



The Energy  
Charter  
**INDEPENDENT  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
PANEL**

## **ISSUES PAPER**

**Call for submissions**

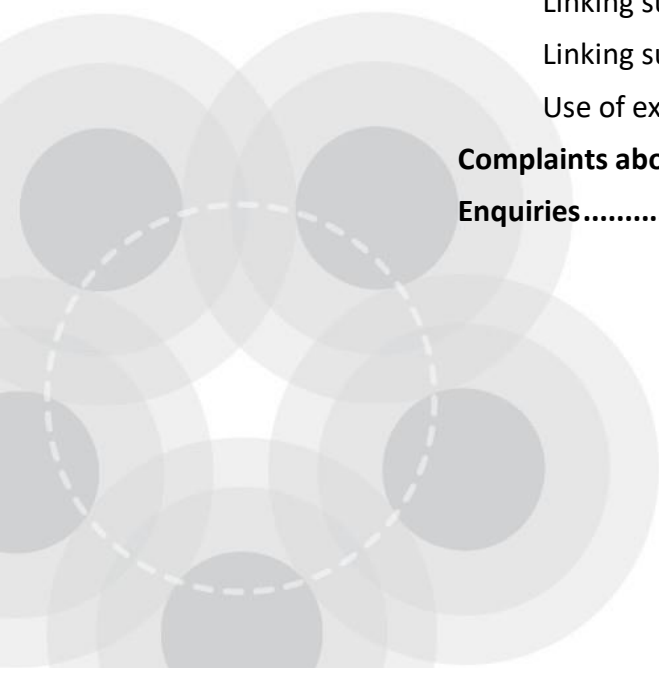
6 October 2020





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## Introduction – Call for Submissions

This Issues Paper is provided by the Energy Charter Independent Accountability Panel (“we” or the “Panel”) to encourage submissions from household and business stakeholders and your representative organisations (“you”) in response to the disclosures made by signatories to the Energy Charter.

Submissions will assist the Panel in the preparation of our assessment report, where we measure the disclosures against the commitments made by signatories to the five principles of the Energy Charter.

In this Issues Paper, we:

- briefly outline the Energy Charter
- describe our role as the Panel – in particular, seeking stakeholder feedback to assist us in preparing our report
- set out the process for making a submission
- provide references to the key source information – including upcoming public forums
- set out several questions we believe are relevant in our assessment, to guide your submission.



## The Energy Charter

The Energy Charter was developed in consultation with a range of energy industry stakeholders and launched in January 2019.

The Energy Charter is a commitment by energy businesses to **putting the customer at the centre of their businesses** and delivering better outcomes for them.

The purpose of the Energy Charter is:

*“to progress the culture and solutions required to deliver a more affordable, sustainable and reliable energy system for all Australians. It is focused on embedding a customer-centric culture and conduct in energy businesses to create tangible improvements in affordability and service delivery.”*

## Signatories to the Energy Charter

The Energy Charter member organisations (the “Signatories”) represent many of the key participants in the Australian energy sector, spanning gas and electricity, generation, networks infrastructure and retailing, and government, listed, and private ownership models. Membership is voluntary.

Refer to <https://www.theenergycharter.com.au/about/> for details of each signatory.

