

# Gas Access Arrangement Review Engagement Plan

October 2026

# Acknowledgement of Country

AusNet acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate their continuing connection to Country.



## About the artist

As part of our reconciliation action plan we have commissioned an artwork by the artist Bitja (also known as Dixon Patten). A proud descendant of the Gunnai, Gunditjmarra, Dhudhuroa, and Yorta Yorta tribes, with blood ties to Wiradjuri, Yuin, Wemba Wemba, Wadi Wadi, Monaro and Djab Wurrung, Bitja is deeply connected to his roots.

The artwork honours the strength in being part of a community, it honours our commonality as humans, but honours our diversity also and by having different views and experiences.

[See AusNet's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan](#)



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## A note on terminology

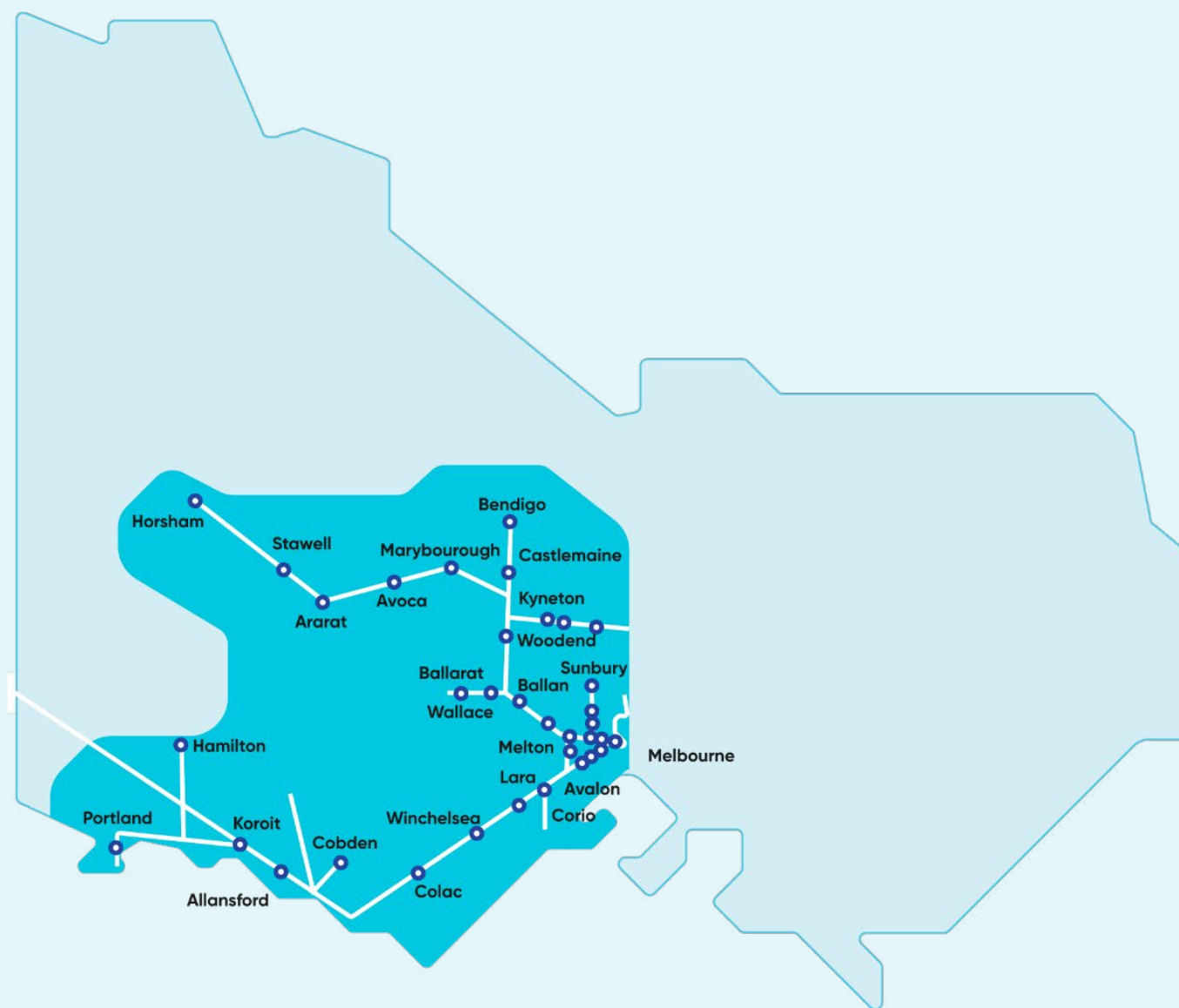
**Draft Plan:** The Draft Plan is the consultation document released by AusNet in early 2027 to seek feedback from customers and stakeholders on our proposed approach before finalising our Proposal.

**Proposal:** The Proposal, also referred to as the Revenue Proposal, is the formal submission lodged with the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) by 1 June 2027. It sets out AusNet's proposed expenditure, services, prices and regulatory arrangements for the 2028–33 regulatory period.

**Draft Decision:** The Draft Decision is the AER's preliminary assessment of our Proposal. It outlines the AER's initial position and provides an opportunity for AusNet, customers and stakeholders to provide feedback before a final determination is made.

**Revised Proposal:** The Revised Proposal is AusNet's response to the AER's Draft Decision. It reflects further analysis, engagement and consideration of the AER's findings before being resubmitted to the AER for final assessment.

**Final Decision:** The AER's final decision on AusNet's Revised Proposal establishes the expenditure, services, prices and regulatory arrangements that will apply for the 2028–33 period.



## Engaging on our 2028–33 gas distribution network plan

The Gas Access Arrangement Review (GAAR) is the process undertaken every five years with the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) to develop the expenditure plans for our gas network, covering the regulatory period between 1 July 2028 and 30 June 2033.

Our five-year plan, referred to as a Proposal, must be lodged with the AER by 1 June 2027. The AER will assess our plan and set our revenue, which affects the price customers pay for gas, the types and quality of services and level of customer service we deliver.

The purpose of this document is to outline our approach to engaging with customers and stakeholders to inform our GAAR 2028–33 Proposal.

Our engagement program for the 2028–33 GAAR is designed to build on and strengthen the engagement approach developed through previous access arrangement reviews and subsequent regulatory processes. Version 2 of this plan reflects how our engagement program has evolved over time, incorporating lessons learnt from earlier engagement activities, feedback from stakeholders, and insights gained through the GAAR Development Panel (GDP).

Our program helps us understand the values, preferences and long-term interests of our customers and stakeholders to reflect these in our Proposal. It gives customers and stakeholders a genuine opportunity to shape our Proposal and helps us meet the AER's requirements, outlined in its Better Resets Handbook.

Our 2028–33 GAAR engagement plan builds on the engagement undertaken for the 2023–28 GAAR process, which concluded in early 2023, and the Variation Proposal we lodged to amend our 2023–28 Access Arrangement, which concluded in April 2025. It is also informed by our other ongoing research and engagement programs, including our Customer Consultative Committee, Customer Satisfaction (C-SAT) and other research programs, Developer Consultative Committee, regular engagement with major customers, customer workshops with residential and small business customers, and engagement with other external stakeholders.

