



Customer Experience Panel

Meeting #4 | Summary Notes

Details	Members	AusNet Staff	External Observers
1.00pm-4.00pm Thursday 7 September 2023 Online (MS Teams) Chair: Fran Duiker Secretariat: AusNet	Emily Peel Mark Grenning John Mumford Jeff Nottle Piang Lilian Tony Robinson Apologies: Jonathan Kneebone	Fran Duiker Charlotte Eddy Lucy Holder Sonja Lekovic Michael Walton Jennifer Turner Thang Pham Michaela Jackson	Nil

Focus Question	Objective of the meeting	Key outcomes	Next FQ5 meeting objectives
FQ5: How might we design connection processes that meet evolving customer expectations, across all our customers?	Explore the current connection experience for all AusNet customers, including customer preferences, pain points and potential gaps, and collaborate on potential areas of improvement, including metrics to measuring success.	- Good service in the connections process is important. Especially for CER – when customers are investing to manage their bills or to help in energy transition – AusNet's processes not be getting in the way - Customer improvements are valued and AusNet should be at least aiming to reduce its GSL payments as a base.. - There's support for further improvements but there needs to be a clear delineation between programs funded through allowances or CSIS - there should be no overlap so customers aren't paying twice. - When considering the CSIS, AusNet should consider the size of the reward and whether any improvements are being diluted through additions of new measures.	Build on Meeting #4's discussion and collaborate on proposed improvements to connection processes, including any relationship/s with the CSIS (with CSIS changes to be considered as part of Focus Question 1), or proposed expenditure allowances for 2026-2031.

Item	Time	Topic	Lead/s
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	1.00pm - 1.05pm	Welcome and agenda	Fran Duiker
Part 1	1.05pm - 1.15pm	General items	Fran Duiker & Lucy Holder
		- Action items: Reporting back on actions from Meeting #3 - Closing the loop on July face-to-face meeting and focus question exercise.	
Part 2	1.15pm – 2:25pm	Deep dive: Homes and small businesses Grid & CER connection processes Explore the connection experience for homes and small business, including grid and consumer energy resource (CER) connections and collaborate on our approach to customer experience in EDPR 2026-31.	Jennifer Turner
	2:25 – 2:30pm	Break	
Part 3	2.30pm – 3.10pm	Deep dive: Large customers Connection process for large customers Explore the current connection experience for large customers, including their grid and consumer energy resource (CER) connections, and collaborate on our approach to customer experience in EDPR 2026-31.	Michael Walton
Part 4	3.10pm - 3.30pm	Other matters & close Open floor Meeting close and next steps	Fran Duiker

Welcome & Introductions

Members were welcomed to the panel by Fran Duiker, AusNet General Manager Strategic Planning and Customer. Following Acknowledgement of Country, Fran thanked everyone for contributions to Padlet in advance of today's meeting. Fran noted that the pack would largely be taken as 'read' but there would be opportunities for discussion throughout today's meeting.

Fran outlined that today's meeting is focussed on FQ5 'How might we design connection processes that meet evolving customer expectations, across all our customers?' and provided an overview of the agenda for today.

No questions or objections were raised.

Part 1: Standing Items

Topics	Discussion points
Actions	AusNet referred to actions since last meeting and confirmed that AusNet would address the panel member's contributions via Padlet. While a copy of the full report to Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action regarding the 2021 storms cannot be shared, AusNet can share a related report with panel members. No further comments or questions were received, including on how AusNet plans to manage overlap between EDPR engagement panels.

Part 2: Deep dive: Homes and small businesses

Topics	Discussion points
Grid connection process	AusNet's Customer Optimisation Manager, Jen Turner, explained the connections process for customers, including context to this process, customer research and

journey mapping, as well as customer expectations and pain points related to connections.

Jen outlined identified and planned improvements in the current regulatory period (i.e., to 2025) and how they align to recommendations from the EDPR 2021-25 Customer Forum.

Discussion

There was discussion around multiple aspects of recent performance and customers satisfaction.