**TABLE 1 – Energy Charter Signatories in 2020**

Signatory	Main Business Area
ActewAGL	Electricity and Gas Distribution, Energy Retail, (ACT)
AGL	Electricity Generation and Energy Retail (NSW, QLD, SA, VIC and WA)
APA	Gas Transmission and Storage, Electricity Generation (National)
Aurora Energy	Energy Retail (TAS)
Ausgrid	Electricity Distribution (NSW)
Australian Gas Infrastructure Group	Gas Transmission and Distribution (National)
CleanCo	Electricity Generation (QLD)
CS Energy	Electricity Generation (QLD)
Endeavour Energy	Electricity Distribution (NSW)
Energy Australia	Electricity Generation and Energy Retail (ACT, NSW, QLD, SA and VIC)
Energy Queensland	Group of Electricity Distribution (QLD) and Retail (Regional QLD) businesses
- Energex	Electricity Distribution (SE QLD) (part of Energy Queensland)
- Ergon Energy Retail	Energy Retail (Regional QLD) (part of Energy Queensland)
- Ergon Energy Network	Electricity Distribution (Regional QLD) (part of Energy Queensland)
- Yurika	Energy solutions (part of Energy Queensland)
Essential Energy	Electricity Distribution (NSW)
Horizon Power	Electricity Distribution and Retail (Regional and Remote WA)
Jemena	Electricity Distribution, Gas Distribution and Transmission (National)
- Ovida	Energy solutions (same ownership as Jemena)
Meridian Energy	Electricity Generation (NSW, SA, VIC)
- Powershop	Energy Retail (NSW, SA and VIC)
Origin Energy	Electricity Generation and Energy Retail (ACT, NSW, QLD, SA and VIC)
Powerlink	Electricity Transmission (QLD)
Stanwell	Electricity Generation (QLD) and Retail
TransGrid	Electricity Transmission (NSW)



## A Summary of the Energy Charter and its Principles

The Energy Charter consists of five Principles – which are commitments made by the Signatories about how they will place the customer at the centre of their business model. For each of these, the objectives for best-practice are captured in Principles in Action.

A summary of the Energy Charter Principles and Principles in Action follows. Further information about the Energy Charter and its signatories is found at [www.theenergycharter.com.au](http://www.theenergycharter.com.au).

### Principle One: “We will put customers at the centre of our business and the energy system”

Having the right culture underpins the way we behave, the decisions we make and the outcomes we deliver. We recognise that getting the culture right for our customers is crucial not only to deliver on our customer commitments, but also to the long-term success of our businesses.

We will develop the culture within our businesses that puts the customer at the centre and will work together and with our stakeholders to deliver the safe, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy system the community expects.

#### Principle One in Action

##### 1. To fulfil this principle energy businesses should:

- 1.1. Have a Board that actively oversees the business’ culture so as to be aligned with Energy Charter Principles.
- 1.2. Have management operationally accountable for embedding a ‘customer at the centre’ culture.
- 1.3. Ensure their work force is engaged and incentives are aligned to drive positive customer outcomes.
- 1.4. Have robust processes to determine customer and community needs and be accountable on how feedback has been considered and incorporated into decision making.
- 1.5. Demonstrate a culture of innovation and collaboration for positive customer outcomes, including through the sharing of insights with government, research institutions and across the supply chain, as well as joint advocacy on regulatory, policy and operational issues.

### Principle Two: “We will improve energy affordability for customers”

We recognise that affordable energy is essential for Australian households and businesses.

We will do what we can to make energy more affordable, by running our businesses efficiently so customers benefit, by offering customers energy deals that best meet their needs, helping them manage their energy use, and by working together to improve energy affordability, as well as innovating for cost effective solutions that meet residential and business customer needs.

#### Principle Two in Action

##### 2. To fulfil this principle energy businesses should:

- 2.1. Ensure that investment, commercial and operational decisions are cost efficient, and explain how customers benefit from these decisions.
- 2.2. Offer customers energy deals that best meet their needs, supported by effective tools and incentives for customers to manage their energy use and cost.
- 2.3. Work cooperatively across the supply chain and with other stakeholders to improve affordability over the short and long term.
- 2.4. Innovate to deliver competitive energy solutions for business and residential customers.
- 2.5. Advocate on behalf of customers to improve energy affordability through engagement in regulatory

### Principle Three: “We will provide energy safely, sustainably and reliably”

We recognise the essential nature of energy and the need to deliver and use energy safely, sustainably and reliably. We recognise the role of energy businesses to respond to the shift to a cleaner energy system that is already underway. We understand the value energy brings to the community and the potential consequences and impacts for customers when reliability and quality of energy supply are compromised.

We will provide energy safely, sustainably and reliably. We will listen to customer preferences and demonstrate how they inform decisions and outcomes and how the community benefits.



and policy processes.

