

4th Consumer & Industry Wānanga: Post-event report

**Prepared by: Carl Billington, Principal Advisor
Zoe Priestley - GM Communications, Engagement and Data**

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Executive summary

The Electricity Authority's fourth Consumer & Industry Wānanga was held on 11 November 2025, with 48 participants.

The wānanga focused on how to increase consumer trust and engage more effectively with hard-to-reach consumers. It included a review of progress from previous wānanga and an open session in the afternoon, where participants set the topics to discuss amongst the tables.

This report summarises the key actions and recommendations identified throughout the day. The attendees and agenda are included in the appendices.

Note, for the first time, we established a cross-agency team to design the wānanga event together. This co-design team included representatives from Consumer NZ, ERGANZ, and EECA. This joint-planning approach contributed greatly to the success of the event and is something we highly recommend for the future - our thanks to Jessica Walker, Miranda Struthers and Caroline Shone for their valuable support and input.

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1. Key themes

- 1.1 The key insights and suggestions from the day can be categorised into the following themes:
 - (a) More effective outreach approaches to struggling consumers
 - (b) Ideas for simplifying engagement with Authority consultations
 - (c) Ideas for improving energy literacy
 - (d) Thoughts on developing a NZ Energy Strategy
 - (e) Responses to the progress update on past wānanga actions and recommendations
 - (f) Suggestions for future wānanga
 - (g) Other isolated topics eg, pricing, switching service, partnerships with iwi.
- 1.2 The full feedback and key points raised under each theme, along with unfiltered recommendations, can be found in Appendix 3.

2. Key insights

- 2.1 There were three key insights identified through the table discussions. These insights were raised repeatedly across topics and themes throughout the day and are as follows:
 - (a) Trust is the biggest driver of engagement: consumers respond to support delivered by trusted people in familiar, community-based settings. Navigator roles, NGO partnerships, and warm handoff pathways directly support this.
 - (b) The sector has strong initiatives but low visibility: while several programmes exist across NGOs, iwi, EDBs, retailers, councils, and EECA, many consumers simply don't know about them. This was also a consistent insight from the May wānanga event: participants were genuinely impressed at the extent of outreach and support initiatives retailers were implementing, but many expressed surprise and disappointment that they've never heard about it.
 - (c) Simplicity is essential: plain language, consistent processes and clear support pathways remove barriers for households already dealing with stress and hardship. It was noted that Authority consultations, particularly the length of documents and the level of technical language could be a barrier.
- 2.2 These insights are reflected in the key recommended actions.

3. Recommended actions

- 3.1 As outlined in Appendix 3, the table kōrero at the wānanga produced a range of recommendations and suggested actions (35 recommendations). We have prioritised the recommendations for follow-up, based on the following criteria:
 - (a) Opportunity for practical action (ie, something could realistically be done in support of the idea)
 - (b) Alignment with the Authority's strategic priorities
 - (c) Alignment with existing or planned Authority work programmes.
- 3.2 The initial assessment identified 14 priority items (see Appendix 4), based on these criteria. We've further categorised these items into three groups:

