

INVITATION TO SUBMIT RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Consumer Advocacy Panel funds research through two grants programs:

- Research initiated by the Panel: the Panel provides funding to consumer organisations, individuals and academic institutions to undertake research on priority electricity and gas issues identified by the Panel
- Research initiated by other organisations: the Panel provides funding to consumer organisations, individuals and academic institutions to undertake research on electricity and gas issues.

The Panel undertakes research in order to

- raise awareness of emerging consumer energy issues
- provide information that can be used to facilitate consumer advocacy
- stimulate discussion or debate on consumer energy issues.

In its 2011/12 budget, the Consumer Advocacy Panel committed a total of \$240,000 (exc GST) for research into consumer electricity and consumer gas issues.

This paper invites individuals and organisations with the requisite expertise to submit grant applications to undertake

- research on one of the priorities identified by the Panel
- research on another issue of benefit to electricity and/or gas consumers in the National Energy Market.

Research priorities

Research priorities are chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- the research area will directly enhance advocacy by consumer organisations
- the research area is of broad benefit to a number of classes of consumer organisations
- the research area adds value and does not duplicate other work underway.

The Panel encourages applicants to present research grant applications that reflect their priorities.

Following consultation with key stakeholders, the Panel has identified the following priorities for 2011/12:

- **Empowering consumer engagement in network price determinations:** providing advocacy organisations with the tools and information to effectively represent consumers' interests in regulatory decisions. Areas of particular interest include:
 - Assessing the framework for network tariff design, and facilitating consumer input to those decisions

- Improving the processes that assess consumers' willingness to pay for higher levels of service
- **Helping all consumers access benefits from retail competition:** the regulatory settings and information tools to ensure consumers make decisions in their own best interests are still developing in the national retail market. Areas of interest include:
 - Building the evidence base in relation to the costs and benefits of customer transfer issues, unsolicited marketing, and the impact on competition
 - Improving market transparency through helping consumers choose energy products that are best fit, including mechanisms and formats for product disclosure
- **Improving consumer advocacy in the gas market:** the development of new wholesale arrangements and rising prices are focusing greater attention on gas than before. Areas of interest include:
 - Providing a consumer perspective on the impact of the developing Short-Term Trading Market
 - Investigating the impact on consumers arising from increasing gas supply charges in certain jurisdictions and providing perverse incentives to disconnect from gas

Please note that all projects should include a communications strategy to ensure the research findings are disseminated to relevant stakeholders (consumer groups and decision-makers).

Process of application

Applicants should submit a grant application form to info@advocacypanel.com.au by **close of business 28 January 2012**.

The application form and guidelines containing advice are available on the Panel's website www.advocacypanel.com.au/applications.htm

Applicants are advised to read the guidelines carefully, and are encouraged to contact the Panel's Executive Director, Kerry Connors, at kerry.connors@advocacypanel.com.au or by phone 02 8296 7880 if they have any questions.