Minutes

SA Power Networks' Community Advisory Forum

Meeting Details

Organiser	Alex Lewis
Date	Wed 5 November
Time	9.30am to 12.30pm
Location	Rydges South Tce

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.
Ed Chan	IAG Rep.

SA Power Networks
Jess Morris, Chief Customer & Strategy Officer
Alex Lewis, Stakeholder Engagement Manager
Megan Grey, Head of Comms & Engagement
Kylie Lush, Minute Secretary
Bruno Coelho, Acting Head of Regulation

Guests/ Observers
Andrew Bills, CEO SA Power Networks
Eva Balan-Vnuk, Chief Officer D&T
Ben Birch, Head of Strategy, Innovation, Growth

1. Recurring Ordinary Items

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country
Andrew welcomed attendees and acknowledged the traditional owners of the land, highlighting the ongoing progress in incorporating First Nations voices into discussions. He also noted the ongoing engagement with the First Nations Clean Energy Networks and the planned Advisory Group structure review, which will explore strategies to include First Nations perspectives.

1.2 Apologies – Chris Marsden

1.3 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 - Jess delivered a presentation on community safety, emphasising our summer preparations ahead of the upcoming bushfire season and the importance of farm safety and safe practices when working near powerlines. October was Safe Work Month and the focus was on working near powerlines.

Recent initiatives were discussed:

- SMS and email campaigns targeting critical care site customers and support customers.
- Paid advertising targeting farmers, construction workers, and high bushfire risk areas.
- Collaboration with councils, MPs, and peak agencies to amplify messaging.
- Safe Work Month campaign assets and media coverage.

Discussion:

- Clarification sought on how critical care sites are flagged in our system was raised. Alex/ Kylie to follow up.
- Risk-based approach to addressing non-compliant/ low wires and the need to seek OTR direction was discussed.

2. Executive Update – Presented by Jess Morris and Andrew Bills

Summer & Bushfire Preparedness

- Bushfire season brought forward by one month.
- Focus on vegetation management and fault clearing on bushfire lines.
- Recent bushfire simulation exercise conducted to ensure readiness.

Andrew Bills shared insights from a recent visit to the UK

- Regional spatial energy plans (20–30 year outlooks) integrating all energy sources.
- 15-year investment plans with 5-year costed periods.
- Proactive transmission and network investment to meet net-zero targets.
- Tight home efficiency standards and innovative retailer offerings (e.g., free energy days).
- Lessons for Australia: strategic planning, transparency, and long-term investment alignment.

COP31 (Conference of the Parties)

- Adelaide is a strong contender to host COP31.
- Significant government interest in showcasing South Australia's energy transition story.
- SA Power Networks to establish a dedicated team to manage involvement.
- Potential legacy opportunities for South Australia to position itself as a global leader in energy innovation.

Discussion:

- Engagement with the Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR):
    - Encouraging proactive involvement in areas like vegetation management and export standards.
    - Risk-based approach to addressing ageing infrastructure in regional areas.
- Broader consultation obligations expected as energy transition accelerates.

3.1 D&T Overview

Eva introduced herself to the group and shared an update on Digital and Technology, highlighting their key focus areas: supporting the current regulatory reset period, where 80-90% of initiatives involve a digital component, and strengthening enterprise-wide digital capabilities.

Key Initiatives

- Field Mobility App – Consolidate 17 field apps into one intuitive app to improve efficiency and user experience.

- Data and AI Strategy – Centralised data repository, predictive and proactive asset maintenance, streamlining processes like asset condition monitoring and solar/embedded generation approvals and exploring opportunities for efficiency gains while ensuring staff are supported through role changes.
- Cybersecurity – preparing for next regulatory reset period with evidence-based investment proposals.
- Vegetation Management – exploring drone imagery, AI and digital twin technology.

