Minutes

SA Power Networks' Community Advisory Forum

Meeting Details

Organiser	Alex Lewis
Date	Wed 6 August
Time	9.30am to 12.30pm
Location	The Highway

Members

Andrew Nance	Chair
Matthew Curnow	RAG rep.
Chris Marsden	RAG Rep.
Georgie Morris	VCAG Rep
Heather Merran	TAG Rep.
Kim Syrus	VMAG Rep.
Lachlan Newman	Community Rep.
Mike Leane	RRAG Rep.
Davis Veremu	ACRAG Rep.
Troy Smith	CAG Rep.

SA Power Networks
Ben Birch, Acting Chief Customer & Strategy Officer
Alex Lewis, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
Megan Grey, Head of Comms & Engagement
Kylie Lush, Minute Secretary
Richard Sibly, Head of Regulation

Guests/ Observers
Andrew Bills, CEO SA Power Networks
Sam Bradley, SA Power Networks
Brendon Hampton, SA Power Networks
Cecilia Schutz, SA Power Networks
Bec Carter, SA Power Networks
Ed Chan, IAG Chair (online)

1 Recurring Ordinary Items

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country
Andrew acknowledged the traditional owners of the land and paid respect to elders past and present.

Apologies - Nil

Previous Minutes - Minutes from the previous meeting were circulated to the members and accepted as an accurate representation of the meeting.

1.4 Safety Share

There have been several incidents in recent months involving members of the public moving fallen powerlines. In the most recent case, a Council worker from the Charles Sturt Council rolled up a live wire and secured it to a Stobie pole. When SA Power Networks crews arrived on site, they confirmed the wire was still live, posing a significant safety risk.
In response to these incidents, SA Power Networks has issued safety reminder letters to all first responders and all 68 councils, emphasising the importance of safety around powerlines and the dangers of handling them.

Andrew Nance provided an update on his recent presentation at the Smart Energy Council's Smart Energy SA Conference, where he highlighted the importance of maintaining consumer interests during the energy

transition. He discussed South Australia's leadership in energy innovation, the unique context of the state compared to others, and the need for efficiency and interoperability in consumer energy resources. Andrew also touched on recent developments, including the Commonwealth's paper on defining the Distribution System Operator role and the challenges of aligning national frameworks with local needs. Feedback from the conference was positive, and Andrew emphasised the importance of ensuring consumer benefits remain central to energy reforms.

2. Executive Update

DSO role - Andrew provided an update on SA Power Networks' evolving role as a Distribution System Operator (DSO), highlighting the shift from traditional one-way power flows to managing a complex, dynamic system with rooftop solar, storage, and flexible exports.

He noted that SA Power Networks has embraced the DSO role over the past six months, driven by innovation and necessity, and is advocating for regulatory frameworks that support efficient and effective outcomes for customers.

Bushfire Insurance -SA Power Networks successfully secured $700 million in bushfire insurance coverage, noting the challenges of market volatility and the importance of joint capacity with VPN.

Port Augusta Technical College- SA Power Networks is partnering with the government and industry to support trades and apprenticeships in regional areas, with a commitment to providing three to five jobs annually through the program. A similar initiative is planned for Mount Gambier next year.

Discussion:

- Discussion on the distinction between the Distribution System Operator (DSO) and Distribution Network Service Provider (DNSP) roles, with SA Power Networks already operating as a DSO.
- Concerns raised about potential regulatory barriers and the risk of added complexity if a separate DSO entity is created. SA Power Networks will continue advocating for governance principles that guide networks toward customer-focused decisions.
- Updates on trials and projects, such as flexibility marketplaces, to optimise network investment and improve customer outcomes.
- Discussion on the growing role of batteries, Virtual Power Plants (VPPs), and associated equity concerns, particularly for customers without access to solar or batteries.

Action: Andrew's DSO speech and presentation to be shared with the minutes.

3.1 SAPN Advocacy Themes

Cecilia provided an update on the development and implementation of SA Power Networks' advocacy framework, which aims to align advocacy efforts across the business and ensure consistency in messaging. The framework includes six key advocacy themes, outcome statements, and a governance process to guide internal and external advocacy efforts.

The framework is designed to ensure all staff, from leadership to frontline teams, are aligned in their advocacy efforts. A stocktake of existing advocacy positions was conducted to identify priorities and develop outcome statements for each theme.

Six key advocacy themes have been developed, including energy security, energy affordability, CER and demand growth, state development, sustainability and resilience and reliability. An advocacy committee has been established, and regular updates are shared with the business to improve visibility and alignment.

