

Evoenergy Community Forum Report

The Community Forum was formed by Evoenergy to provide customer and general community feedback to inform the development of Evoenergy's 2026-2031 gas network access arrangement regulatory proposal.

The Community Forum was made up of 32 diverse members of the Canberra and Queanbeyan community.

The Forum met six times, including a site visit. Meetings were held in person or a hybrid mixture of online and in-person participation. Meetings included presentations from a range of Evoenergy representatives, the opportunity to ask questions, workshop activities and whole-of-group discussions.

In addition to the Forum meetings, participants had the opportunity to hear independent presentations by the ACT Government, ACT Council of Social Services and the chairperson of Evoenergy's Energy Consumer Reference Council.

This Report has been prepared by the members of the Community Forum as an independent summary of our key areas of discussions and conclusion.

Our priorities for the 2026-31 gas network regulatory proposal

This regulatory proposal occurs within the context of the ACT Government's Integrated Energy Plan which is at the forefront of Australia's transition and guides a program of transition away from gas to electricity in the ACT. The forum recognised the uncertainty associated with the speed of this transition and encourages flexibility as we respond. Considering this, the Community Forum identified the following priorities:

- More information should be provided to the community about the energy transition and its impact on customers
- Evoenergy has a role to encourage customers to move off gas, while not disadvantaging customers who may not be able to transition as easily, including vulnerable customers
- The cost of the transition should be shared fairly across all energy consumers
- We support a move away from separate gas and electricity networks to consider the energy system as a whole, including the impacts on the electricity network and its costs to customers
- The transition is ACT Government policy, and the ACT Government should be taking a greater role in facilitating the transition.

Customer impacts

It was recognised by the Community Forum that the energy transition will impact different customers in different ways. During our discussions, we identified the following priorities:

- The energy transition is fair and equitable for all energy customers
- Customers need more information about the transition and the associated costs to make informed decisions. This should be provided by energy retailers and government, as well as the gas network
- It may be appropriate to tailor approaches to different customer segments, such as residential customers, commercial customers, large customers and those that may find it harder to transition (e.g. renters or apartment owners)
- Consumer protections need to be clearly articulated and enforced in the ACT to ensure people are given appropriate advice and price gouging is avoided.

The cost of transition

The transition away from gas comes with costs for both customers and the network owners. The Community Forum has the following suggestions with respect to recovering the costs of transition:

- The cost of transition should be fairly distributed across all customers, both those leaving the network early and those remaining on the network for longer periods
- Predictability and certainty over the longer term, beyond five years, is important when considering prices and the structure of tariffs
- We discussed the various revenue recovery options and had mixed views about the benefits of price cap and/or revenue cap and hybrid
- We discussed the various tariff blocks and agreed that there were options that should be explored in recognition of desires for people to move off gas. Different pricing structures between residential and commercial should be considered
- The ACT Government should play a larger role in funding the transition, thereby sharing the costs across all ACT taxpayers
- The costs of disconnection should not act as a disincentive to transition away from gas. Some forum members suggested that the cost of disconnection should not be borne by the disconnecting customer. Evoenergy should explore innovative ways to keep the cost of disconnection low. It was suggested that the costs of disconnection could be shared across neighbourhoods or paid for by customers over several years
- The exit fee was not supported by the Community Forum
- The majority agreed that Evoenergy should consider the option of not recovering 100% of the cost of its network assets as it is a business risk that should not be borne by customers alone.

About the regulatory environment

During our discussion the Community Forum identified the following with respect to the regulatory environment:

- The current regulatory framework is no longer appropriate and is not fit-for-purpose to facilitate the energy transition
- Planning needs to extend beyond the five-year regulatory period
- We suggest that, because the ACT is at the leading edge of the transition, the AER be innovative in its thinking around a consolidated energy framework and increased pricing and operational synergies between the gas and electricity networks should be explored.

What we value

In the first meeting of the Community Forum we identified the following values, including how they related to the gas network. These should be considered by Evoenergy as it makes its plans for the future.