# A living engagement plan

This engagement plan is a living document. We both recognise and support this document changing over time as we engage with customers and other stakeholders, and as environmental circumstances continue to change. It has been developed with our Customer Consultative Committee (CCC) and GAAR Development Panel (GDP). It builds on our ongoing customer research, our experience engaging across AusNet’s three regulated networks, lessons from other distribution businesses, and recognised engagement guidelines and best practice.



The CCC provided input on the engagement model, objectives, topics and stakeholders to include in the process. Overall, the CCC was supportive of our engagement plan, with the table below summarising specific feedback:

| What we heard from the CCC                                                                                                                                               | How we’ve responded                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reconciling different views between stakeholders will be important for the process, noting the passion and diversity in views on gas matters.                            | Our GAAR Development Panel has been structured to play the key role of reconciling views heard through other engagement activities. Other engagement activities including the Stakeholder Roundtable will focus on gathering diverse perspectives but will not be decision-making forums. |
| From experience with other price reviews, clear Terms of Reference are necessary, so members of different engagement panels/forums understand their role in the process. | We have drafted separate Terms of Reference for both the GAAR Development Panel and the Gas Stakeholder Roundtable and added another layer of detail to describe the roles each play in the engagement structure                                                                          |
| The CCC offered suggestions for topics to engage on, as well as key stakeholders to include.                                                                             | The CCC’s suggested topics and stakeholders are reflected in this document. We have also direct-approached the stakeholders suggested by the CCC to invite them to be involved.                                                                                                           |
| There is a need to better understand household gas usage and the shift toward electrification, while also hearing diverse perspectives on the future role of gas.        | We have included this in the list of topics and will incorporate external presenters as part of the agenda for the Gas Stakeholder Roundtable.                                                                                                                                            |

The GDP is also shaping the engagement plan by providing feedback on activities, topics and advising on how differing views should be considered throughout the process. Their views are reflected in the design of this engagement plan and the engagement activities described throughout. The table below summarises GDP feedback on our initial engagement plan and our response:

| What we heard from the GDP                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | How we’ve responded                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The engagement program should focus on the issues most relevant to customers and that they can influence in the Proposal.                                                                                                                                         | We worked with the GDP to develop nine focus questions to guide GDP discussions, research activities and broader engagement.<br><br>These focus questions also ground engagement with other audiences, including customer workshops and the Gas Stakeholder Roundtable.                                                                                                                                  |
| Customer workshops should build participants’ understanding over time, reach a diverse mix of regional and metropolitan customers, and provide a clear feedback loop between customer views and how they are used to help inform the development of the Proposal. | We developed a three-round workshop program covering rural, regional and metropolitan customers in Warrnambool, Bendigo and Sunshine, supported by an initial online context-setting session.<br><br>GDP feedback helped shape workshop locations, participant mix, timing, topics and intended outcomes. The GDP will continue to provide input into the design and planning of future workshop rounds. |
| Our research program should triangulate between sources to support a strong and representative Proposal.                                                                                                                                                          | This feedback is shaping both our demand forecasting and accelerated depreciation methodologies, both of which the GDP gave feedback on. Both approaches will triangulate between historical data, economic modelling and customer research findings.                                                                                                                                                    |
| Customer-facing engagement materials should be in plain language and expressed in relatable metrics.                                                                                                                                                              | The GDP has had opportunities to give feedback on select materials in advance of presentation for the Stakeholder Roundtable and customer workshops.<br><br>The GDP also gave detailed feedback on the customer segmentation survey questions and wording in advance of release.                                                                                                                         |

Updates to this document will be shared via the GAAR 2028-33 pages on Community Hub, and we will continue to seek feedback on this plan to ensure we are providing appropriate opportunities for interested parties to engage.

We welcome your feedback on this document. You can share your feedback and responses to these questions and shape future iterations of this document via the feedback form on our [Community Hub page](#).

# Engagement objectives

Our overarching objective is to develop a Proposal that reflects consumer needs, is supported by stakeholders and is accepted by the AER. Our engagement approach will be guided by the AER’s requirements (below) from the Better Resets Handbook.

Information on how we will achieve these objectives can be found in [Appendix A](#).



## Engaging the right way

- Sincere engagement
- Treating consumers as partners
- Equipping consumers to engage
- Being accountable



## Achieving breadth and depth of engagement

- Accessible, clear and transparent engagement
- Consulting on desired outcomes and then inputs
- Engaging via multiple channels
- Consumers’ influence on the Proposal



## Clearly showing how customers have impacted this Proposal

- Linking our Proposal to consumer preferences
- Independent consumer support for the Proposal

# Key topics

We aim to engage on topics most relevant to shape our Proposal and where stakeholders can have an influence on our decision making. We have identified and refined these topics through feedback from customers, stakeholders, the CCC and GDP. Each engagement group will cover topics specific to their interests and preferences.

We will revisit topics as necessary throughout the process, particularly if there are material changes in our operating environment arising from government policy, National Gas Rule changes, or evolving customer preferences.

## The AER expects we will engage on:

- Demand forecasts
- Opex base year, trends and step changes
- Capex program
- Accelerated depreciation
- Overall value for money and affordability
- Tariffs and pricing

## Topics our stakeholders have indicated interest in include:

- Continued reliability of the gas network
- Renewable gas opportunities to decarbonise Victorian industry
- Fairness and equity (in particular, how we can support not leaving customers behind)
- Electrification, specifically modelling of whole-of-household costs and least-cost path to decarbonisation (and what it means for our gas network)
- Long-term scenarios and impact on bills
- Opex (reactive repairs) vs capex (proactive maintenance) trade-offs
- Gas network decommissioning, including technical options, environmental impacts, and options for strategic ‘pruning’
- Approach and who pays for service abolishment for customers leaving the network
- The role of gas in an orderly energy system transition
- Cultural and social variables in the gas transition

