

Tasmanian Council of Social Service National Electricity Market Consumer Advocacy Project Final Report February-July 2006

The project, undertaken by the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS), involved the facilitation and coordination of Tasmanian domestic electricity end users and their advocates, as well as research and advocacy on issues related to the National Electricity Market (NEM). The project commenced in January 2005 and was expected to finish in January 2006; however, TasCOSS sought and was granted an extension of the project by the Panel for six months until June 30, 2006. The major reason for the extension of time was the need to expend funds that were in surplus in January 2006 due to there being a lull in consultation activity in the latter part of 2005 (prior to the introduction of the national energy market reform agenda), and therefore few opportunities for consumer engagement in national energy market issues.

This is the final report of that project. Earlier project reports were submitted to the Panel in April and July, 2005 and in January, 2006. For full details of the whole project, those reports should be read in conjunction with this report for the final period January- June, 2006.

It should be noted that TasCOSS has re-submitted to the Panel for continuation and expansion of the project in the 2006-07 financial year. This funding has been approved.

Consumer consultation

TasCOSS continued to use its Consumer Issues Sub-Committee of the Tasmanian Social Policy Council for consultation on national energy market issues and their impact on Tasmanian consumers, and in particular on low income and disadvantaged consumers. The Sub-Committee comprises representatives from TasCOSS member organisations, including Anglicare Tasmania and the No Interests Loans Scheme (NILS), as well as interested individuals.

Regular reports of project activities were provided to the TasCOSS CEO and Board, and updates on those activities were published in TasCOSS publications.

Participation in the national NEM consumer advocacy network

TasCOSS has been an active participant (and the sole Tasmanian participant) in the national network of electricity consumer advocates coordinated by the Consumer Law Centre Victoria. This has involved, in this reporting period:

- engagement with an active advocacy e-mail list (NEM-CHAT),
- participation in several national telephone link-ups,
- attendance at a national consumer advocates' 'round-table' meeting in Melbourne in May 2006, and
- collaboration – by telephone, e-mail and in person – in addressing issues raised in the MCE-initiated energy market reform process, and in other energy-related consultations.

The network has focused its attention in this period on the many activities of the energy market reform process that are of concern to small consumers, including the National Electricity Amendment (Advocacy Panel) Rule, harmonisation of jurisdictional performance indicators, AEMC consultations on transmission revenue pricing, the proposed 2006 energy legislative package, the formation of a Stakeholders Reference Group regarding recommendations for the national framework for distribution and retail functions, the proposed reviews of the effectiveness

of full retail competition, and the activities of the newly formed Energy Reform Implementation Group.

Submissions

TasCOSS made submissions in this period in response to the following public consultations:

- the Australian Energy Market Commission regarding the proposed Rule change under Section 95 of the National Electricity Law in relation to the governance, accountability and funding arrangements for the National Consumers Electricity Advocacy Panel (February 2006);
- the Utility Regulators Forum Steering Committee on National Regulatory Reporting Requirements Retail Working Group on its discussion paper: *National Energy Retail Performance Indicators* which addressed the issue of harmonisation of performance indicators across jurisdictions (April 2006);
- the Tasmanian Energy Regulator on his first Electricity Distribution Pricing Review consultation paper: *Form of Regulation for the 2007 Determination* regarding the form that the next pricing determination will take (January 2006).

Copies of the submissions are attached.

Other activities

The Panel will appreciate that many of the national energy market reform issues to which we have responded are very complex indeed. This has necessitated not only understanding and keeping informed about these and other issues, but also communicating relevant information to others with less access and direct interest. This has been an integral part of the TasCOSS project and is particularly important since there are no other small consumer advocates involved in national energy market issues in Tasmania (outside of those issues that concern the environment and energy efficiency and conservation).

TasCOSS has also been involved in another Panel funded project in this period, that is, the commissioning of research into the use of pre-payment meters for electricity in Tasmania. A final report from that project is expected to be available soon.

Attachments

Copies of submissions detailed above are attached.

6 July

Kath McLean

Policy Officer, TasCOSS, PO Box 1126, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, 7006.

Phone: 03 6231 0755 Fax: 03 6223 6136 E-mail: kath@tascoss.org.au