- (a) High-priority opportunities
 - (b) Quick-win opportunities
 - (c) Medium-term system improvements
- 3.3 Each of these items are summarised across three categories: high-priority opportunities; quick-win opportunities; medium-term system improvements.
- 3.4 Note that no 'owners' are confirmed for any recommendations – some of the items may fit within the scope of the Authority's work programme, others may fit best with industry or community stakeholders and some others may require multiple owners. These issues will be confirmed at the next stage as the recommendations are published and participants are invited to contribute to future working groups.
- 3.5 High-priority opportunities
- (a) Simplify & 'humanise' sector language: Do more to simplify the language we use and translate it into the language of consumers and communities – make it more meaningful and accessible.
 - (b) Pilot Community Energy Navigators: Similar concept to Whānau Ora navigators in the health system. There was strong support for the concept of having navigators embedded in communities to enable early intervention, hardship identification, switching support and support energy literacy. This isn't within the scope of the Authority but there's a potential opportunity for collaborative work here to confirm a practical model and find the right 'home' and resourcing approach.
 - (c) Develop a Sector Visibility Hub: A central, shared place for sharing information and raising awareness of outreach initiatives - hardship support, initiatives and tools - and best practice consumer engagement. This would help address the most common frustration across all themes.
 - (d) Strengthen NGO–retailer 'warm handoff' pathways: Creates a consistent, trusted process for connecting households to the right support without stigma or confusion.
 - (e) Define the Energy Wellness Framework: There was strong support for shifting the narrative from hardship reaction to proactive energy wellbeing. It was suggested a shared framework could be developed for how we discuss the future we are working in to enable for consumers, and how we describe the challenges and opportunities they experience.
- 3.6 Quick-win opportunities
- (a) Plain-English consultation summaries & short-form submission options: the recent CCO summaries were cited as a well-regarded example. Consumer advocates and other less resourced stakeholders would like to see this approach normalised. Doing so should improve participation and speed up engagement comprehension.
 - (b) Co-branded consumer rights & support guide: makes support visible, consistent and accessible for households and frontline workers. Partner with relevant NGOs to find the right tone and promotion approach.
 - (c) Best practice repository for frontline NGO & community workers: establish a shared resource point for advocates and potentially retailers to access and emulate the best approaches others are implementing.
 - (d) Seasonal winter energy campaigns (proactive support & messaging): increase energy literacy (time of use awareness, healthy homes messaging, other ways to be more efficient or economic).

3.7 Medium-term system improvements

- (a) Consistent hardship processes across retailers: many retailers are doing brilliant outreach work, but the approach taken is not standardised across the industry. There was a desire among participants for more consistency in the approach retailers take towards consumer hardship.
- (b) Multi-agency hardship collaboration (MSD, iwi, NGOs, EECA, councils): acknowledging that no one agency can offer everything that is needed, there was a strong desire for greater collaboration between agencies when supporting consumers who are experiencing related hardship factors. Privacy requirements were identified as a potential obstacle to this however.
- (c) Regional & co-hosted wānanga expansion: it was suggested that these dialogues could be taken deeper with a more localised form – instead of a big central event, could this morph into a series of regional events that are co-hosted with locally-based NGOs and retailers.
- (d) Standardised “Right Plan Check”: strong desire for all retailers to proactively check whether consumers are on the best plan for their needs, use and budget.
- (e) Trusted caller verification mechanism: A few participants raised the need for a way to verify that outreach calls are genuine, like what some banks do. This was suggested to reduce mistrust and help people feel safer engaging.

3.8 Winter energy payment: Targeting the Winter Energy Payment was a consistent theme for this wānanga. While outside the Authority’s mandate, the recommendation was that consumer advocates and community organisations may wish to collaborate on a recommendation to central government.

4. Post-event participant feedback

4.1 As indicated, this 4th wānanga has been our highest rated event yet in terms of participant feedback ratings. 27 participants completed the post-event survey forms (previous events only had 12 and 9 persons completing the surveys).

4.2 Of these, 16 rated the event 5/5, 10 rated it 4/5, and one person gave a 3.8/5 rating. Rounding the latter up, that means 100% of respondents rated the event as very good or excellent, with the majority (60%) selecting ‘excellent – 5/5.’ This has never happened before.

4.3 Key successes: we asked participants what they liked most about the event and what created the greatest value for them. The following four key themes received the most positive feedback stood out:

- (a) Hearing from a diverse range of people across the sector and learning about the breadth of outreach initiatives.
- (b) The opportunity to collaborate with people from other parts of the sector.
- (c) The design of the day, which left room for open dialogue and extensive interaction. “It felt like engagement, not a presentation.”
- (d) The open session (crowd-sourced agenda slot)
- (e) Updates on past wānanga outcomes and making the continuity visible