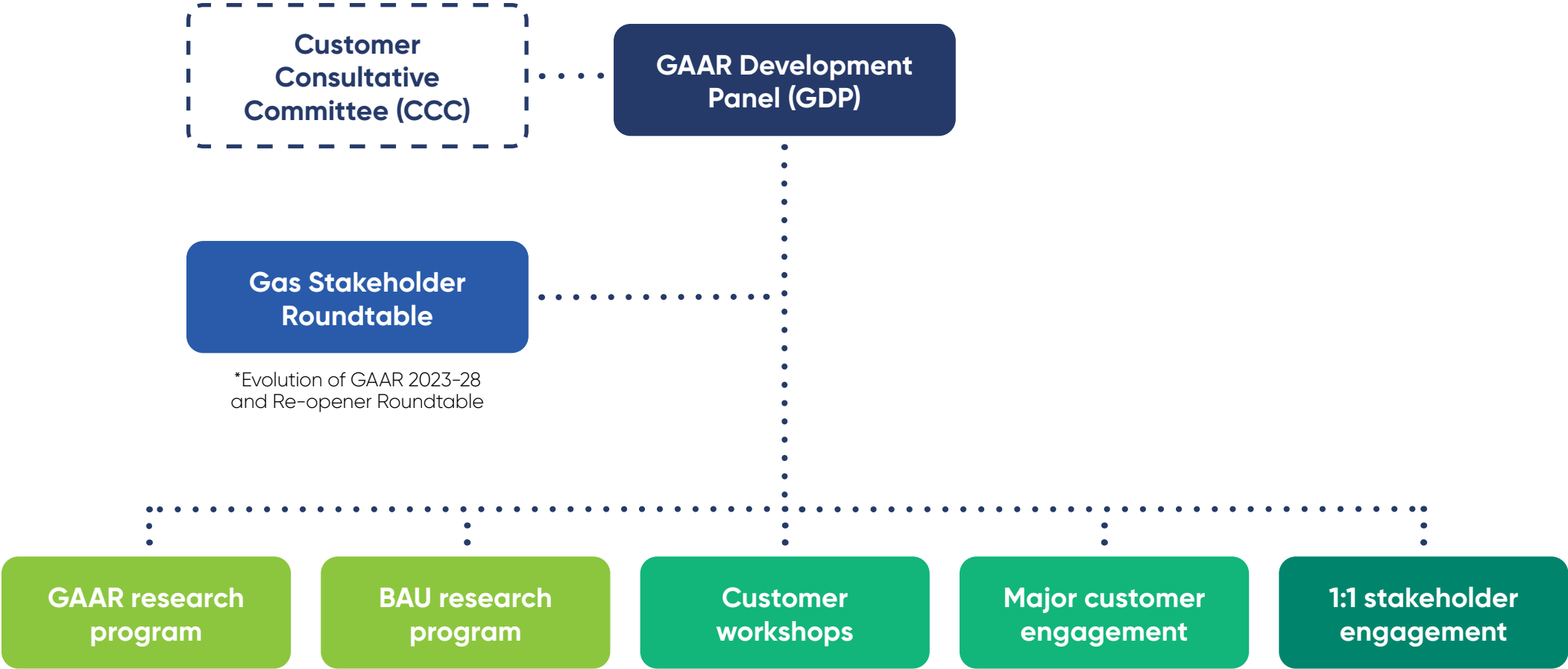
## Additional topics we would like to discuss include:

- Changes to our tariff variation mechanism, for example a hybrid price cap mechanism or a revenue cap
- National Gas Rules (including Energy Consumers Australia proposed rule changes to the Australian Energy Market Commission)

# Our engagement model

Our engagement model enables a range of customers, representatives and stakeholders to shape and offer feedback on our Proposal, with defined pathways for reconciliation to best reflect customer preferences.

We also use a range of channels to connect customers and stakeholders with the topics and engagement methods most relevant to their interests and circumstances.



**GAAR Development Panel (GDP)**

A small group of experts overseeing engagement and providing guidance and advice to shape the Proposal.

Acts as a decision-making forum on agreed topics (e.g. engagement design), informed by broader engagement and research activities.

**Gas Stakeholder Roundtable**

A forum for hearing diverse stakeholder perspectives on key topics. This is an advisory (not decision-making) forum and enables stakeholders to stay updated and share views at key points.

Helps to inform the development of our proposal and the more detailed discussions happening with the GDP.

**1:1 stakeholder engagement**

Advisory forums that support Proposal development.



# Engagement channels

The following sections describe each engagement channel, with further information in the Terms of Reference for each group.



# GAAR Development Panel (GDP)

The GDP is a small group of experts overseeing engagement and providing guidance and advice to shape our Proposal. The GDP engages in deep, focussed discussions on complex topics that are most significant to the Proposal. The purpose of the GDP is to work constructively with AusNet to shape a Proposal that (a) reflects customers’ interests, and (b) they can support.

## Primary role

Support AusNet to achieve the overarching engagement objective: to develop a Proposal that reflects consumer needs, is supported by stakeholders and is accepted by the AER.

To achieve this the GDP supports AusNet by:

### 1. Collaborating with AusNet to design and execute an inclusive and effective engagement program by:

- Co-designing parts of the engagement plan, including at a minimum the detailed plan for customer workshops and design of customer research activities where required.
- Participating in other engagement activities as required, including attending relevant Gas Stakeholder Roundtable sessions, speaking at AER public forums, attending customer workshops, and participating in 1:1 stakeholder engagement as desired.
- Providing strategic oversight to our engagement program, providing independent advice to AusNet and proposing adjustments to engagement topics, activities, or approach in the pursuit of the engagement objective.

### 2. Supporting AusNet to shape a Proposal in a dynamic, complex and uncertain context by:

- Reconciling disparate customer preferences, as anticipated through the engagement process, to recommend a compromise for AusNet to pursue in our Proposal.
- Discussing and forming a consensus on the approach a prudent service provider should take in the current dynamic environment.
- Constructively challenging AusNet's approach, participating in good faith to achieve the engagement objective within the scope of the Proposal and the existing regulatory framework.

### 3. Representing customers' interests on topics requiring expert knowledge by:

- Identifying and prioritising the issues that matter the most for customer groups, based on observations through the engagement program.
- Bringing expert advice for consideration based on technical expertise of the subject matter (e.g. gas markets, regulation, and policy) or from experience with customers outside of the engagement program (e.g. representing a customer or industry group or otherwise).
- Consulting on AusNet's approach to complex topics, including, for example, the approach to accelerated depreciation, tariff variation mechanisms, or strategic network planning.

## Definition of GDP support

The GDP discussed and agreed what ‘support’ means to it in the context of this GAAR. Where AusNet reports through engagement that the GDP ‘supports’ a Proposal element, the following definition applies: GDP support for a decision, actions or approach means at a minimum that ‘I broadly agree with this’.

The GDP also developed a set of ‘guiding principles’ for how members will work together:

1. GDP support relates to customer perspectives, strategic direction, and AusNet’s approach to trade-offs. It does not verify modelling, cost efficiency or numerical inputs – this is the role of the AER to scrutinise.
2. In the first instance, the GDP should seek consensus positions. If in doubt, the Chair will determine support by a vote and will capture any material dissenting views in the meeting summary and in the independent panel report, if required.
3. Where the GDP supports (or does not support) a position, any conditions, constraints and trade-offs that led to that position should be clearly articulated and documented.
4. Support should be informed by evidence and engagement insights, and expressed with reference to customer needs, preferences and impacts.

## Meeting frequency

The panel meets approximately every six weeks throughout the engagement process, with flexibility to adjust the meeting schedule as required.

## Membership



**Nicole Wallis (Chair)**, an experienced energy executive delivering balanced leadership, governance, regulatory expertise, and customer-focused perspectives



**Damian Sullivan**, an independent consumer advocate driving policy, research, stakeholder engagement, and long-term customer interests



**David Prins**, an energy regulation and strategy expert promoting consumer interests throughout the energy transition



**Kellie Larsen**, an infrastructure and sustainability specialist bringing technical expertise, regulatory knowledge, and customer advocacy



**Andrew Richards**, CEO of Energy Users Association of Australia (EUAA) and a trusted representative of large industrial and commercial energy users



**Gavin Dufty**, a consumer advocate focused on affordability, equity, and the needs of vulnerable customers



**Michael Poulton**, a regional community leader fostering collaboration, innovation, and community-focused strategic outcomes

## Topics

Over its first two meetings, the GDP established its own remit and provided input into AusNet’s engagement plan. As part of this discussion, the GDP also considered the level of influence (and ownership) they saw appropriate over the various parts of the Proposal. We used the IAP2 spectrum of public participation as a guide of where they would operate through the process.