Discussion

- Importance of aligning digital standards across teams to ensure reliable data for asset performance monitoring.
- The importance of balancing systems and processes with knowledge and expertise from the field.
- Ongoing work to consolidate and streamline tools to reduce complexity and costs.
- Need for transparency and confidence-building with non-IT stakeholders regarding cyber security investments and bringing customers along on the journey.
- Whether cyber security was explicitly listed as a risk in the asset management objectives. The importance of connectivity, using Starlink, to provide access to systems in the field.
- Does the platform allow the receipt of e-COC forms? This will be added to the Connections Portal.
- Rex optimised – useful to add note that now compatible for use with Chrome or Edge. Eva to follow up with team.

3.2 Strategic Plan Update

Ben provided an update on the evolution of SA Power Networks' strategic planning process with an emphasis on simplifying complexity to improve communication and alignment across the organisation.

Objectives & Key Results (OKRs)

- Clear objectives linked to measurable outcomes and key initiatives.
- OKRs to be integrated into performance reviews for senior leaders.
- Shared culture-related OKRs for all senior leaders to improve organisational culture.

Priorities

- **Customer Experience Programme:** Enhancing customer satisfaction and engagement.
- **DSO (Distribution System Operator) Evolution:** Transitioning the business model to support future energy needs.
- **Asset Risk and Condition Performance:** Improving data-driven decision-making for asset management.
- **Safety and Culture:** Addressing feedback from the culture survey and improving safety performance.
- **Financial Efficiency:** Emphasising cost efficiency while delivering outcomes.

It was noted that the CAF has provide significant input into the OKRs. Andrew Nance discussed the importance of aligning advisory group priorities with SA Power Networks strategic objectives. Continuing to target the effort being put in and ensure accountability is a key outcome of this work was highlighted.

3.3 DSO Update

Ben provided a DSO update on behalf of James Brown who couldn't attend due to illness.

SA Power Networks is adapting its business model to align with the evolving energy landscape, particularly the rapid growth of Customer Energy Resources (CER) such as rooftop solar and batteries.
South Australia leads the nation in CER adoption, with nearly 50% of homes having rooftop solar and a significant growth in battery installations.
Electrification and its impacts on the network are being closely monitored, with a focus on managing challenges and opportunities.

- SA Power Networks is moving towards a DSO model to address network challenges and maximise customer value.
- SA Power Networks has pioneered flexible exports, allowing customers to maximise solar exports with dynamic operating envelopes.
- A trial is planned for 2026 to explore flexibility marketplaces, which would allow SA Power Networks to procure third-party solutions eg. Virtual Power Plants, instead of building new infrastructure.
- SA Power Networks is working with AEMO and ElectraNet to integrate distribution network data into broader energy system modelling.

Discussion

- A question was raised as to why EV demand has levelled off and the key barriers. EV uptake has slowed due to range anxiety and limited charging infrastructure.
- The cost of the flexibility marketplace initiative was raised.
- Discussion was had around minimum demand events and their frequency. These events occur frequently, particularly on sunny spring days. They are managed through interconnectors and SAPN's solar backstop capability.
- SA Power Networks acknowledged the challenges and emphasised the need to focus on inclusive solutions for customers unable to afford CER technologies to ensure equitable access for all.
- Pricing and recovery of network costs is an issue and will increase as CER uptake increases.

3.4 Advisory Group – Key Reflections & Takeaways

Troy - Connections

- The connections process has progressed significantly over the past three years, with improved communication and collaboration between SAPN and industry.
- The REX replacement project is advancing well, with positive feedback from stakeholders.
- The introduction of the Electronic Connection System is seen as a promising solution to streamline processes, though implementation details remain complex. Brendon has committed to a December resolution date.
- Industry sentiment has shifted positively, with reduced animosity and greater collaboration with SAPN.

Davis - Asset Condition & Risk

- Progress has been made in clarifying the purpose of meetings and improving communication, but there is still work to be done to unpack the broader implications of asset management initiatives.
- Concerns remain about the confidence level of data used in asset management dashboards, particularly regarding reliability and validation processes.
- The group has requested fewer presentations from subject matter experts and more focus on areas where advisory members can add value.
- A customer-focused newsletter has been introduced, providing tangible benefits by improving communication with regional stakeholders.