- 4.4 Key improvements: We also asked participants what we could do to further improve the event in future. Key themes for improvement included:
- (a) Some participants noted the repeating themes from previous wānanga, leading them to question whether we are moving things forward or just recycling discussion topics. How do we channel the dialogue into action? As one participant put it: “Maybe watch out a bit for the same themes/topics to be discussed across multiple wananga. I had a bit of a reaction (admitting to be predisposed to having a negative view on the current situation!) to seeing that there were some clear trends across all of them but the 'pace of change' meant that resolving or genuine responding to them was taking time. Could cause frustration.”
 - (b) Some participants would have enjoyed hearing more about some of the outreach initiatives that are happening across the sector – short presentations on these topics would be welcome. Recommended [Pecha Kuch style presentations](#) (20 slides, each slide auto-advances after 20 seconds: limits presentations to 6.40mins at most).
 - (c) A small number of participants expressed a desire for action groups or working groups to translate the dialogue into action on the back of the wānanga. Desire for tangible outcomes from the discussion (ie, the winter energy payment keeps resurfacing but remains unsolved).
 - (d) There were several positive comments regarding the way the event was facilitated by the MC. One individual indicated they almost didn't attend because the agenda looked too open/loose but having attended they loved the event and don't want us to change the approach. However, they queried whether we could provide more certainty regarding the themes or focus to help people have confidence it will be worth the time and cost to attend. Perhaps also include a pre-event survey to ascertain key themes people would like to cover, or some planned, short presentations at the start of the unconference segment to get juices flowing. As one participant said: “I liked the 'unconference' idea of the afternoon session but maybe some of the set up could be done before the day? IE use some platform to crowdsource/upvote topics and then get people to commit to two or three of them - 30min on each. Allows the organising team to plan a bit more and also for some smaller working group style discussions to kick off.”
 - (e) There was also a recommendation for a specific wānanga event to focus on business consumers – they tend to be overlooked.

5. Next steps and future events

- 5.1 During the wānanga, we signalled an intention to identify collaborative ideas and potential solutions that participants could agree to continue to support and find ways to collaboratively implement. We signalled the possibility of sharing the key outcomes from the day and inviting participants to sign-up for specific activities they would like to support – either through working groups, or by connecting others with their resources or networks.
- 5.2 A logical next step would be to share the key insights and recommendations and invite participants to register their interest to support or lead the implementation of specific initiatives. This approach shares ownership and the resourcing burden.
- 5.3 If participants continue to engage, then the wānanga has proved valuable and produced a legitimate set of forward actions. If we do not get further engagement then we will need to reassess whether this is a viable approach to fostering collaboration across the sector, or whether there are other approaches to consider.

- 5.4 This has been our most successful wānanga yet in terms of participant feedback ratings. However, getting people to commit to action beyond the moment of the event is expected to be challenging. Another approach that could be taken for future wānanga is to build each wānanga as a discrete event where we focus on a finite set of specific topics, needs or opportunities and use the event to conduct the collaborative design work in that moment, without the need for further input beyond each discrete event.
- 5.5 This decision could be made once we see what level of take-up we are able to generate as we publish the outcomes from these discussions.

Appendix A Wānanga attendance list

1	Alysha Honore (Electra)	Industry
2	Andrew Millar (Electricity Authority)	Govt
3	Ben Oakley (ComCom)	Govt
4	Brodie Stewart (2 Degrees)	Industry
5	Carl Billington (Electricity Authority)	Govt
6	Carol Reed (Transpower)	Govt
7	Carolina Rodriguez (Electricity Authority)	Govt
8	Caroline Shone (EECA)	Govt
9	Cherie Burnett (Toast)	Consumer
10	Choi Jackson (Octopus)	Industry
11	Cristiano Marantes (EA Board)	Govt
12	Daniel Griffiths (Electricity Authority)	Govt
13	Freda Wells (Electricity Authority)	Govt
14	Gareth Cartwright (Community Energy Network)	Consumer
15	George Ashby (Mercury)	Industry
16	Grant Allerby (Contact)	Industry
17	Gwyneth Carey-Smith (CAB)	Consumer
18	Idil Kaplan (ComCom)	Govt
19	Jessica Harris (EA Networks)	Industry
20	Jessica Walker (Consumer NZ)	Consumer
21	Jonathan Young (Ara Ake)	Innovation
22	Jono Banard (Electricity Authority)	Govt
23	Karen Boyes (MEUG)	Industry
24	Kasey Pasene (Pulse Energy)	Industry
25	Kate Day (Common Grace Aotearoa)	Consumer
26	Keith Scoles (Alpine Energy)	Industry
27	Laura Ackland (Transpower)	Govt
28	Lizzie Governor (Contact)	Industry
29	Lyndal Macartney (Electra)	Industry
30	Mairin Gallagher (Unison Networks)	Industry
31	Megan (ENA)	Industry