- A member asked via the chat whether there are any reasons why more recent performance on connection satisfaction is declining? AusNet responded that it relates to pain points and drivers, chiefly the time taken and duration of connection process.
- Another member asked about AusNet's service levels regarding time to connect and whether they are tracked. AusNet responded that it has regulated Guaranteed Service Levels for connections and pay and penalty to customers when they are missed. AusNet took an action to share how much it pays in GSL penalties for connections (i.e. the dollar amounts corresponding to the data on slide 25). Another member questioned whether AusNet's approach is to pay GSL penalties rather than providing good service to customers. They proposed there is a gap between what AusNet says it wants to do and what it is doing regarding being customer focussed, and said there shouldn't be a need for improvements - a customer-focused service should be provided as a standard. AusNet clarified that it has competing priorities – that the regulatory frameworks incentivise efficiency and some service levels are regulated, but customer service is not incentivised in the same way. AusNet confirmed GSLs for connections are paid from its bottom line and that “gold plated” customer service would need strong customer support for AusNet to invest in, and evidence has consistently suggested that customers would likely not be willing to pay for this. During subsequent discussion the member responded they don't want gold plating but AusNet should be improving customer service while keeping costs down and quality up. AusNet agreed and highlighted that it doesn't aim to make GSL payments, and the balance needs to be appropriate - it becomes a question of 'what are customers in our community prepared to pay?'. There was broad agreement that AusNet should be aiming to minimise GSL payments (and meet regulated timeframes). Members complimented AusNet's openness and honesty on what its priorities are and its performance.
- Another member commented that new grid connections and pain points may arise because of multiple parties are involved. They asked for clarification about who would receive 'push notification updates' – a builder or customer – when the process improvements are made? AusNet responded that the details are still being refined, but the new communication system be more flexible and allow more options regarding who sees what communications from AusNet and for parties involved to indicate their preferences.
- A member shared insights from another network's engagement, where customers suggested that because they were a monopoly and customers don't have a choice, they should provide high quality service.

In response to collaboration questions about improvements to the grid connection process:

- AusNet summarised that the Padlet responses were quite split regarding how AusNet should take a moderate approach regarding improvements to the grid connection process.
- In response to a member question, AusNet confirmed that the planned improvements to customer experience outlined in the slide deck should all be implemented by 2025. Later, another member asked a follow-up question about if

AusNet successfully implements everything this period, how will it describe the baseline at the start of next period? Would it be that AusNet won't have any GSL payments? AusNet confirmed that having no GSL payments would be ideal but it is looking at the process as an end-to-end value chain, and customers' expectations and experiences can be hard to forecast. The member then asked whether, if AusNet puts the connections process in the Customer Service Incentive Scheme, customers would be paying twice? AusNet clarified that the improvements presented are business-as-usual expenditure within the current regulatory period, so customers are not paying twice (as the expenditure was not proposed in the last nor the upcoming EDPR).

- It was discussed and broadly agreed that AusNet needs to propose either specific expenditure for service improvements (for improvements beyond what can be justified as business-as-usual expenditure or include a measure in the CSIS (for business-as-usual improvements), to help avoid customers paying twice. A member pointed out and AusNet agreed there is still some risk of a double up on returns through the Regulated Asset Base (RAB) and CSIS, and it was agreed this be considered as part of capex forecasts.
- Another member said they feel connections should continue to be a focus, and AusNet should be aspirational regarding connections and in taking an advocacy position to known challenges that others' responsibilities.

In wrapping up this section, AusNet highlighted that it would like a clear steer today on how the Panel would like to proceed regarding the questions in the pack. It was broadly agreed that the Panel is comfortable relying on customer research re: level of improvements to be made (Q1), that the important consideration for CSIS inclusion is that customers are not paying twice (Q2). No additional discussion was had on commitments to be made in EDPR 2026-31 (Q3), beyond Panel members saying earlier that they would like to see efforts to reduce GSL payments.

CER connection processes

Fran Duiker opened discussion with panel members on CER connections.

Discussion

- A member expressed the view that ideally AusNet should make improvements for installers and property owners, to which other members agreed.
- AusNet's role in educating/informing customers and installers was also discussed, with a member noting that a desire for more information was a key theme in the recent customer workshops, and that AusNet is generally seen as a reliable source of information. A panel member spoke to a need to encourage a better standard of practice among installers. They suggested that AusNet needs to take an educative, and possibly an accreditation, role as if the installer does poor quality work, everyone on the network suffers. AusNet said it's aware some networks have started blacklisting installers, but thinks training and education should be the place to start. Another member indicated there should be much more focus on compliance moving forward, as there will be exponential growth in this field.
- A member questioned what impact the evolution of solar technologies will have on CER connections – will customers be installing fewer panels/smaller systems in future as, or larger systems, and noted that the future “customers” of the CER connection process will include those replacing/changing existing systems, as well as those installing CER for the first time, which may change things.
- Regarding how AusNet should approach improvements to the grid connection process in EDPR 2026-31, several members agreed that networks should be looking at how they can facilitate consumer options, and that this is core to AusNet's reputation. It was suggested that more information for customers as it becomes available would be very helpful e.g., examples of the sorts of improvements that could be made and where the best ‘bang for buck’ could be.

- Another member noted and it was broadly agreed that more expenditure would be needed to service the expected increase in applications.
- The comments on CSIS design and ensuring customers aren't paying twice from the grid connections discussion were upheld, plus a member cautioned against getting too detailed or granular with CSIS measures as any incentives AusNet then has may be spread too thin and not be meaningful. The same member flagged that it is very complicated to construct a reliable metric to the AER's satisfaction. It was suggested by another member that CSIS payments could perhaps be used for more stretching targets.