Discussion:

- Questions were raised about how environmental considerations fit into the framework. It was noted that sustainability is integrated into existing themes, but further development is needed to address external advocacy opportunities.
- Discussion on how flexible exports fit across multiple themes, including affordability and energy security, highlighting the interconnected nature of advocacy positions.
- Concerns were raised about poor performance in the electrical industry and opportunities for SA Power Networks to lead change.
- Cost barriers for customers upgrading to smart meters were discussed, with a focus on advocating for targeted financial support from the government. SAPN could investigate using their apprentices to remediate sites/ upgrade meters for vulnerable customers.

3.2 People & Culture – Overview & Priorities

Sam Bradley, Chief People Officer, provided an overview of SA Power Networks' People and Culture function, its priorities, and key initiatives aimed at maximising the value of the organisation's investment in its people.
The People and Culture function has been reshaped to focus on leadership, culture, organisational development, and change management.

Six key outcomes for 2030 were outlined, including trusted and inclusive leadership, a thriving and aligned workforce and ensuring employees feel valued.

An overview of some of few key initiatives being progressed was provided:

- **Safety:** Implementation of the Fatal Hazard Control Program to reduce risks and embed safety practices into daily operations. A significant reduction in fatal hazard events has been observed since the program's rollout.
  Workforce Planning: Addressing operational resourcing needs, managing an ageing workforce, and building new skills and capabilities, particularly in response to emerging technologies like AI.
- **Career Pathways:** Expanding apprenticeship and early career programs, with over 10% of the workforce currently in pathway programs. Focus on increasing female participation and regional recruitment through partnerships like the Port Augusta and Mount Gambier Technical Colleges.
- **Inclusion and Diversity:** Development of a new Inclusion and Diversity Strategy to 2030, with a focus on increasing female representation in trade and technical roles. Progress on the Reconciliation Action Plan was also highlighted.
  Culture: Emphasis on aligning behaviours with organisational values, streamlining processes to remove roadblocks, and enabling employees to focus on impactful work.

Discussion:

- Questions were raised about how SA Power Networks is promoting female participation in technical roles. Initiatives include early career programs, pre-apprenticeship pathways, and visible role models in leadership and technical roles. Progress will be monitored against diversity targets.
- A question about how SA Power Networks is supporting regional recruitment was raised. Partnerships with regional technical colleges and pre-apprenticeship programs are key to ensuring regional employment opportunities are meeting workforce needs.
- SAPNs retention strategy and target levels for attrition.
- Technology integration and how manage AI.
- The need for a people metric in the asset management plan.

3.3 Advisory Group Briefing Papers

The chair of each of the Advisory Groups provided updates on their respective groups, providing information on emerging issues and key insights.

Mike provided an update on the **Regional and Remote Advisory Group**, focusing on key issues: improving responses to regional outages, clarifying the Department of Energy and Mining's role in emergency response, and enhancing communication and partnership opportunities with Telstra. The group is revisiting microgrid and stand-alone power system opportunities, monitoring outcomes from the Upper North energy resilience workshop on , and planning to engage with regional customers at the upcoming Riverland Field Days in September

Heather provided an update for the **Tariffs Advisory Group** on key issues, including the new solar export tariff, which lacks clarity on its visibility and impact. Communication around tariff structures remains challenging, with customers struggling to link SA Power Networks' tariffs to retailer charges. Recent retailer discussions in Melbourne offered limited insights due to competitive sensitivities. The group stressed the need for government support to protect vulnerable customers during the smart meter upgrade program and noted the release of the AEMC pricing review report for further tariff insights.

Lachlan provided an update for the **CERIAG**. Energy Masters pilot, now in the household installation phase, and the ongoing Market Active Solar project, with a ring-fencing waiver requested. Discussions included interoperability, DSOs, and a proposed National Electricity Rules change by Energy Consumers Australia to replace annual distribution plans with integrated system planning, which CERIAG supports.
He also provided a **cybersecurity update**, highlighting efforts to manage data flow, including restricting Google Drive access, and addressing quantum computing risks via a technology register and vendor updates. SA Power Networks has implemented physical protections against threats like inverter misuse and is recognised nationally for its expertise in this area. The 2024 Cybersecurity Annual Report has been released, and SA Power Networks is leading the development of national standards for inverter technology and cybersecurity, including establishing a Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) body to enhance interoperability, mitigate risks, and strengthen energy security.