The resulting nine focus questions guide the topics brought to the GDP for feedback:

1. How might AusNet develop a good demand forecasting methodology?
2. How can the GDP better understand AusNet’s current and future customer use and service?
3. Is AusNet’s Haulage tariff structure equitable, cost reflective and understandable?
4. How might AusNet engage with customers on how volume risk is shared between customers and AusNet?
5. How might AusNet forecast and plan for a potential rise in dormant connections?
6. What are the cost and equity implications of options to fund renewable gas investment?
7. How might AusNet best support customers, making our services fit for purpose for all?
8. How does AusNet equitably balance price impacts between current and future consumers?
9. How might AusNet deliver safety & reliability trade-offs considering minimum standards?

See [Appendix B](#) for how the GDP’s nine focus questions align with the IAP2 spectrum of public participation and the intended level of influence for each topic.

Meeting summaries from the GDP will be published on our [Community Hub page](#), providing stakeholders with visibility of the issues discussed, views considered and advice provided throughout the engagement process.

The GDP will be invited to prepare an independent report outlining its views on the engagement process, the extent to which customer preferences have been reflected in the Proposal, and any areas of support, concern, or recommendations for the AER’s consideration.

Further details are set out in the terms of reference for the GAAR Development Panel.

# Gas Stakeholder Roundtable

The Gas Stakeholder Roundtable is an evolution of the Roundtable we engaged with for our 2023-28 Proposal and Variation Proposal, to provide continuity and keep AusNet accountable. The purpose of the Roundtable is to create a forum for hearing diverse stakeholder perspectives on key topics for the many interested stakeholder and customer groups, to help inform the development of our Proposal.

Feedback from the Roundtable is presented back to the GAAR Development Panel for further consideration, discussion, and reconciliation. The Roundtable is an advisory group, not a decision-making group, but its insights and advice are also used to help inform the development of the Proposal, and is relied upon by the GDP.

## Primary role

Gather stakeholder preferences and insights into key topics for the GDP and AusNet, as well as providing a channel for feedback on topics which matters to stakeholders most. To achieve this the Roundtable will:

- Discuss topics determined by the GDP and AusNet that are of interest to a broad mix of stakeholders
- Meaningfully contribute the experiences and preferences of the organisations/ industries they represent
- Be encouraged to make submissions on our Draft Plan and Proposal
- Engage on topics of most interest/ relevance to them.

## Meeting frequency

Approximately 5 times throughout the process, with additional updates/briefings as needed.

## Membership

A broader stakeholder panel open for interested parties to submit an Expression of Interest to join. Members can opt in/out of conversations that interest them most. The Roundtable includes representatives from:

- Regulators (Essential Services Commission)
- Energy Retailers (Red/Lumo Energy, EnergyAustralia, Perpetual Energy, Origin Energy, AGL, Alinta Energy)
- Consumer and social service advocates (Energy Consumers Australia, Victorian Council of Social Service, Brotherhood of St Laurence and independent consumer advocates)
- Independent advisory groups
- Government organisations (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)
- Commercial and industrial customer representatives (Energy Users Association of Australia, AKD)
- Gas industry and supply-chain representatives (Pacific Energy, LMS Energy, Bourke Infrastructure Group, Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity, EDMl and Amplitude Energy)
- Research and academic institutions (University of Melbourne, Grattan Institute).

The meetings will be chaired either by a senior AusNet representative or the independent GDP Chair, as determined by the GDP.

We will invite the AER to observe each Roundtable meeting, with different AER representatives attending discussions aligned to their areas of responsibility and interest.

At least one GDP member will be invited to observe each major engagement activity and bring relevant insights, themes and stakeholder perspectives back to the GDP.

## Topics

Roundtable topics are aligned to the GDP's focus questions and sequenced to enable the GDP to provide input on how issues are framed and presented before they are discussed with the broader stakeholder group. The table below summarises Roundtable discussion topics and their alignment to the GDP focus questions.

### Meeting 1: 17 April 2026

- AusNet network and operating context
- GAAR process overview
- Reference services and tariff structures

### Meeting 2: 27 July 2026

- Customer needs and preferences
- Demand approach and long-term scenarios
- Asset-stranding risk and tools

### Meeting 3: 22 September 2026

- 5-year demand forecast
- Asset management
- Renewable-gas connections funding

### Meeting 4: 27 November 2026

- Long-term demand and renewable gas
- Fair and equitable ways to manage asset stranding

### Meeting 5: 17 February 2027

- Fair and equitable ways to manage asset stranding
- Overview of Draft Plan
- Priority issues and trade-offs
- Overall feedback

Meeting summaries from the Gas Stakeholder Roundtable will be published on our [Community Hub page](#), providing stakeholders with visibility of the issues discussed, views considered and advice provided throughout the engagement process.

Further details are set out in the terms of reference for the Gas Stakeholder Roundtable.

Research

Our research shapes our engagement approach and strengthens the foundations of our Proposal.

AusNet’s ongoing research program tracks customer needs, expectations and priorities over time. Our bespoke and targeted research studies for the GAAR enable us to uncover deeper insights on specific topics and issues that influence strategic decisions, supporting the engagement process and development of our GAAR Proposal by:

- Providing robust, evidence-based support for our Proposal by integrating quantitative and qualitative data, giving stakeholders confidence in the integrity of our approach.
- Tracking evolving trends in customer sentiments and understanding how customer views shift in response to external factors such as technology, policy, and economic changes, to inform our Proposal.
- Driving informed decision-making on key topics of our Proposal through detailed exploration of these topics.
- Fostering transparent and meaningful discussions on key aspects of our Proposal using data-driven insights supported with qualitative context to uncover the “why” behind customer preferences.
- Championing inclusivity and representation by capturing perspectives from a broad range of customers and communities, enabling diverse voices to be heard through the process and in the Proposal.

Specific research projects that are in use in this engagement process include:

- Engagement Sentiments Tracker (ongoing)
- Dormant gas customers (completed)
- Customer segmentation (completed).

[Appendix C](#) provides further detail on the purpose and outcomes (where available) for each study relevant to this GAAR period.

Engagement Sentiments Tracker

The Energy Sentiment Tracker provides continuous insights into how residential and business customers think, feel and behave in relation to energy use. It monitors Customer Satisfaction, trust in AusNet, affordability and bill predictability, reliability, safety, customer service, appliance ownership, gas usage, electrification intentions and expectations for the energy transition. The tracker also allows emerging topics to be explored while maintaining consistent measures over time.

This research provides current and historical evidence of changing customer needs and priorities. It supports engagement discussions, identifies emerging issues and allows targeted GAAR questions to be tested with a broader customer sample.

Dormant gas customers

This research examined why customers retain a gas connection despite recording no usage and what they intend to do in the future. More than 23,000 AusNet customers had been dormant for at least 12 months, with long-term dormancy increasing. Of 96 surveyed dormant customers, 57% had not used gas for one to two years and 24% had not used gas for more than two years.

Customers commonly retained their connection because of abolishment costs, uncertainty about the process, limited awareness, or a preference to keep gas as a backup option. Only 31% reported high awareness of the abolishment process. The research also identified five broad customer groups with different motivations and likelihoods of future abolishment.