Part 3: Deep Dive | Large customers

Topics	Discussion points
Connection process for large customers	AusNet's Michael Walton explained the current large customer connections process at AusNet. He noted the Grid View portal, which can help inform large customer connection decisions. Discussion • The panel discussed community batteries and how they are classified, the growth of them (with council take-up) and interaction with the network as both load and generator. • A panel member asked how customer contributions are calculated if augmentation to the network is required to connect them, and AusNet responded that charges are determined according to AER guidelines (incremental cost less incremental revenue test). • AusNet confirmed that it does not measure satisfaction with the large load customer connection process at present (though it does with the generator connection process), noting that there is a very small number of large load connections each year so this would be difficult. • Continuing the discussion of improvements to the connection process for large customers, another panel member added that most distribution businesses with large customers have a dedicated account manager. The panel member thinks account management should be assigned when the major customer <i>applies</i> for connection (and not once already connected). • Following on, a panel member suggested large customers could be able to choose and pay for improved levels of service beyond the standard, and that this practiced in other industries. Several members indicated they do not think large customers having a dedicated customer manager is 'gold plating', considering the broader community benefit argument of large employers. AusNet confirmed that it does not charge additionally (beyond the regulated rates) for advice provided to large customers when they are connecting and don't differentiate by service level. • It was agreed that large customer connections are not included in any CSIS given the small sample size. • Other discussion points included: - AusNet adding that consistency between DBs is highly valued by large customers and that we are subsequently working with other DBs to deliver this. - In response to a question about GSL equivalents for large customers, AusNet advised that timeframes are all regulated in the National Energy Rules and if there is a breach DBs need to report this to AER and they decides on a penalty. AusNet advised that they have not had a failure to meet the

timetable. Another member used an example to suggest that large customers would be more likely to take legal action and that as such providing a range of service options for them to choose from could be worth considering.

Part 4: Other matters & close

Topics	Discussion points
Open floor	- AusNet's Fran Duiker issues that have been mentioned in the Padlet and suggesting that the question regarding the MyHomeEnergy portal could be addressed offline. - A panel member indicated they were surprised at the large number of life support customers and queried the cost of this. They shared an example of their own and the view that retailers were overly cautious of life support customers and this is a time consuming process. AusNet acknowledged that maintaining the life support is a major concern and considerable administrative process, but the most important aspect is life support customers during outages. AusNet noted that they are continually speaking with ESC about how can we improve this process. Notifications to life support customers need to go very early, and any breaches we have had were not medically verified. AusNet highlighted it is an extremely complex areas and that they don't remove people in genuine need. - Community Hub – A member commended AusNet on the recent customer workshop they observed and noted that at the end of the workshop was a link to Community Hub. The panel member noted there were agrees in keeping the Hub up to date, and suggested that all slide decks and materials should be made available there. AusNet agreed to prioritise making improvements to Community Hub. Regarding sharing of all panel materials, another member indicated that this could impact the current high level of transparency between AusNet and the panel. AusNet suggested the draft proposal provides an opportunity for broader access, feedback and commentary. - A panel member asked what the final outcome is and next steps are from today's conversation? AusNet advised that we are aiming to collaborate through this process, we will give a summary of what the key takeaways are from today's conversation, which will also contribute to the proposal. - A panel member referred to a new connections report, produced in 2020, by last customer forum. They suggested it could be valuable to speak with them again, 4 years on. AusNet thanked the member for their suggestion but noted that one complexity is that these people may not repeatedly connect.

Close & Next Steps

AusNet's Fran Duiker thanked everyone for their time and contribution to rich discussions, provided a summary of actions arising from the meeting, and invited agenda items for the next meeting. Several panel members thanked AusNet for the very transparent information pack that informed today's meeting.

Action items			
Action	Assigned to	Status	Due date
AusNet to share information on 2021 storm impacts, aligned to VicGov reports:	R&E Team	Complete	n/a

- <https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/recovery/Community-and-wellbeing/Lessons-Learned-from-storm-event>
- https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/594930/Network-Resilience-Review-Final-Recommendations-Report.pdf

AusNet to share details of last EDPR's GSL approach and exact wording with Mark	R&E Team	Complete	n/a
AusNet to provide exact \$ for GSLs paid on connections	R&E Team	Not yet started	Next FQ5 meeting
AusNet to continue updating Community Hub and striving to complete meeting summaries in a timely manner	R&E Team	Ongoing	n/a
AusNet to follow up query re: MyHomeEnergy portal directly with John	SP&C Team	Not yet started	TBC

*SP&C Team – Strategic Planning & Customer Team

^ R&E Team – Research and Engagement Team

Reg Team – Regulation Team