

30 October 2020

Ms Clare Petre, Ms Cassandra Goldie and Mr Andrew Richards
Independent Accountability Panel
The Energy Charter

Email to: submissions@theenergycharter.com.au

Dear Accountability Panel Members

Feedback on the Aurora Energy 2020 Energy Charter Disclosure

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the Energy Charter disclosure statements released for this year. COTA Tasmania would like to comment specifically on the Aurora Energy disclosure statement and we offer the following feedback.

By way of background, our organization has a positive working relationship with Aurora Energy and we participate in the Community Consultation Forum as the peak body representing the interests of older Tasmanians.

Broadly speaking, we believe that Aurora has represented their progress against the principles of The Energy Charter in a transparent way. The statement is well presented and Aurora has disclosed what we believe to be some of the barriers to further progress against the Charter. On a positive note, Aurora is to be congratulated on the helpful and timely efforts in support of consumers adversely impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Principle 1: Customers at the centre of everything we do and the energy system

We support Aurora's identification of the ongoing need to engage with the Community Consultation Forum and other stakeholders and provide proactive feedback on how consumer feedback influences decision-making.

We are aware that many older Tasmanians who may not be on existing hardship programs are often just one unexpected payment away from hardship. Anecdotal feedback tells us that these customers often prioritise payment of utility bills and will reduce spending on food, medications and reduce their energy consumption to ensure they can pay their bills when they fall due. Understanding more about the needs of the diversity of customers beyond those on hardship support will be an important step forward. It is encouraging to read that customer segmentation work is underway as there is considerable potential for the Community Consultation Forum to work with Aurora Energy in developing a clear picture of the experiences and needs of these customer segments.

In respect of the customer outcome metrics presented in support of this principle, it is fair to say that many of these metrics are challenging for consumers to understand. Comparable data that has the variations explained in a user friendly way would be beneficial for consumers. For example, the metrics show that Ombudsman referrals have increased but there is no explanation as to why this may have occurred.

Principle 2: We will improve energy affordability for customers

Aurora Energy is aware of the concerns we hold regarding the product service fee associated with access to the aurora+ app (11 cents per day or \$40 per annum). We believe strongly that this facility should be made available to all Aurora Energy customers free of charge. It is clear that many energy providers provide equivalent products at no cost to the customer.

Aurora+ is being marketed heavily as a tool to better understand and manage energy usage and it is not clear that all consumers are aware of the product service charge. We note there is a fine balance to be struck between marketing a product such as aurora+ and empowering customers to make informed decisions.

To assist customers in managing their energy usage and affordability, Aurora Energy should be ensuring that customers have free access to the right tools to assess their own situation and helping them to use them effectively.

Principle 3: We will provide energy safely, sustainably and reliably

COTA Tasmania believes Aurora Energy is performing very well against this principle.

Principle 4: We will improve the customer experience

COTA Tasmania appreciates the transparency Aurora Energy has provided in the disclosure statement around the removal of Aurora Online at short notice. It has certainly impacted the customer experience for the users of Aurora Online and the substituted arrangements fall short of the previous experience by a long way. We would like to have seen a plan for bringing back the level of customer service that was available prior to the removal of Aurora Online.

As noted earlier, COTA Tasmania believes the customer segmentation work that has been undertaken is a positive step forward and this information can be used to better understand the

experience of the diversity of Aurora customers. Having a clear picture of the customer experience at all stages of their engagement with Aurora Energy should help to enhance that experience in every sense.

While the case studies provided by Aurora are useful in understanding progress made, it would be a positive step if we could read case studies or quotes that come directly from customers. This could be used as evidence of Aurora Energy closing the customer feedback loop and acting on feedback.

Principle 5: We will support customers facing vulnerable circumstances

Aurora Energy has performed well against this criteria during the COVID 19 pandemic and acted proactively and with compassion.

We note that Aurora Energy has removed the product service fee associated with aurora+ for all hardship customers, and we support the extension of this waiver to all concession holders, and indeed all Aurora Energy customers.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2020 Energy Disclosure Statements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Leitch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small horizontal line under the "e" in "Leitch".

Sue Leitch
CEO