG member cited past successful experience with NGOs and other consumer advocates using scenarios as a way of engaging with barriers and possibilities.

However, these sorts of stakeholders are typically not well resourced and it isn't easy to get them to engage in events like this. Scenarios are useful - if you give them a blank piece of paper to start with, it's just too difficult. They can just take the abstract

out of it. It's easier to show people rather than tell them – most people can't envision a future and what these sorts of changes might mean for them.

It was also noted that retailers will have significant experience in this field and will have both strong insight regarding consumers and the best ways to engage with them.

EAAG members recommended referring to the Australian Digital Energy Futures report too, which included a range of future consumer scenarios.

The following question was raised: how do you connect with consumers where they are already? And what do you bring to this conversation? People described past experience of hosting barbecues at farms and supply stores or AMP shows in regional communities. What can we give that's relevant to their life today, to make it worth engaging with this?

It was also observed that this level of engagement work would suit multiple programmes of work across the Authority – are there opportunities to link resources so the Authority benefits more widely from the knowledge and insight that's gained?

Data quality

One consumer advocate commented that the data quality they see is very poor at times – multiple formats, missing data, inconsistent naming conventions across products. There also seems to be a difference between what retailers see in the back end of the register compared to what consumer advocates access in the front end. They felt there is a lot of data clean-up to be done before any digitization project will work for mass market consumers.

Another member cited a news piece that suggested there were 15,000 different price and product plans in NZ alone. This is not simplicity. There was a desire to see the Authority tackle this sort of systemic consistency as part of enabling digitalisation. It's not just the technology – we need to tackle this systemically.

EAAG members also encouraged the Authority to think about the sequencing of its work. There are obvious links to some of the benefit that could be derived through

MTRs and the way they could begin to benefit consumers who have challenges with affordability – enabling them to shop around or wield more collective buying power. Are there some other things the Authority could enable in a different sequence that might enable critical benefits to more challenged consumers? Is the current schedule of initiatives consistent with the Authority's requirement to secure the best outcomes for consumers.

And again, to attract investment in this, EAAG members felt tech and service developers need to see us putting those systemic foundations in place around standardisation and simplicity.

The group called out the challenge of needing to act now, but acknowledging the future is still evolving. Yet there are some obvious things that are needed: Consumers need that central repository where comparable information is available in a consistent format across all ICPs with a smart meter. Then that data needs to be anonymised and available, as granular as possible, at an aggregate level to anyone who needs it - whether researchers, retailers, policy people, investors and developers, or consumers.

This is the key enabler. Available data is the easy one to solve because it is centralised. You won't get any pushback and it will unlock so much potential and allow the innovation layer to come over the top, and let them do the hard work. Also doing it well and doing it once in a centralised way, avoids driving additional cost into the system if developers rather than leaving developers to invent their own solutions or constantly upgrade systems and software in the absence of consistency or standardisation.

In significant change like this there's always some resistance to be expected (ie [Stop Smart Meters | https://stopsmartmeters.org.nz/](https://stopsmartmeters.org.nz/)), but this can be addressed to some degree through fact sheets and training resources that help educate consumers with correct factual information.

At this point the Chair provided a brief recap and observed the general unity of opinions and advice across the group, however the Chair noted the following issue to consider:

There's a natural opportunity to begin working with the prosumers and other early adopters that have the resources and motivation to adopt more digital tools and services. However at the same time, there's the growing equity challenge of a number of consumers without access to digital technologies, smart meters or affordable power. How do we balance these different ends of the continuum as we move forward with this work?

Analogies were drawn with the banking industry's transition to digital services and support. They had a desire to access more technology, but started with what people currently had and built on that as a starting point to reach the largest number of consumers.

The EAAG members also called out the need for education and guidance as we increase public access to data – we need to ensure that we're not inadvertently assisting people to make really bad decisions or to give others bad advice (due to data ignorance). There also need to be some checks and balances in the system to prevent 'cowboys' from misusing or undermining the integrity of the system.

From there the Authority team expressed their thanks to the EAAG members and reiterated the next steps and milestones in the process from here.