32	Miranda Struthers (Energy Mate - ERANZ)	Industry
33	Monica Choy (Vector)	Industry
34	Neill Ballantyne (MSD)	Govt
35	Phil Squire (Sustainability Trust – Toast Electric)	Consumer
36	Robert Allen (Robert Allen Consulting)	Industry
37	Sabina Bickelmann (The Collective Energy)	Industry
38	Sam Elder (Climate Navigator)	Innovation
39	Sarah Gilles (Electricity Authority)	Govt
40	Seumas Fantham (Todd Foundation)	Consumer/NGO
41	Siobhan Bradley (Electricity Authority)	Govt
42	Steve Young (Octopus Energy)	Industry
43	Tammy Phillips (ECAN)	Govt
44	Tuhi-ao Bailey (Parihaka)	Industry
45	Wayne Anderson (2 Degrees)	Industry
46	Will Goldsmith (Electricity Authority)	Govt
47	Zoe Priestley (Electricity Authority)	Govt
48	Karen Tomkies (Electricity Authority)	Govt

Appendix B Wānanga agenda

Welcome		
8:30	Arrival - tea and coffee	Registration open from 8.30am Name tags include a colour code – to segment consumer reps, industry bodies, and govt agencies by colour. People choose their own seats but no table to be all one colour.
9am	Kick-off	
9am	Opening MC (Carl). Opening remarks from Sarah.	MC open event. MC housekeeping & agenda. CE remarks
9.10	What this is! Carl set the scene and reiterate the key messages that this is a participation event! Overview agenda. Set ground rules – curiosity, respectful dialogue, committed critique, collaborative solutions.	Short context from Carl.
9.20	Table Introductions: Give participants opportunity to introduce each other around their tables Invite people to refer to the Venn diagram as they get to know each other and make any additions they wish (each table to have a printed copy they can add to).	Participants invited to get to know their tables & informed they may be asked to introduce the person on their left to the room at some point throughout the day: ask people to find out something the person on their left brings to the room that they don't.

9.30	Session One: Increasing Consumer Trust	
	<p>How might we better meet consumer needs?</p> <p>Collaborative session to identify ways to increase consumer trust and enable better access to the information and support they need.</p> <p>Table questions:</p> <p>Retailers/EDBs: what outreach is happening that you wish more people knew about? What opportunities do you see?</p> <p>NGOs: what's happening that you wish more people knew about? What opportunities do you see?</p> <p>Everyone: how do we build on these things to connect better with consumers and/or give better access to the information and support they need?</p> <p>Close session with dot voting to identify priorities</p>	<p>Table discussion</p> <p>Provide flip charts to capture discussion. This is the key session we want specific ideas/outcomes from.</p> <p>Can revisit this in the open agenda item if needed also.</p> <p>Moderators support capture.</p>
10.30	Morning tea	
11am	Session Two: Review, Recap & Progress on output from past wānanga	
	<p>Successes: Focussing on what has been progressed: explore what successes could we apply elsewhere or scale or standardise more widely? How might this be enabled?</p> <p>Gaps: What is still missing? How could we collaborate to</p>	<p>Refer back to pre-reading summary. Participants should already be primed to contribute to this discussion. Flip charts at tables to capture their discussion.</p> <p>Moderators support capture.</p>

