

## Telstra Energy electricity and gas retail licence applications – roundtable with Aboriginal Executive Council

On 29 June 2021, members of the Aboriginal Executive Council discussed Telstra Energy's applications for electricity and gas retail licences with staff at the Essential Services Commission. Members of the Aboriginal Executive Council raised:

- Telstra has a poor standard of communication with financial counsellors and representatives of consumers who are experiencing payment difficulties in relation to telecommunication accounts. There was concern that these issues in the telecommunications sector might feature with Telstra Energy. There are insufficient communication channels to escalate complaints or hardship issues with Telstra compared with some energy retailers which have dedicated phone numbers and trained hardship teams. Telstra Energy should consider this when implementing financial hardship procedures and policies in the energy market.
- Telstra Energy should have specific channels (phoneline, email etc.) should be made available to Indigenous consumers and their advocates. These specific channels should be handled by staff who are culturally trained or are Indigenous employees.
- The commission should consider the possibility of licence conditions in relation to better communication with consumers to alleviate concerns for consumers in hardship.
- The commission should also consider more measures than just auditing Telstra Energy. Self-reporting has not worked particularly well in the telecommunication industry.
- There was also concern around how Telstra Energy can improve its internal processes, procedures, call centres, hardship teams and customer service to meet its regulatory obligations in Victoria's energy market.
- Telstra Energy should consider ways to deal with consumers who have different literacy levels. The use of visual representations and plain language may assist in consumers in accessing hardship assistance and/or making complaints.
- Concerns in relation to Telstra Energy using Telstra's existing telecommunication customer database to market Telstra Energy products. Cold calling customers can cause anxiety and lead to the unethical selling of products to consumers who may not need them.
- If consumers were to bundle products with Telstra or Telstra Energy, this should not penalise telecommunication customers due to energy related issues and vice-versa.

- Consumer credit checks should be completed by an independent third party and the process of internal credit checks against consumer telecommunication accounts should not occur. Transparent credit process should be in place.