These insights support demand forecasting, network planning and consideration of abolishment charges. They also help identify where clearer information or more targeted engagement may be required.

Customer segmentation

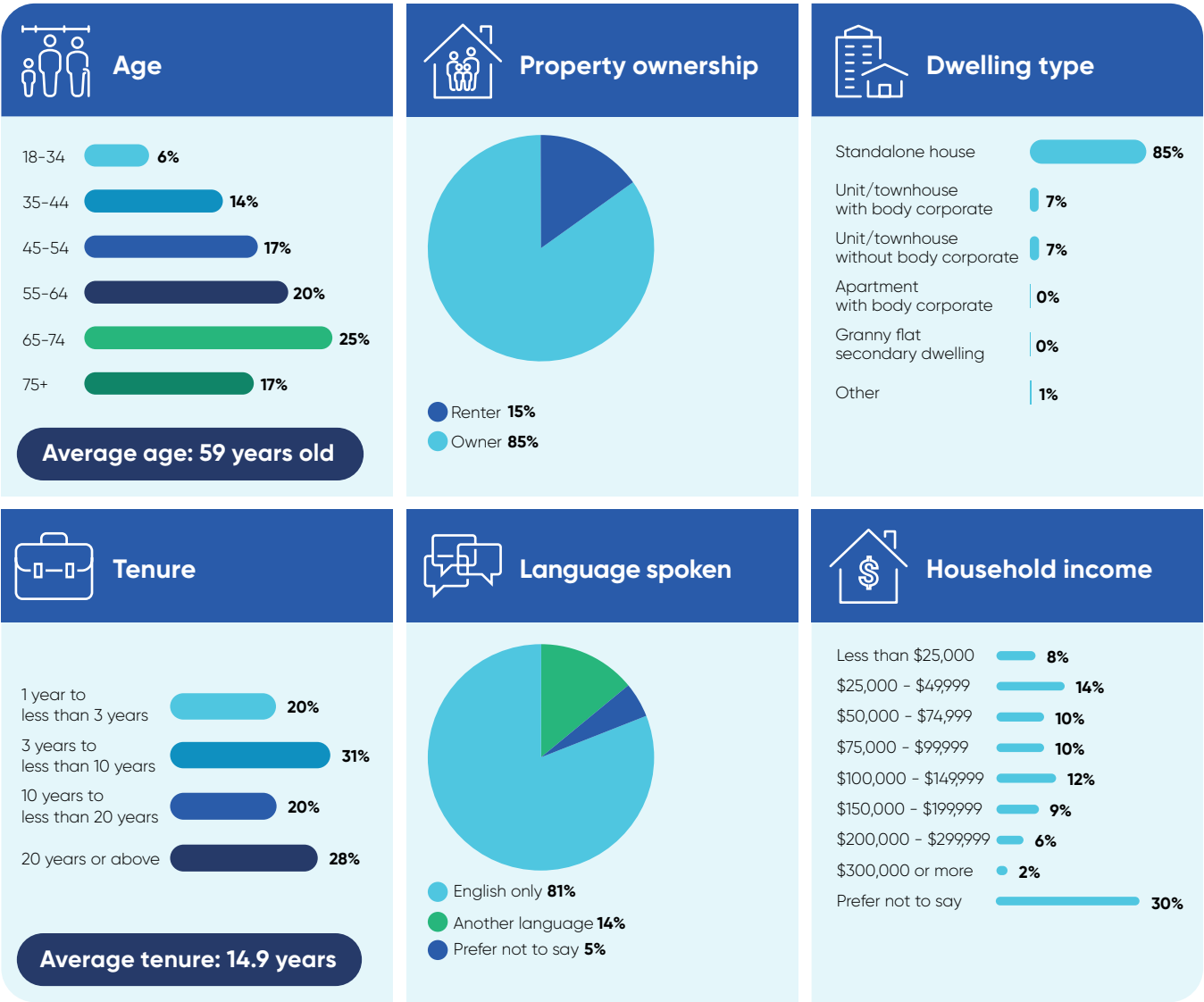
From May to June 2026, AusNet surveyed 2,346 residential gas customers to understand their gas appliance use, household circumstances, future appliance replacement preferences, electrification intentions and the practical or financial barriers affecting their choices. The research identifies distinct customer groups based on their current gas use and examines differences in their transition intentions, readiness to electrify and capacity to make changes.

AusNet and the GDP discussed the survey design and framing before AusNet drafted the questionnaire. The GDP then reviewed the draft, providing a customer perspective on its relevance, clarity and accessibility. The final survey was distributed to a broad sample of residential gas customers across AusNet’s network.

We received 2,346 completed responses, representing a response rate of 2.2% of all customers invited to participate. Statistical significance testing was conducted for relevant comparisons at the 95% confidence level.

The findings provide a detailed view into what appliances customers own, how they use gas, how they may change their gas usage, and the factors influencing those decisions. These insights support the demand forecast for the GAAR and will help tailor engagement, communications, services and customer support to different customer circumstances.

The infographic below summarises the demographics of respondents to the survey.



Source: AusNet gas customers segmentation survey 2026, completed responses (n=2,346)



# Customer workshops

We are holding a series of customer workshops with households and small businesses connected to our distribution network. These sessions are being held in three locations with up to 90 participants in total, delivered in three rounds to capture feedback from a diverse range of customers across our network.

The workshops are designed to move from establishing a common understanding of the GAAR process and AusNet’s gas network to exploring customer priorities, testing options and trade-offs, and reviewing emerging Proposal positions.

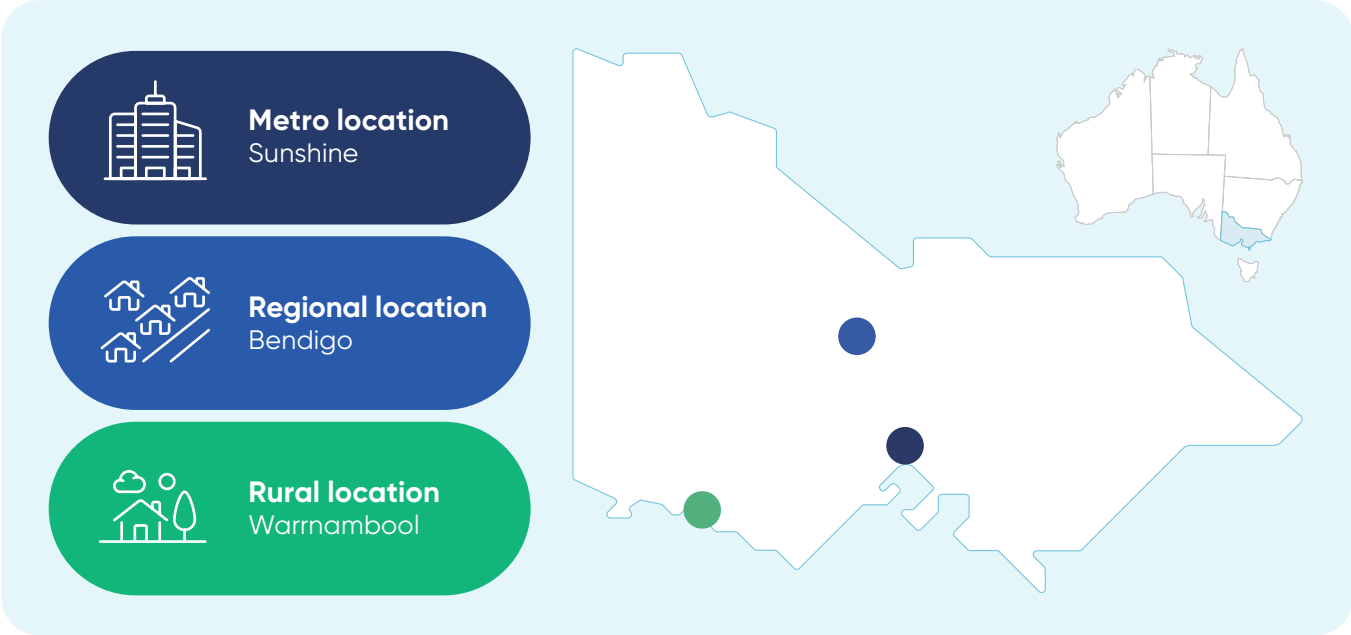
Participants were independently recruited by a specialist research provider to achieve diversity across customer characteristics, circumstances and attitudes, including customers experiencing vulnerability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and customers with differing views on future gas use. The workshops are not intended to produce a statistically representative sample of all customers. Our aim is to deliver an inclusive engagement program that proactively reaches a range of customers to shape our Proposal.

