



EDPR 2026-31

Research and Engagement Panel Meeting

Details	Members	AusNet Staff
Tuesday 12 November 2024 Online (MS Teams) Chair: Charlotte Eddy Secretariat: AusNet Observers: Lotte Scheel, AER David Prins, AER CCP	Helen Bartley Tricia Hiley Darren McCubbin	AusNet Staff: Charlotte Eddy, GM Strategy and Regulation (Distribution) Stephen Thompson, GM Customer and Community Lucy Holder, Customer Engagement Manager Jade Park, Senior Research Specialist Eliza Cochrane, Regulatory Economist Lia Mavrias, Business Graduate

**Missed part of the meeting*

Agenda

Welcome & Agenda

1. **What we've heard engaging on the draft proposal** | Summarising feedback from Panels (via Coordination Group), submissions, customer workshops & other sources
2. **C-Sat Methodology** | Customer Satisfaction (C-SAT) program re-design
3. **Close** | Next steps

Key outcomes

The panel members discussed the challenges of obtaining draft proposal feedback from customers, noting that the feedback received has been valuable.

The AusNet team introduced the upcoming changes to the customer satisfaction (C-Sat) program then variously informed to collaborate on various aspects, being the platform, delivery & collection method, digital inclusion, questionnaire & drivers of satisfaction being tested and any other considerations. Panel members expressed strong support for the change, and we took away clear direction on the approach for more detailed C-Sat design elements. These are summarised in the *Actions*.

Key discussion points

Agenda item	Key discussion points
Welcome	AusNet's Charlotte Eddy opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country, welcomed participants then outlined the meeting purpose and agenda.
1. What we've heard engaging on the draft proposal	AusNet's Lucy Holder discussed the feedback received from customers on the draft proposal, noting that panel members are already familiar with much of the feedback through their participation in other panels. The main focus of this agenda item was customer awareness and the challenges of generating organic interest. The low levels of feedback were interpreted as an indication that customers are generally satisfied with the content, suggesting that the panels have effectively captured and represented customer needs. Discussion included: - Confirming 31 regional newspapers within AusNet's distribution area featured the ads, all of which were secured by the external ad agency, except for The Age and Herald Sun. Some of these newspapers also published related articles. - A panel member highlighted the challenge of engaging customers, noting that acronyms and complex language can be a barrier, as well as customer focus on low prices often take priority over deeper involvement, and that without consumer passion and capacity, engagement can be difficult. However, panel members acknowledged and commended AusNet's effective efforts in reaching customers through various channels. - Confirming the absence of feedback shouldn't be taken as support, but is a data point. - The feedback from Sandy Point was highly regarded for its depth and authenticity. As a remote community, their insights reflect the experiences of many others in similar situations, amplifying the voices of a broader customer base. - Involving customers in the details of the proposal may be challenging, as they have not been part of the broader decision-making process. For example, seeking customer input on Electric Vehicle (EV) charging without involving them in the initial choice of EV implementation could feel like a leap. - A panel member spoke to the importance of using clear, accessible language when engaging customers, ensuring the content style meets their needs. However, highly technical content is difficult to simplify without losing meaning. Going forward, future resets could clearly distinguish between content suitable for customer engagement and material better suited for panel members with the capacity to digest the technical elements. Strategies for making technical concepts more accessible, and whether all plans need to be engaged on with the general public were also discussed. - We are expecting the final customer workshop Round 4 report soon, and will be shared with the panel members as soon as it is ready.
2. C-Sat Methodology	AusNet's Lucy Holder recapped the upcoming changes to AusNet's C-Sat program, being a shift from the phone surveying approach AusNet's had for the past 8 years to an online methodology. Lucy reminded the group of why the change is essential, with the existing phone-based system is increasingly difficult to manage and is receiving fewer responses. Additionally, with growing scrutiny on data use, especially externally, customer acceptance of third-party services has been challenging. To address these issues, AusNet is bringing the C-SAT process in-house and largely automating the data collection and analysis process. By shifting to an online survey model, AusNet expects improved insights and data quality, more flexibility in the

approach, and richer data analysis opportunities to inform customer service improvements.

AusNet spoke through the timelines for the change, including that the AER is currently assessing implications for the current-period and 2026-31 Customer Service Incentive Schemes, and will be making a decision on cut-over timelines in November. AusNet is preparing for a cut-over from January 2025 while it awaits the AER's decision on the schedule.

AusNet spoke through the items in scope for discussion today, being the platform, delivery & collection method, digital inclusion, questionnaire & drivers of satisfaction being tested and any other considerations.