### Principle Three in Action

#### 3. *To fulfil this principle energy businesses should:*

- 3.1. Maintain the highest standards of safety for their people, the community and the environment.
- 3.2. Engage with customers and the community on investments, and manage operations in line with their expectations, demonstrating how communities benefit.
- 3.3. Develop business strategy and manage operations to respond to the shift to a cleaner energy system that is already underway.
- 3.4. Work with government, other energy businesses, the community and industry bodies to develop a planned transition to a cleaner energy system.
- 3.5. Facilitate new services and technologies that support sustainable energy solutions that meet the changing needs of the market.
- 3.6. Implement solutions across the supply chain:
  - a. that support energy connection, service and reliability that meets customers' needs.
  - b. to resolve service issues that impact customers and the community.

### Principle Four: "We will improve the customer experience"

We recognise that it should be easy for customers to make informed decisions about their energy use and services, that outcomes should be transparent, and all customers should benefit from the transformation of the energy system. Customer service from energy businesses should be respectful, efficient and seamless, particularly if things go wrong.

We will make it easy for everyone to get the best product or service for them regardless of their ability to engage, or interest in, the energy market. We will continually improve our processes and communication and will work together to provide better services across the supply chain to meet customer needs.

### Principle Four in Action

#### 4. *To fulfil this principle energy businesses should:*

- 4.1. Enable customers to get fair outcomes regardless of their ability or desire to participate in the energy market.
- 4.2. Empower customers by:
  - a. making sure all communication is clear, in plain terms, accessible and understandable
  - b. providing insightful and useful information and accessible tools; and
  - c. streamlining access to, and portability of, customer energy data.
- 4.3. Ensure that innovation and design in products and services, as well as communication platforms and tools, are driven by customers' needs and preferences.
- 4.4. Have effective and accessible dispute resolution processes, co-ordinated across the supply chain, to resolve customer issues and implement process improvements in response.

**Principle Five: “We will support customers facing vulnerable circumstances”**

We recognise that some households and businesses may experience vulnerability that requires support from energy providers, which may require collaboration with governments and community service organisations. Not all experiences of vulnerability will be the same, and providing support requires solutions tailored for different circumstances.

We will establish processes for early recognition of, and engagement with, customers facing vulnerable circumstances, support customers to navigate periods of vulnerability, and collaborate with the community and government to assist customers.

**Principle Five in Action****5. To fulfil this principle energy businesses should:**

- 5.1. Have processes to enable early identification of and engagement with customers with vulnerability, coupled with intervention measures that can prevent customers falling into hardship.
- 5.2. Provide products and services that are tailored to customers facing vulnerable circumstances and support them to get back on track.
- 5.3. Provide flexible solutions that are easy to access and are provided by specially trained frontline staff with expertise in supporting those customers who face additional barriers to engaging with the energy market.
- 5.4. Take a collaborative approach, partnering across the energy supply chain and with government and community service organisations to implement innovative solutions that improve outcomes (affordability or experience) for customers facing vulnerable circumstances.

**Disclosures under the Energy Charter**

Each year the Signatories have agreed to publicly account for how they are delivering against the Principles in the Energy Charter, by providing an annual disclosure (the “Disclosures”). The reporting period is 1 July to 30 June and disclosures are submitted to the Panel on 30 September each year.

The Disclosures are available for review at [www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au/industry-disclosures](http://www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au/industry-disclosures).



## The Energy Charter Independent Accountability Panel

Within the Energy Charter governance structure, the Panel's role is to assess the annual Disclosures and publish a report to assist the Signatories in understanding how their current status and progress is being perceived.

As part of this process, the Panel considers feedback from stakeholders about the Disclosures.

In this way, the Panel provides accountability that the Signatories are delivering on the promises they make to consumers by joining the Energy Charter.

The report will seek to highlight best practices as well as interesting and innovative approaches – to assist in driving progress towards the Principles in Action for all Signatories.

The Panel will also identify and highlight those areas where the gap between the Principles and the current state may be widest or may be closing least rapidly.