Kim - Vegetation Management

- Challenges include high vegetation management costs, public perception issues, and animosity towards SAPN, which has regressed in some areas.
- Issues with tree species selection and limited capacity at the Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR) are causing delays and confusion.
- The group is working to address the tension between legislative requirements for vegetation management and the state government's push for increased tree canopy coverage.

- The public perception of SAPN and its perceived hardening is of concern, requiring some improved stakeholder relationships and language.

Matt - Reset

- The completion of the reset process was a significant milestone, providing a sense of relief and accomplishment.
- Emphasised the importance of maintaining momentum and achieving tangible outcomes, rather than just engaging in discussions.

Lachlan - CERIAG & Cyber Security

- The growth of Customer Energy Resources (CER) continues to accelerate, with no signs of slowing down.
- Lachlan expressed optimism about South Australia's leadership in CER adoption and the opportunities it presents for the state and the country and highlighted SA Power Networks role in supporting this transition.
- Lachlan noted the value of quarterly meetings with SAPN's cybersecurity team, which provide insights into customer perspectives and ongoing challenges.
- He acknowledged the increasing importance of cybersecurity in the context of CER growth and the broader energy transition

Mike - Regional and Remote

- The group has made good progress in connecting with regional and remote areas, particularly on the Eyre Peninsula with two local members, but struggles to engage effectively with other areas of the state.
- There is a need to improve feedback mechanisms from customers, especially in regional areas where engagement is limited.
- SAPN is encouraged to leverage networks such as the Local Government Association (LGA) and Primary Producers SA to better understand customer needs.
- The replacement of the Leigh Creek to Davenport Line presents a unique and golden opportunity to explore the feasibility of standalone power systems (SAPS) for remote areas.
- SAPN is encouraged to investigate SAPS as a potential solution to improve reliability and address customer concerns about extended outages.

Heather - Tariffs

- The group has been focused on the finalisation of the reset and the new tariff structure statement, including the introduction of export tariffs for residential customers.
- There is a need to evaluate whether current tariff structures are truly cost-reflective, particularly in light of DSO changes, CER growth, and automation initiatives.
- Questions remain about how tariffs can incentivise efficient energy use while balancing the needs of residential customers who may struggle to adapt their behaviour (e.g., shifting energy use to off-peak times).
- The group is considering how tariffs can better reflect the social and community benefits of electricity networks, rather than focusing solely on individual cost recovery.
- The group plans to engage with the AEMC's pricing review, which is expected to deliver its findings in March 2026.

Georgie - **Vulnerable Customers**

- This can be a difficult area given the relationship with DNSPs but SAPN has provided strong support and advocacy for vulnerable customers, particularly in areas where network and retailer responsibilities overlap.
- There is a significant energy equity divide, with 50% of households lacking solar and 30% of households renting, limiting access to CER benefits.

- SAPN is encouraged to leverage granular data on energy consumption to inform data-driven policies that address inequities in cost recovery and access to CER technologies.
- The group emphasised the need for SAPN to play a role in addressing the energy divide, particularly in relation to network cost recovery.

Ed Innovation Advisory

- The Innovation Advisory Group has had a productive start, with a good mix of broad representation and skills among its members.
- The group has focused on establishing how to work together effectively and aligning on principles for assessing innovation projects.
- Ed suggested to provide a detailed list of projects in the pipeline to help advisory groups better understand what fits into the innovation space.

Matt expressed his gratitude to the SA Power Networks staff for their dedication and effort in organising and facilitating these meetings and discussions. Andrew Nance was also thanked for his leadership as the CAF Chair.

Mike commended the SEC Newgate report which will be discussed further at the next Reset Advisory meeting on 19 November

Alex noted another joint ElectraNet, CAP/CAF meeting in Quarter 1 2026.

4. Other Business

- **CAF/Advisory Group Survey -** Andrew reminded the group to complete the advisory group feedback survey that went out.

Meeting closed at 12.45pm

Current action Items:

Item	Action Item	Who	Complete
1.4	Critical Care Sites: Jess to clarity how these are identified and tagged in the system.	Alex/Kylie	In progress
3.4	A list of IAG projects to be shared with the group	Michelle/ Alex	In progress