Discussion included:

- Panel members expressed strong support for the move to online and the proposed platform and delivering method, noting the advantages of this move – particularly that it is more accessible for customers and will help AusNet better understand its customers and make improvements – outweigh the downside of changing (being consistency in methodology over time).
- Agreeing it would be valuable to monitor the response rate especially early on to determine whether the changes to the program have achieved the desired outcomes, and help inform AusNet's continuous improvement of the program.
- Support for aligning the survey link distribution with standard communications. Two potential scenarios were noted in which customers might not reach AusNet: 1) inability to access the online survey, and 2) satisfaction with the service, leading them not to provide feedback. Both scenarios could skew data, making it either overly negative or overly positive. Additionally, feedback varies greatly across different methods, with customers often more positive when speaking to a real person.

AusNet's Stephen shared that feedback from highly satisfied or dissatisfied customers is still valuable, as it highlights areas for improvement.

- Taking the opportunity to simplify the survey wording was a big theme in the discussion
 - Support for using clear and simple language
 - Simplifying the C-Sat question wording – suggested changing from "extremely (dis)satisfied" to "very (un)happy"
 - It would be helpful to confirm whether the content is clear and easy to understand for the CALD community. Leveraging the plain and culturally inclusive language resources developed by AusNet's communications team for the initial draft and collaborating with them on this first pass of the survey.
 - All communications should be designed for Year 6/7 level. AusNet took an action to test the survey for Plain English, and to test it (via Panel member/s) with some customers in this age group.
- While the Panel did not think it was necessary for the program (at least initially), they were supportive of AusNet looking for ways to continuously improve accessibility of the survey including exploring automated AI-assisted phone completes and more simple versions – e.g. responding to SMS with a number or having a short and a long version. A panel member noted many customers who aren't comfortable online have work-arounds in place, e.g. support from friends/family/community to help them complete online tasks, and may use this for surveys.
- The importance of privacy, ensuring that survey screens and compliance are upheld to minimise data breaches.
- The refreshed survey enables AusNet to gather valuable insights into customers experiencing vulnerability on the network, including their demographic information and overall experience, but shouldn't force a response to invasive questions or ask

any questions – such as life support registrations – if it can get this data elsewhere to build a more comprehensive understanding of customers and do more granular analysis of the data to inform improvements.

It was suggested AusNet could offer an 'other' option in lieu of demographics and personal circumstance questions. AusNet would be providing customers experiencing vulnerability the opportunity to share their specific circumstances if they feel comfortable. This helps AusNet gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable customers, especially during planned and unplanned outages, and provides new insights into how their individual situations may impact their energy usage.

- It was clarified that the survey captures information on the duration, level of comfort, and the extent of inconvenience experienced by the customer.
- Given the order of questions in the survey can introduce extraneous variables and bias in the customer's responses, the C-Sat question should be asked first to give AusNet flexibility on the remaining questions in the survey to maximise its value and maintain relevance without influencing the outcomes.
- Panel expressed comfort with AusNet delivering the survey using the Forsta platform, noting the process will be largely automated with fewer opportunities for manual handling errors or intervention than the current C-Sat methodology. There was some support for AusNet looking further into ISO 20252 accreditation, which involves a robust auditing process and enhances confidence in its research. A Panel member noted the process is intensive and can be expensive, but would be worth AusNet considering further, in addition to considering ADIA accreditation. Such accreditations would apply across AusNet's research activities. While a significant investment, it was suggested this would be useful in giving the regulator and customer advocates added confidence in the robustness of AusNet's research.

Close and Next Steps

AusNet's Charlotte Eddy thanked the panel members for their time and valuable contributions, acknowledging that this may be the final Research & Engagement panel meeting. The panel would be kept informed of key milestones and future engagement opportunities, and highlighted the various other points of contact AusNet maintains with each panel member.

Action items			
Action	Assigned to	Status	Due
AusNet to progress planning for the move to C-Sat going online, and: - Taking the opportunity to simplify the survey and the wording throughout (incl. the C-Sat question), aiming for a Year 6/7 reading level - Testing the survey wording for ease of understanding - Adopting a continuous improvement mindset and keeping the design of the survey flexible so it can evolve with changing communications preferences, availability of channels, integration with other data sources, and to be more accessible. - Monitor the survey on launch, for things like completion rates and who is (and isn't) completing it - Go all online in the first instance, with a view to continuing to improve accessibility over time informed by customer engagement on the survey (e.g. potentially adding an automated phone complete option in future) - Further consider ISO20252 accreditation and looking into ADIA membership.	AusNet	Underway/ In progress	Ongoing
Panel members to provide submissions on the Draft Proposal	Panel members (Optional)	In progress	17 November