The Panel was established in June 2019.

In 2020 it consists of three members, selected to represent key energy industry stakeholders. Details of the current Panel may be found at [www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au](http://www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au).





## Call for Submissions

This Issues Paper sets out the process for public submissions to be provided to the Panel.

Our role is to review the Disclosures against the principles of the Energy Charter – and a key part of the Panel’s evaluation is its public consultation process.

We are keen to hear from residential and business customers and their representatives about how the Signatories are performing for their customers, and what would deliver better outcomes for all customers.

We are interested to hear:

*To what extent do the Disclosures represent your experience in the reporting period?*

We are calling for written submissions to assist the Panel in our task.

Submissions will inform the Panel’s report, which will be published in December 2020.

## Timetable

Submissions are due by **5:00pm Sydney time on Friday, 30 October 2020**.

## Format

Submissions are to be made in pdf format, with naming convention “[name] Energy Charter 2020.pdf”

## Submission

Email submissions to [submissions@theenergycharterpanel.com.au](mailto:submissions@theenergycharterpanel.com.au) with subject header “**Energy Charter Panel 2020 Public Submission from [name]**”. Each submission must include the name of the submitter and a means of contact.

## Publication

Submissions will be reviewed by the Panel, and conforming submissions will be published to the Panel website in full. The Panel will operate on the presumption that all submissions are public. **The Panel is unable to accept non-public submissions.** In exceptional circumstances the Panel may use its discretion to publish a de-identified submission i.e. where the submitter’s name and contact details are supplied to the Panel and the submitter has requested the Panel to withhold their name from publication.

## Conforming submissions

Public submissions to the Panel process are an opportunity to gain a wide range of stakeholder feedback on the Disclosures, in the context of the Energy Charter and its Principles.

We are seeking **specific, succinct and constructive feedback** via these submissions.

We highlight that the Disclosures for 2020 relate to the period from **1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020**. As the Disclosures refer to this period, **submissions should similarly address this period**.

The Panel will only publish submissions which **respond directly to the Disclosures**, the degree to which Signatories and the Australian energy industry in general are progressing towards meeting the Principles, and means by which the businesses may attain best practices most rapidly.

The Panel is unable to make use of (or publish) submissions which are out of scope (such as matters of government policy outside the Signatories’ influence) or which are in substance standard-form or template submissions, or submissions prepared for other purposes, with limited direct relevance to the development and success of the Energy Charter and its objectives.



## Sources of information

Public submissions should be prepared with reference to the following material.

### The Energy Charter in detail

The Disclosures are directly related to the Energy Charter and Submissions should be framed in terms of the Energy Charter. Refer to <https://www.theenergycharter.com.au/publications/>.

### Signatory Disclosures

Disclosures have been published at [www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au/industry-disclosures](http://www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au/industry-disclosures), as well as on individual Signatory websites.

### Public Forums

The Panel is hosting a series of on-line forums in October 2020. Each forum will follow the same format and will be recorded for subsequent review by stakeholders.

This is an opportunity for stakeholders across Australia to hear from the Panel and the Energy Users Consultative Group (which represents energy users in the Energy Charter governance structure), and to provide feedback to the Panel directly.

**TABLE 2 – Public Forums**

Date	Region	Time	Venue
Monday 19 October 2020	NSW	9:30am - 11:00am AEDT	Register on-line
Monday 19 October 2020	Queensland	10:30am-12:00pm AEST	Register on-line
Thursday 22 October 2020	Victoria	9:30am - 11:00am AEDT	Register on-line
Friday 23 October 2020	Tasmania	9:30am - 11:00am AEDT	Register on-line
Friday 23 October 2020	WA/SA Regional/Remote	11:30am - 1:00pm AEDT	Register on-line

Details of the forums are available at <https://theenergycharterpanel.com.au/public-consultation/> including instructions on how to register, and how to access the material remotely or after the event has concluded.

### The Panel's website

From time to time the Panel may publish other material relevant to our assessment of the disclosures. Interested stakeholders may visit [www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au](http://www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au), and subscribe to remain up- to-date.



