

Australian Council of Social Service and
National Consumers Electricity Advocacy Panel

NEM Advocacy – Low income and disadvantaged consumers

NCEAP project reference: Application 254 (an extension of Application 133)

Progress Report #4:

Period 01 April 2008 through 30 June 2008

Provided under the terms of the Agreement

Tony Westmore, Senior Policy Officer (Electricity)

Introduction:

ACOSS made application to the Panel for financial support of work to facilitate advocacy of consumer interests in the National Electricity Market. ACOSS and the project it proposed have a particular focus on consumers with low and fixed incomes and who are otherwise disadvantaged. ACOSS proposed a project with a focus on issues of regulation, retail codes and pricing. ACOSS proposed a project that involved the employment of a policy officer, work directed to consultation, information dissemination and advocacy.

The policy officer employed by ACOSS, Tony Westmore, commenced work on the project in February of 2006 on a two-day per week basis and has worked four-days per week since early May 2006. The national energy market reform program has been characterised over the duration of the project by changing agendas, shifting schedules, proposals of significance and substantial detail, short time frames for consideration and response. ACOSS has endeavoured to keep abreast of developments and to respond as appropriate.

Summary of progress: highlights

Retail policy – the new national regulatory framework: Further to previous reports, work on development of a national regulatory framework for retail (non-price) and distribution (non-economic) continued to be suspended while MCE SCO finalised a 'policy response'. The next stage of stakeholder work will follow the release this response for consultation.

Smart meters: In early March MCE SCO released for public consultation Phase 2 of the cost benefit analysis of smart metering and direct load control. The policy officer wrote the ACOSS submission in response to the Phase 2 CBA. In conjunction with other advocates the policy officer developed proposals for longer term consumer consultation and advocacy, and resourcing for this work. Two applications for funding were prepared and lodged with the Advocacy Panel. The policy officer was nominated by the National Energy Consumers' Roundtable as its representative to the Scoping Group established by MCE SCO preparatory to creation of the National Stakeholder Steering Committee. The policy officer attended the first meeting of that Group held 14 May and a subsequent meeting held 20 June; both with a focus on finalising governance and scoping details for the NSSC. An initial meeting of the National Smart Meter Consumer Advocacy Group was held by teleconference 29 May with a view to sharing information about developments in the national and Victorian smart meter projects and planning engagement with the project.

Information and coordination for COSS policy staff and others: Over the course of the three month reporting period the policy officer facilitated communication between COSS staff and associates particularly with regard to developments in the smart meter project and the review of Community Service Obligations. The policy officer coordinated a one day conference with a focus on essential energy services, climate change and low income households to held in April in conjunction with the national ACOSS Social Inclusion conference. This meeting attracted on the order of 30 participants. A copy of the program and the resulting publication are attached to this report.

Climate change, emissions trading, the national electricity market, energy efficiency, equity and related issues: The long-running project partnership between ACOSS, the Australian Conservation Foundation and Choice directed to produce an assessment of household energy efficiency potential was finalised and resulted in publication of a report. The policy officer was responsible for research, drafting and editing, liaison with partners, launch and distribution. The Department of Climate Change convened a series of roundtable meetings for non-government community sector and environment organisations to consider issues associated with the development and introduction of an emissions trading scheme (ETS). The policy officer represented ACOSS at these meetings. The Minister for Climate Change convened a roundtable meeting of non-government community sector organisations to consider issues related to ETS design and implementation. The policy officer represented ACOSS at this meeting. The policy officer attended a private briefing given by Macquarie Generation regarding ETS matters.

Federal Budget 2008-09: The policy officer coordinated the ACOSS energy and climate change briefs for the Federal Budget and produced the post-Budget analysis in these areas.

Consumers' energy website: The application for Advocacy Panel funding for this project was unsuccessful. The project was terminated.

Consumers' energy conference: The application for Advocacy Panel funding for this project was unsuccessful. The project was terminated.

Climate change seminar for National Energy Consumer Roundtable: in conjunction with staff of the Consumer Action Law Centre, the policy officer coordinated the program and speakers for a one day seminar covering a wide range of issues associated with climate change and responses, the national energy markets and energy consumers.

The policy officer took ten days of accrued annual leave in the period ending 30 March; from and including 30 May.

Meetings and consultations:

University of Melbourne: conference Climate Change & Social Justice 03/04, Melbourne
 Energy Retailers Association of Australia: briefing 07/04, Melbourne
 Origin Energy National Customer Consultative Council: meeting 09/04, Melbourne
 ACOSS Social Inclusion Conference: conference 09-10/04, Melbourne
 Brotherhood of St Laurence: roundtable meeting emissions trading 11/04, Melbourne
 Department of Climate Change: NGO Roundtable meeting 18/04, Sydney
 Climate Action Network Australia: conference 28/04, Sydney
 Wilkins Review (Measures complementary to emissions trading): meeting 01/05, Sydney
 MCE SCO (re Smart Meter National Stakeholder Steering Committee): meeting 14/05, Canberra
 Department of Climate Change: NGO Roundtable meeting 15/05, Sydney
 Total Environment Centre: Price Caps, Revenue Caps and TFP Regulation, forum 19/05, Sydney
 National Smart Meter Consumer Advocacy Group: meeting 21/05, Melbourne
 Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water: roundtable 21/05, Melbourne
 Macquarie Generation, NCOSS, PIAC: meeting 23/05, Sydney
 Origin Energy National Customer Consultative Council: meeting 19/06, Melbourne
 MCE SCO (re Smart Meter National Stakeholder Steering Committee): meeting 20/06, Canberra
 National Energy Consumers Roundtable: seminar climate change 23/06, Melbourne
 National Energy Consumers Roundtable: meeting 24-25/06, Melbourne

ACOSS submissions and etc:

10/04 ACOSS with Choice and Australian Conservation Foundation, publication *Energy & Equity: Preparing households for climate change: efficiency, equity, immediacy*

16/04 Response to request for contribution from ACOSS United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, In-Depth Review Australia,.

21/04 ACOSS submission to MCE re Smart Cost Benefit Analysis of Smart Metering and Direct Load Control

29/05 Advocacy Panel: Application on behalf of National Consumers' Roundtable on Energy for National Smart Meter Consumer Advocacy Project

Research and development:

Smart meters, advanced metering infrastructure and related matters
Price regulation, competition and regulation

Climate change, emissions pricing, energy efficiency and equity (low income and disadvantaged households), the Interim Report of the Garnaut Climate Change Review