	address these issues/opportunities?	
12.00 noon	Lunch	
1pm	Session Three: Open Agenda	
1pm	What's the most important conversation(s) we need to have now? Whiteboard suggestions – invite tables to pick their own topic(s) to pursue together.	Organic crowd-sourced session. Tables can use this session to progress earlier discussions, or signal additional items they're keen to progress together.
1:15	Open discussion – what key issues have emerged in the discussion so far that we want to canvass together? Quick whiteboard stocktake, and then table work.	Moderators support capture.
2:15	Sign up and opt in!	
2:15	Open invite (sign-up whiteboards) for people to continue the dialogue on key initiatives or opportunities. Identify a lead to facilitate the dialogue. End of event survey	MC to work with Moderators to chart key ideas and opportunities that could be progressed. Invite people to sign-up to participate in working groups or other forms of ongoing planning or dialogue.
2.30	Formal Close & Networking	
	Karakia and transition to snacks and networking with Eftpos cash bar.	Encourage people to take the opportunity to make connections with a view to continuing dialogue together beyond the event.
3.30	Close	

Appendix C Raw list of detailed recommendations from table discussions (organised by theme).

1 .More effective consumer outreach	
Key headlines	<p>Very strong support for the Energy Wellbeing Network concept (being picked up by CEN in dialogue with EECA)</p> <p>Some excellent work is being done (cross-referral programmes, community outreach etc) but it is inconsistent, not joined up, and there's limited awareness of these initiatives and options.</p> <p>Potential for NGOs to act as agents for consumers</p> <p>Well received initiatives and examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pop-up events (libraries, community centres, hāngi events, sustainability expos, Xmas parades). Community Care Funds offered by some retailers. NGOs running budgeting workshops, wellbeing programmes, social services, and warm homes initiatives. Payment plans, “right plan” checks, hardship teams, smoother-pays, pre-pay options. Community visits, local sponsorships, call-backs, and digital app tools. Retailers offering hardship teams, power credits, payment plans, and “right plan” checks — but with low consumer engagement. Local energy wellness outreach by EDBs within their networks, engaging with local community agencies to support those in energy hardship. <p>Trust increases as people interact more.</p> <p>Privacy principles impede trusted referrals - is there a way to gain consent for these purposes?</p> <p>A huge range of activity is already happening across the sector, but most people in the room weren't aware of the full picture. This lack of visibility came up again and again.</p> <p>What builds trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based delivery through schools, churches, iwi organisations, trusted NGOs. Simple, relatable, proactive messaging and listening. Consistent support processes across retailers. Genuine collaboration across agencies.

	<p>Frontline workers using warm, flexible, unscripted communication.</p> <p>What breaks trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex language. Cold outreach from unknown numbers. Retailers giving different advice. Hidden eligibility criteria. Lack of honesty about cost pressures and future pricing. <p>In short: Retailers have the tools that help. NGOs have the trust that connects. Connecting the two is where the biggest impact lies.</p>
<p>Highest-value Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do more to simplify the language we use, and translate it into the language of consumers and communities, not so technical NGOs could partner with providers to co-host community-based workshops (drop in events) NGOs could create ‘warm handshake’ or ‘soft door-knock’ introductions for retailers Explore potential to establish Community Energy Navigators Explore potential for NGOs and retailers to more effectively share data regarding consumers that may need more support (privacy issues need navigating here) Are there opportunities to improve call centre scripts and approaches to help overcome shame-related disengagement etc, or create less embarrassing self-service options. Find ways to better share the good things retailers are doing – enable best-practice sharing and also help improve public perception. Could some initiatives be scaled up across the system. Create central online hub for relevant organisations to find and share all of this information – addresses big issue of visibility and connection, and aligns with our priority of collaboration. Need to tell more of the positive stories - not just bad news headlines. Potential hardship tariff for distributors - pair up with retailers.