## Issues to Consider in Submissions

We provide some guidance so that your submissions can best assist the Panel in our assessment.

### Guiding questions

The Panel would appreciate responses which **focus on the following general questions**, which the Panel seeks to address in our report.

**TABLE 3 – Questions**

Question	
1	What are specific examples of practices or conduct by Australian energy businesses which are <b>consistent with the Energy Charter Principles and Principles in Action</b> , which should be more widely encouraged?
2	What are specific examples of practices or conduct by Australian energy businesses which are <b>not in alignment with the Energy Charter Principles and Principles in Action</b> , and where improvements should be made?
3	What <b>emerging or innovative technology, systems, practices or processes</b> can help energy businesses move closer toward the Principles of the Energy Charter?
4	Are there examples of <b>analogous customer-centric behaviours, processes or metrics in other Australian industries, or internationally</b> , which might be adopted by Australian energy businesses to better meet the Energy Charter Principles?
5	For particular Principles, <b>what metrics might be most appropriate to assess and measure progress</b> over time – and why?

### Linking submission content to Principles

The Panel intends its report to follow the structure of the Energy Charter itself – addressing each of the five Principles in turn. As a result, submissions should **clearly identify which Principle (or Principle in Action) is being addressed** wherever possible, when responding to the above questions or other matters.

### Linking submission content to Disclosures

The Panel must assess the Disclosures. Submissions which either **reinforce, rebut or provide alternative points of view in relation to specific Disclosures** are most likely to assist us in considering and reflecting your viewpoint in our assessment.

### Use of examples and case studies

The Panel appreciates that the Energy Charter is seeking to ensure the customer is placed at the centre of the energy industry. The human impact of energy supply to your home or business is very relevant, and so the Panel is interested in **specific case studies or stories which are relevant to the Principles and/or the Disclosures**.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all business sectors in Australia, including the energy sector. We are interested in feedback about how this impacted on implementation of the Energy Charter principles, as well as 'business as usual' conduct of Energy Charter Signatories.



## Complaints about your energy provider

It is not the role of the Panel, nor does it have the capacity, to respond to individual complaints about your energy provider(s). Submissions are not an appropriate mechanism to raise complaints unless they are used as case examples.

To make an individual complaint where you are seeking resolution, you should first contact your electricity or gas retailer or distributor (if relevant). If that does not resolve your issue you can contact the Ombudsman in your State or territory.

This fact sheet from the ACCC may help you with your issue:

[https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/What-can-I-do-if-I-have-a-complaint-about-my-energy\\_0.pdf](https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/What-can-I-do-if-I-have-a-complaint-about-my-energy_0.pdf)

**TABLE 4 – Energy Ombudsman contact details**

Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland	1800 662 837	<a href="http://www.ewoq.com.au">www.ewoq.com.au</a>
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW	1800 246 545	<a href="http://www.ewon.com.au">www.ewon.com.au</a>
ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal	02 6207 1740	<a href="http://www.acat.act.gov.au">www.acat.act.gov.au</a>
Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)	1800 500 509	<a href="http://www.ewov.com.au">www.ewov.com.au</a>
Energy and Water Ombudsman South Australia	1800 665 565	<a href="http://www.ewosa.com.au">www.ewosa.com.au</a>
Energy Ombudsman Tasmania	1800 001 170	<a href="http://www.energyombudsman.tas.gov.au">www.energyombudsman.tas.gov.au</a>
Ombudsman NT	1800 806 380	<a href="http://www.ombudsman.nt.gov.au">www.ombudsman.nt.gov.au</a>
Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia	1800 754 004	<a href="http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au">www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au</a>

## Enquiries

For matters which are not addressed by this Issues Paper or the key websites ([www.theenergycharter.com.au](http://www.theenergycharter.com.au) and [www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au](http://www.theenergycharterpanel.com.au)) please contact the Panel via [chair@theenergycharterpanel.com.au](mailto:chair@theenergycharterpanel.com.au).