Insights captured from the three locations will be analysed to identify common themes and differences between communities. These insights will also be tested alongside findings from our customer research and other engagement channels and be provided to the GDP to support its deliberations and used to help bring customer voices directly into the development of our Proposal.

These workshops were co-designed in collaboration with the GDP. This design process included:

- Identifying key topics for customer engagement
- Determining which customers and communities to involve and selecting locations that support accessibility and representation
- Shaping the structure and timing of workshops, including options for multiple rounds and identifying the most effective stages in the Proposal development process to engage and gather customer feedback
- Defining desired outputs and how these insights will be reflected in our Proposal.
- Through these workshops we will:
  - Share information about our services, consumer energy trends, the future of gas, and our Draft Plan
- Gather direct feedback and insights to understand customer preferences:
  - Listen to the lived experiences, preferences and challenges for our customers
  - Test key elements of our Proposal directly with those impacted by service levels and bills
  - Understand the views of a diverse range of customers and businesses across our network
  - Validate findings from our quantitative research.
- Build customer knowledge, trust, and confidence in our engagement process by:
  - Identifying and addressing emerging issues or concerns with our existing or proposed gas services
  - Providing an opportunity for feedback on our engagement process.

## Workshop locations



## Workshop format, purpose and focus areas

|             | Context setting                                                                                                                                                                                           | Round 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Round 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Round 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Format      | 1hr online session, delivered shortly before the first in-person workshop.                                                                                                                                | 2hr in-person workshop, held locally at each separate location.                                                                                                                                                                                        | 3hr in-person workshop, with the same participants at each location.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 3hr in-person workshop, with the same participants at each location.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Purpose     | To establish a baseline of understanding about AusNet, the gas network and the GAAR process.                                                                                                              | To build on existing research to understand needs, preferences, and expectations in relation to the gas network.                                                                                                                                       | To test emerging Draft Plan positions and understand customer preferences on key trade-offs, including how costs and benefits should be shared between different customer groups over time.                                                                                                                                          | To test the Draft Plan, understand whether customers see their feedback reflected, and explore whether the overall package appropriately balances competing priorities and trade-offs.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Focus areas | <div>Overview of AusNet’s gas network services, and the GAAR process</div> <div>Key drivers shaping the future of the gas network</div> <div>How customer input will be used to inform the Proposal</div> | <div>What do you value most about the gas network now?</div> <div>What do you value about the gas network as Victoria navigates the energy transition?</div> <div>Key topics, changes, and trade-offs we are considering as part of our Proposal</div> | <div>How should costs, risks and benefits be shared between current and future customers?</div> <div>Are our emerging positions on affordability, fairness and service levels aligned with customer expectations?</div> <div>What trade-offs are customers willing to make between price, service and future network outcomes?</div> | <div>Does the Draft Plan reflect the priorities and preferences customers have expressed throughout the engagement process?</div> <div>Does the Draft Plan appropriately balance affordability, fairness, service levels and future network needs?</div> <div>Are there any aspects of the Draft Plan that customers would change or prioritise differently?</div> |

## Major customers and one-on-one stakeholder engagement

In addition to our ongoing engagement, we will create dedicated opportunities for major customers to engage directly with us on our Proposal and their specific needs, expectations, and preferences. Our GDP will help guide our engagement activities with these customers which may include one-on-one meetings, small group forums and webinars.

We will also keep stakeholders informed about our plans and provide opportunities for feedback, to understand their preferences and priorities on various aspects of our Proposal. This includes those who have a general interest in our planning but may not be actively involved in other engagement activities, such as government and regulators.

Through this targeted engagement, we will:

- Understand specific needs, expectations, and preferences, including:
  - Explore needs and requirements, including future gas demand expectations and supply requirements
  - Discuss opportunities and challenges related to renewable gas, where appropriate
  - Gain insights into the broader gas market landscape, including market dynamics and government policy
  - Seek feedback on aspects of the Proposal that directly impact their operations
  - Seek feedback on the extent to which our Proposal reflects customer and stakeholder preferences
- Maintain transparency and build trust with a wider group of interested parties
  - Keep stakeholders informed about our plans and provide opportunities for feedback
  - Identify any emerging issues or opportunities that may influence our Proposal.

We are planning a Major Gas User forum to be held in early 2027, bringing together large industrial and commercial gas customers to discuss key industry developments and provide feedback on issues relevant to the 2028-33 GAAR.

The forum will also create opportunities for participants to share experiences and perspectives on long-term gas planning, energy transition pathways, energy efficiency initiatives, and emerging opportunities such as renewable gas. Insights gathered through this discussion will help inform our understanding of customer priorities and support the development of a Proposal that reflects the needs of major gas users.

## Customer Consultative Committee

Our [Customer Consultative Committee](#) (CCC) is a standing committee that brings the voices of communities and customers into our business to discuss operations and plans with AusNet senior leaders.

The CCC will continue to receive updates on the process and opportunities to observe engagement activities, supporting its oversight of gas-related matters and helping hold AusNet accountable during and beyond the regulatory period. As key customer representatives, CCC members may also support comprehension testing of complex topics and engagement materials, helping us assess whether information is clear, accessible and suitable for broader customer engagement.

## “Business-as-usual” (BAU) research and engagement

Our BAU research and engagement activities include our Customer Satisfaction (C-SAT) program, ongoing major customer and operational engagement, Developer Consultative Committee and other channels. Relevant insights from these activities will be incorporated into the process to help inform our Proposal.

## Draft Plan engagement

In early 2027 we will release our Draft Plan, seeking public feedback from a broad range of stakeholders to inform our final Proposal. Activities will be discussed with the GDP nearer the time but may include:

- Promoting the Draft Plan and opportunities to engage
- Open public submissions on our Draft Plan
- Public briefings (e.g. webinars).

## Post-lodgement engagement

Following the lodgement of our Proposal we will continue to maintain our business-as-usual research and engagement program and continue GAAR-specific engagement as-needed to inform our Revised Proposal.

