

TasCOSS National Electricity Market Consumer Advocacy Project (No. 211)

Final Project Report 2006-07, June 2007

This project, involving research and advocacy on national and jurisdictional electricity issues on behalf of Tasmanian domestic consumers (end users), commenced with funding from the Panel in July 2006. This report is the final report for the 2006-07 year, and covers the period February to July 2007.

Participation in the national NEM consumer advocacy network

TasCOSS has continued to play an active role, as the only Tasmanian participant, in the national network of electricity consumer advocates coordinated by the Consumer Action Law Centre. This has involved attendance at national 'Roundtable' meetings in Melbourne in March and in Canberra in June, 2007, as well as participation in several national telephone hook-ups in the reporting period.

TasCOSS has also been involved in collaborative briefing of, and ongoing discussions with consumer representatives on national stakeholder consultative committees, specifically the Retail Policy Working Group's (RPWG) Stakeholder Reference Group, two of the Energy Reform Implementation Group's reference groups, and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources Smart Meter Stakeholder Working Group.

Retail Policy Working Group (RPWG) Working Papers

TasCOSS made a submission on the first *Working Paper* released by the RPWG, having judged that its subjects were of central importance to residential energy consumers in a competitive market situation. Although Tasmanian residential consumers have not yet experienced retail competition, it is likely that they will in several years time (expected in 2010, pending the outcome of a public interest test), and will therefore benefit, along with other consumers, from the inclusion of strong consumer protection measures in the national regulatory regime.

TasCOSS has read the subsequent RPWG Working Papers (Numbers 2-4 plus the 'Supplementary Working Paper') but has decided not to make formal independent submissions on these since many of the issues (such as balancing regimes and settlements, business authorisations, etc) are of less immediate concern to Tasmanian consumers than those in *Working Paper No 1*.

TasCOSS is in the process of preparing a response to the recently released 'composite paper' from the RPWG: *National Framework for Non-Economic Distribution and Retail Regulation: Consultation Paper prepared for the Retail Policy Working Group, June 2007*. This is due July 18, 2007.

Meetings with State Government representatives involved in NEM issues

We have met several times in this period with staff from the Tasmanian Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER), Office of Energy Planning and Conservation

regarding the National Energy Market reform process and, in particular on the implications of the move to national regulation for Tasmanian consumers. TasCOSS has established strong collaborative links with the Tasmanian representatives on the Retail Policy Working Group and other Ministerial Council on Energy Standing Committee of Officials' working groups.

TasCOSS also met with an officer from Tasmanian Treasury's Shareholder Policy and Markets Branch, the branch responsible for overseeing the State's participation in the NEM, as well as for the phased introduction of retail competition in the State, to discuss consumer issues.

2007 Investigation of Maximum Prices for Electricity Distribution & Retail Tariffs

The Tasmanian Energy Regulator is currently holding an investigation into the Maximum Prices for Electricity Distribution and Retail Tariffs in Tasmania. It will be the final distribution price investigation held at a state level before the process moves to the national regulator, the AER. TasCOSS has made several submissions to this investigation, including one seeking to have electricity supply through pre-payment meters 'declared' so as to be covered by a regulated price.

A draft determination is due at the end of July 2007.

Response to Advocacy Panel Review

As you are aware, TasCOSS responded to the Advocacy Panel's 'Request for Comments' (April 2007) on several issues under review, including a structured approach to the allocation of funding, assessment of the effectiveness of funded projects and the funding of fixed costs.

Submissions

No written submissions were prepared in this period; however, the Panel has copies of all submissions prepared by TasCOSS under this project in the 2006-07 financial year.

Kath McLean
Policy Officer
Tasmanian Council of Social Service

PO Box 1126
Sandy Bay TAS 7006
Phone (03) 6231 0755 Fax (03) 6223 6136