

Media release

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Customers chart the way for service and experience

As an inaugural signatory to Australia's first ever Energy Charter, Essential Energy, has today released its first report on its progress to deliver against the Charter's principles and vision, *"Together, deliver energy for a better Australia"*.

The Disclosures Statement covers the reporting period 1 January to 30 June 2019 and outlines the specific actions Essential Energy has undertaken to improve the customer experience and identifies future opportunities. Signatories to the Energy Charter, who represent all points of the energy supply chain, have committed to work collaboratively on operational solutions.

Essential Energy CEO, John Cleland, said the Energy Charter itself is a game-changer for energy consumers and industry alike, with all participants working together to build consumer trust and relationships.

"Our network reliability today is more than 30 per cent better than it was 15 years ago, but we need to build on that improvement with progress in customer-centric areas. Our overall Customer Satisfaction Index is currently around 85 per cent but we can do better in how we interact with our customers both large and small," Mr Cleland said.

Some of the key highlights from the company's first statement include implementation of a new Customer Interaction Management System which has led to open claims and complaints reducing by more than 50 per cent and the award-winning Networks Renewed trial in Collombatti, which demonstrated a 20 per cent improvement in network voltage performance. The report also identifies opportunities where Essential Energy can do better against the Charter principles.

Mr Cleland added that Essential Energy is working to achieve an 8 per cent reduction in real network charges from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2024, pointing out that the company's network charges today are 40 per cent lower than in 2014, and account for approximately 37 per cent of the average electricity bill.

"Ultimately, we want consumers to value the energy that runs their home or business, and we want them to feel more informed and in control about the energy they use, the service the industry delivers and what to do in the event of a blackout."

He said that as a signatory to the Energy Charter and through Essential Energy's alignment with the Energy Charter's principles, the company expects to be better positioned to:

- understand current performance levels and areas for improvement, benchmarked against industry peers
- remain focused on and accountable for improving customer service and experience
- learn from other industry participants' experience
- implement changes in corporate culture and operations that will benefit customers in the future.

An independent Accountability Panel led by Climate Change Authority Chair, Dr Wendy Craik AM, and comprised of consumer, commercial and industry representatives, is expected to review the disclosures from the signatory companies and produce an annual evaluation report in November this year.

Visit essentialenergy.com.au for more information.

Background to the Energy Charter

- Work on the Energy Charter commenced in February 2018 and took effect from 1 January 2019.
- An **Industry Working Group** made up of supporting businesses representatives developed the Energy Charter principles and accountability framework for consultation.

- The Energy Charter was developed in consultation with consumer and business representatives through an **End User Consultative Group**.
- **Energy Consumers Australia** played a role in the development of the Charter, closely monitoring progress and providing guidance based on consumer expectations of the initiative. Energy Consumers Australia will be the Accountability Panel Host in 2019.
- The Energy Charter is a voluntary, principles-based disclosure regime that can be applied to all businesses across the gas and electricity supply chains. All energy businesses are encouraged to join.
- Signatories cover all parts of the energy market from large-scale solar, wind, hydro, coal and gas generation to gas pipelines, electricity networks and energy retailers, as well as new residential energy services.

Essential Energy FACT FILE:

- Essential Energy builds, operates and maintains one of Australia's largest electricity distribution networks, servicing 855,00 customers across regional, rural and remote NSW.
- Our footprint covers 95 percent of NSW, traversing 737,000 square kilometres of landmass with 183,612 km of powerline, 163,417 of those in designated bushfire zones.
- The network services more than 855,000 customers with approximately 4.6 customers to each kilometre of powerline, which is almost one-tenth the customer density compared with our counterparts in NSW.
- Essential Energy's footprint also includes 1.38 million power poles, equating to 1.6 power poles per customer.

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