This is highly unknown and largely dependent on the AER's feedback, or changes to our operating environment, so will be determined nearer the time, but may include further meetings with our GDP, Gas Stakeholder Roundtable and customer workshops.

## Community Hub

To maintain transparency and keep stakeholders informed, we regularly upload outcomes, outputs, and updates to our dedicated [Community Hub page](#) throughout the engagement process. We use our Community Hub to:

- Communicate progress on our engagement activities
- Publish key documents, meeting summaries and outcomes
- Keep all stakeholders informed and up to date
- Provide a virtual space for stakeholders to ask questions and share feedback.



# Appendix A: Engagement objectives

A summary of the AER’s requirements and how we plan to achieve each objective through our engagement approach is provided in the table below.

| The AER’s requirements         | How we will achieve this objective                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Engaging the right way         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Sincere engagement             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Our engagement approach is supported by the AusNet Board and senior leaders, who will consistently participate in and/or observe our engagement activities</li><li>The engagement program is well-resourced, with sufficient budget available for all engagement activities to be undertaken effectively. This includes our ongoing and BAU research and engagement programs to enable more informed, transparent and nuanced discussions support by historical data and relevant insights</li><li>We will design an engagement approach that is informed by customer advocates and stakeholders and remains flexible to evolve with their ongoing input. Our approach will respond to changes in customer sentiment and the external environment, with the ability to revisit topics as needed</li><li>We will prioritise themes and issues that are important to our customers and stakeholders, focusing on areas where they can influence outcomes</li><li>Where appropriate, we will provide panel members, customers and stakeholders with access to confidential and sensitive information on many aspects of our performance, operations and operating environment to guide discussion.</li></ul> |
| Treating consumers as partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The terms of reference for the GAAR Development Panel will be drafted and reviewed as a collaboration between AusNet, the members of the panel and other consumer advocates</li><li>The GAAR Development Panel will be involved at every stage of our planning including designing and observing other engagement activities</li><li>We will be responsive to requests for additional meetings, information and discussion on topics throughout the engagement process</li><li>Insights and feedback from our BAU panels (such as our Customer Consultative Committee) will also be used to inform the engagement approach and planning.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Equipping consumers to engage  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Detailed and relevant information and content will be provided to GAAR Development Panel members one week before each meeting</li><li>Research and engagement insights from multiple sources will be shared to help panel members form their own opinions and participate in deeper and more informed discussions</li><li>Panel members with strong industry connections, relevant background, consumer representation and technical knowledge will be selected to challenge us across a broad range of topics to better inform our proposal</li><li>We will provide other interested stakeholders and consumers with relevant information while engaging with them, so they may provide informed insights and feedback.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Being accountable              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>We will invite the AER and other relevant stakeholders to observe our engagement activities</li><li>We will welcome challenging conversations and engage openly and honestly to deepen our understanding of consumer preferences to find the best outcomes for our Proposal.</li><li>Our engagement outcomes and materials will be published on our Community Hub page.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

| The AER’s requirements                                    | How we will achieve this objective                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Achieving breadth and depth of engagement                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Accessible, clear and transparent engagement              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>For each engagement activity, we will clearly explain its purpose, scope, and how much influence participants have, including any limits like government policy or existing customer insights</li><li>We will publish this engagement plan and our engagement outputs on our Community Hub site, to help those who are not directly involved in activities stay informed and participate if they choose</li><li>Engagement materials will be prepared with the audience in mind, with a focus on accessibility and clarity. This includes efforts to use plain language, visual aids, explainers, and providing additional background material and opportunities to seek clarification</li><li>Clear timelines of the process will be provided to give engagement participants visibility and predictability.</li></ul>                          |
| Consulting on desired outcomes and then inputs            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The outcomes of our Proposal will be shaped by consumers. This means engaging them on the outcomes they value and how they want us to engage with them throughout the development of our Proposal</li><li>Our engagement with consumers will focus on both long-term outcomes and those specific to the regulatory period covered by the Proposal</li><li>We will continue engaging after our proposal has been submitted. If circumstances change and updates are required, we will engage with consumers and stakeholders on those changes</li><li>Our ongoing research program (including our Energy Sentiment Tracker and Customer Satisfaction program research) will provide insights on the gaps between current and desired expectations and customer needs, which we will use to support decision making within our Proposal.</li></ul> |
| Engaging via multiple channels                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A variety of appropriate engagement methods will be used, including in-person and online meetings, workshops, surveys, forms and forums, with methods selected based on stakeholder preferences and audience</li><li>We will provide multiple channels for interested parties to interact and provide feedback, including through social media, our Community Hub and direct email.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Consumers’ influence on the Proposal                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The level of engagement and influence by consumers and stakeholders on the IAP2 spectrum will be made clear for each engagement activity</li><li>All participants, across activities including workshops and surveys will be made aware of how their feedback will be used for the Proposal. Our panels and engaged stakeholders will have a clear line-of-sight to the Proposal development through the process</li><li>Meeting minutes and outcomes of our GAAR Development Panel will be reviewed by the Chair before being published to confirm our understanding and the outcomes of each meeting.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Clearly showing how customers have impacted this proposal |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Linking our Proposal to consumer preferences              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consumer preferences found through our research and engagement activities, including from our BAU and ongoing programs, will be reflected throughout our Proposal</li><li>We will release a comprehensive draft Proposal seeking stakeholder feedback. The Proposal submitted to the AER will show how we have responded to feedback received on this draft Proposal.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Independent consumer support for the Proposal             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>We will seek feedback and support for our draft Proposal before finalising it, incorporating the feedback we receive into our final submission to the AER</li><li>We will empower our GAAR Development Panel to produce an independent report that outlines their views on the engagement process and the extent to which customer preferences are reflected in our Proposal. This report will provide advice to the AER as part of their consideration of our Proposal.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

# Appendix B: GDP topics mapped to IAP2 spectrum of public consultation

The table below maps the GDP’s nine focus questions to the IAP2 spectrum of public participation. It shows the intended level of influence for each topic and clarifies how the GDP will contribute to shaping AusNet’s approach and Proposal.

## Focus Question 1: How might AusNet develop a good demand forecasting methodology??

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Our 5-year demand forecasting methodology, including likely short-term customer behavior and other demand drivers. ●
- Scenarios we should consider in our long-term model. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Endorsement of final demand outputs.

## Focus Question 2: How can the GDP better understand AusNet’s current and future customer use and service?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Key aspects of our customer research (incl. survey design, methodology and approach). ●
- Key considerations in our customer segmentation research. ●
- AusNet’s approach to engaging with customers to understand their future needs. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Detailed geographic (e.g. street level) forecasting on what individual customers may or may not do in the future.

## Focus Question 3: Is AusNet’s Haulage tariff structure equitable, cost reflective and understandable?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Our proposed engagement on tariff structure for the Reference Services Proposal. ●
- AusNet’s approach to engaging with customers on our proposed changes to haulage tariff structures. ●
- Balancing equity, cost reflectivity and customer preferences in tariff design. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Abolishment tariffs and socialisation – we will defer to the decision made by the AEMC on the rule change currently under consideration.
- Assessing if our tariffs are cost reflective and fit-for-purpose – This is an AER responsibility.
- Ancillary reference tariff rates.