Georgie provided an update on the **Vulnerable Customers Advisory Group**, highlighting the worsening energy affordability crisis in South Australia. Energy debt levels are the highest in the nation, with average debts around $1,800. Rising costs, driven by high network charges, inequitable recovery mechanisms, and poor housing quality, are disproportionately impacting vulnerable households, particularly those without solar or batteries. Federal and state government responses, including concessions and subsidies, are insufficient, with many households unable to access support. Georgie emphasised the need for energy efficiency standards, equitable tariff reform, and joined-up government action to address these issues. The significant level of consultation at both the State and Federal Government, which places pressure on customer advocates, was also noted.

Kim provided an update on the **Vegetation Management Advisory Group** key issues, including the recent apple tree trimming incident that underscored the need for better community education on legislative requirements. The group discussed rising aggression towards SA Power Networks staff/ contractors, the impact of urban greening strategies, and the role of undergrounding (PLEC scheme). Communication with local councils is critical to build relationships, with forums planned to improve collaboration on legislative and operational matters, including bushfire boundary reviews. The next meeting will include a site visit bus trip within the City of Marion. Communication and education remain central to addressing challenges and strengthening stakeholder relationships.

Chris provided a brief update on the **Reset Advisory Group**. Chris reported challenges with the cross-jurisdictional consumer review of the reset engagement programs, following ECA not supporting our application and as a result, alternative approaches to progress are being explored.

Davis provided an update on the **Asset Condition and Risk Advisory Group**, covering discussions on reliability, insulator pollution, asset management objectives, customer outcomes, and cybersecurity. Key points included the

need for better alignment between people, culture, and asset management plans, the launch of a newsletter to improve community engagement on regional investment, and ongoing efforts to address system integration and onboarding for new leaders. The group also emphasised the importance of tangible customer outcomes. A bus tour in the Adelaide Hills is planned for October to further explore asset management initiatives.

Ed joined the meeting online from interstate to introduce himself to the group as the newly appointed Chair of the **Innovation Advisory Group** and shared a brief overview of his background. He provided an update on the newly formed Innovation Advisory Group, which held its inaugural meeting in May to establish principles and group processes. The next meeting, in two weeks, will focus on project discussions, including using a proposed SA Power Networks project as a test case for assessment criteria and feedback.

Troy provided an update on the **Connections Advisory Group**, highlighting progress on resolving issues with authority to connect forms, plans for a streamlined process, and efforts to improve industry standards. Key discussions included inconsistencies in works management systems, and introducing stricter accountability for poor-performing electricians. Troy commended Brendon and the work being done in the connections space.

3.4 Connections Update
Brendan updated the group on his first year as Head of Customer Solutions,
highlighting progress in processes, restructuring into four functions for better accountability, and significant growth in major projects and battery installations. He also flagged challenges like the housing roadmap, EV charging, and embedded networks, which pose risks to consumers and the network.

He highlighted inefficiencies in the connections process, such as poor communication and lack of visibility, and stressed the need for a systems-based approach. Key initiatives include simplifying smaller connections, improving project management, and using a balanced scorecard to measure performance across key areas for sustainable improvement.

The new customer portal aims to streamline connections by integrating services, improving communication, and enabling self-service. Phase one, which is launching soon, covers embedded generation and minor connections, with future phases expanding to larger projects. Brendan emphasised the need to simplify processes before automation for effective transformation. The $4 million investment is part of a broader customer program.

Brendan shared a vision for the Connections team to build strong foundations by 2025, achieve digitisation by 2026, and deliver industry-leading service by 2027. He emphasised the need for continuous improvement, customer-focused outcomes, and efficient processes.

CAF members praised the progress that has occurred to date and their confidence in Brendon for further transformation.

4. Other Business

- **Optional joint ElectraNet CAP & SAPN CAF meeting**
  There is interest from ElectraNet in holding a joint session with SA Power Networks. While cautious about ensuring a clear agenda and purpose, discussions may focus on a potential regulatory process regarding the ageing transmission line from Port Augusta to Leigh Creek, which was heavily damaged in the October 2024 storms. This process could explore whether the line should be replaced or if SA Power Networks could step in using standalone power systems to deliver improved outcomes for affected communities. The other agenda item could be a presentation from DEM on their Planning and Forecasting work. Dates and interest for the session will be tested in the coming weeks.

- **Strategic Plan Update and Next Steps -**
  Item deferred to the November meeting.

Meeting closed at 12:53

Current action Items:

Item		Who	Complete
	Share DSO related link to Andrew Bills presentation.	Kylie	Sent with minutes
	Share CAF meeting slides with group.	Kylie	Sent with minutes
	Invite Ben Birch to next meeting re: Strategic Plan Update	Kylie	In progress