	<p>Add incentives for those who seek advice (ie credit on accounts or additional temporary service etc)</p> <p>Improve Winter Energy Payment - Too broad/non-targeted. Not flexible - doesn't match real consumption. Rethink the model with community and retailer involvement.</p> <p>Introduce Community Energy Navigators - participants proposed local, trusted people embedded in communities to guide households through plans, support energy literacy, identify hardship early</p> <p>Cross-agency collaboration – potential to introduction handoff protocols between retailers and MSD: joint identification of hardship, better links between EECA, councils, NGOs, retailers and iwi/hapu.</p> <p>Energy Wellness Framework - develop a shared concept of energy wellness with wellness checks (like health checks) – focus on wellness not just hardship.</p> <p>Fair, transparent support schemes - power credit schemes should be advertised, visible, and consistent, preventive support rather than crisis management, clearer guidance on how retailers respond to hardship</p>
<p>2. Simplifying engagement with Authority consultations</p>	
<p>Key headlines</p>	<p>Not much discussion required – three specific ideas were tabled.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>More collaboration/engagement ahead of formal consultation (CCO hailed as good example):</p> <p>Use advance workshops to refine ideas, flush out cost/benefit trade-offs early, also hear what other parties are thinking.</p> <p>Provide plain-English summaries (ie, CCO example -very well received). Request to normalise this approach.</p> <p>People also really liked the short online questionnaire version of submissions</p>
<p>3 .Improving energy literacy</p>	
<p>Key headlines</p>	<p>Could this be framed in terms of building our future – more aspirational than 'building energy'</p> <p>Needs a joined-up whole of system approach</p> <p>Creative - make it fun: webinars, podcasts, vox pop interviews, re-humanise something that is central to our lives</p>

	Need an energy advocacy organisation: could there be a role for MEUG here? What about residential input?
Recommendations	Combine financial & energy literacy together.
4. Developing a NZ energy strategy	
Key headlines	Needs to be non-political (endure beyond changes in government) – developed in a place-based way, bottom-up from the community/consumer level. Begin locally and regionally and then feed up nationally. Need for a neutral independent agency to drive consumer outcomes and advocate for consumer ownership/leadership (link back to Energy Wellbeing Network). Vision: that consumers get the energy they need Should electricity be treated as an essential service like water?
Recommendations	No clear actions recommended - apart from encouraging communities not to wait for the 'centre' and just starting. But who could initiate this? Possibly this could link with the EWN dialogue. EA role could continue to be neutral convenor
5. Past wānanga progress update	
Key headlines	Successes noted: Consumer Care Obligations (CCOs): huge milestone; “massive win”. Best plan advice becoming more standard. CDR progress and better access to consumption data. Retailers stopping disconnection fees (e.g., Mercury). Regional outreach increasing across the motu. Solar deployment pilots and community energy trials gaining traction. Growing willingness to collaborate — a culture shift noted by many. Gaps still to progress: A sector-wide hardship fund or similar mechanism is still seen as needed.

	<p>Social hedging remains of interest but not moving quickly. Many innovations are localised and not scaling. People struggling the most still rarely switch or compare deals.</p> <p>Pre-pay consumer experience still needs improvement. Coordination between government agencies is weak — silos everywhere.</p> <p>Clearer messaging on rights, support, and entitlements needed.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>Assess which 'gaps' will be addressed in future. For those that don't have a 'home' – do they warrant prioritising and, if so, by whom?</p>
<p>6. Suggestions for future wānanga</p>	
<p>Key headlines</p>	<p>People left feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraged by real progress since 2024 Clear that trust is the biggest enabler Keen to work together more closely Energised by the open, collaborative format Aware that hardship is complex and linked to deeper social issues Wanting consistency, coordination, and visibility across the sector
<p>Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep developing the wānanga — more often, more regional, more co-hosted. Start work on a shared sector platform to showcase initiatives (retailers + NGOs). Look for opportunities to pilot navigator roles. Better visibility of hardship support options. Build partnership frameworks between retailers and community groups. Hold a follow-up session specifically on data sharing and privacy. Continue supporting MTR, smart meter access, and consumer mobility work

7. Isolated topics	
Recommendations	<p>Participants shared practical areas that need urgent improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear definition and model for Energy Wellness. Consistent pathways for hardship (who does what, when). Better frontline training across all NGOs and community workers. Joint messaging and co-branded campaigns. Real-life case studies of success. Better coordination between health, housing, income, and energy support. Disconnection prevention not coordinated with NGOs.