## Focus Question 4: How might AusNet engage with customers on how volume risk is shared between customers and AusNet??

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Our proposed engagement on tariff variation mechanisms. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Detailed discussion on the formula of AusNet’s proposed tariff variation mechanism proposal – the AER’s recent decisions have been very prescriptive.

## Focus Question 5: How might AusNet forecast and plan for a potential rise in dormant connections?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- How we communicate with customers on the impact of the AEMC rule changes on charges. ●
- AusNet’s approach to managing dormant connections. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Deviating from the AEMC’s final rules on disconnection and abolishment charging.
- Deviating from our Gas Safety Case and any other advice provided by Energy Safe.

## Focus Question 6: What are the cost and equity implications of options to fund renewable gas investment?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Balancing the benefits and costs for renewable gas investment in this GAAR proposal. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Funding decisions on specific projects

## Focus Question 7: How might AusNet best support customers, making our services fit for purpose for all?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Our approach to gathering insights through customer workshops. ●
- Our role in supporting customers who require varying levels of support (e.g. vulnerability). ●
- Making our services fit for purpose, including meeting customer service expectations across different customer groups.

**Out of scope:**

- Billing and financial hardship programs, since this is a retailer responsibility.
- Advocating for changes in government policy.

## Focus Question 8: How does AusNet equitably balance price impacts between current and future consumers?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Our approach to communicating and engaging on accelerated depreciation (AD), including the design of a survey on price paths and how this topic is presented at customer workshops and the Stakeholder Roundtable. ●
- Balancing risk and cost distribution for past and future investments, considering customer and stakeholder preferences. ●

**Out of scope:**

- The finalised level of AD in the final and revised proposals.
- Alternative interpretations of the National Gas Rules on depreciation and redundancy.
- Non-regulated cost recovery (i.e. gov’t funding).

## Focus Question 9: How might AusNet deliver safety & reliability trade-offs considering minimum standards?

**We propose to ask you about:**

- Appropriately considering a range of credible options to address AusNet’s asset management needs. ●
- Balancing the impacts of service levels (reliability and responsiveness) with cost to meet expectations. ●

**Out of scope:**

- Going below minimum standards and regulatory obligations (e.g. planning obligation in the GDCoP).
- Assessing whether costs shown by AusNet are fair and accurate – this is the AER’s role.

# Appendix C: Research

The following research activities will support our engagement approach by gathering insights and preferences to help inform our Proposal.

## Customer segmentation survey (new)

Segmenting customers by their gas usage patterns and behaviour characteristics enables a more nuanced understanding of their preferences and needs, which in turn supports more accurate demand forecasts and targeted engagement strategies.

By analysing how different customer groups use energy today and how they expect to use it in the future, we can tailor our services and communications to better match their distinct patterns and expectations.

### Target audience

- End-use consumers

### What did we learn?

- Most customers still use gas heating (67%), but gas is no longer the sole heating source for many households. More than half of gas-heating customers also have an electric heating substitute, and these customers are significantly less likely to use gas heating every day.
- Customers are increasingly considering electrification, with 46% either actively electrifying or thinking about moving away from gas appliances.
- Future appliance replacement decisions are likely to drive further electrification. Among customers with gas cooktops, 59% intend to replace their current appliance with an electric alternative when it reaches end of life, compared with 31% who intend to replace it with another gas cooktop.
- Customer transition pathways are diverse. While many customers are considering electrification, 54% are not actively planning to electrify and are more likely to replace gas appliances with gas when they fail.
- Preferences, familiarity and practical constraints remain important drivers of future gas use. Customers choosing to remain with gas commonly cited a preference for gas appliances, while electrification barriers included the need for electrical upgrades and major home renovations.

### How does this support our GAAR engagement?

- Understanding gas usage pattern and behaviour characteristics supports more accurate demand forecasts for our Proposal
- Understanding the preferences of different demographics enables us to engage through appropriate methods on topics most relevant and important to each customer segment.

## Energy Sentiment Tracker (ongoing)

Our existing Energy Sentiment Tracker provides continuous, strategic insights into how residential and business customers on our gas network feel, think and behave regarding energy use.

This ongoing research monitors trends over time and delivers valuable intelligence to inform our Proposal. The tracker is modular and can incorporate emerging topics such as gas cooking sentiment to stay relevant.

### Target audience

- End-use consumers

### What insights do we monitor over time?

- Our Energy Sentiment Tracker should go beyond basic attitudes and behaviours to provide a 360° view of customer experience, expectations and transition readiness. Key dimensions include (but are not limited to):
- Perceptions of AusNet as a gas distributor incl. trust, reliability, value for money, community/environmental care, crisis response, innovation and support for customers experiencing vulnerability
- Overall satisfaction and the strategic priorities customers want AusNet to focus on, including cost, reliability, safety, decarbonisation, customer service, innovation
- Perceived bill levels, cost-of-living pressures and drivers of bill changes; importance of bill predictability for budgeting
- Appliance ownership and switching intentions (including cooking preference in 2026), electrification journeys, reasons for changing gas usage
- Outage experience and communications: Frequency and acceptability of planned/unplanned outages, preferences for notification channel
- Future intentions incl. likelihood of staying connected to gas, switching to electric and adopting related technologies (EVs, solar, batteries)
- Topical lenses as needed (e.g. gas stovetop cooking sentiment) to capture emerging concerns without altering core tracking.
- How does this support our GAAR engagement?
- Provides existing and ongoing data and evidence for our Proposal on the preferences and feedback of customers on our gas networks
- Brings continuous/historical quantitative data into key discussions on customer preferences across various aspects of the Proposal
- Provides an opportunity to include targeted questions about our Proposal, enabling us to capture customer preferences from a broader range of customers.

## Dormant gas customers (existing)

Existing research on dormant gas customers explored why individuals maintain a gas connection despite having no usage, aiming to uncover the underlying reasons and future intentions of these customers.

This activity helped us understand what motivates customers to keep their connection and what steps they might take next, providing valuable insights for future engagement and service planning.

### Target audience

- End-use consumers
- Temporary disconnected gas customers

### What did we learn?

- Over 23,000 AusNet customers have been dormant for 12+ months, with long-term dormancy steadily rising
- Of surveyed dormant customers (n=96), 57% haven't used gas for 1-2 years, 24% for more than 2 years and only 2% used gas in the past 6 months. Shows a clear shift away from routine gas use
- Most have switched to electric heating (89%) and solar (71%). Only about 13% still have a gas appliance/s in place
- Reasons for keeping the connection include high disconnection/abolishment cost, unclear process, lack of awareness and desire to keep gas as back up or future option
- Reasons for moving away from gas include environmental concerns, a preference for electric appliances and gas prices
- Only 31% are highly aware of the gas abolishment process. 47% believe abolishment is likely within the next decade, though many remain neutral or hesitant
- Five archetypes identified - renters, fence-sitters, disconnected, confused/unaware and cost-driven. Each have distinct motivations, awareness levels and likelihood of future abolishment.

### How does this support our GAAR engagement?

- Provides an evidence base for decisions on abolishment charges
- Supports demand forecasting
- Helps build our understanding of customer intentions and preferences that we can take into consideration when planning for the gas network.

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