



FIRST PEOPLES ENGAGEMENT

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Powercor acknowledges and respects the Traditional Owners as the original custodians of the lands and waters our network covers. We recognise First Peoples' unique and inherent rights as Traditional Owners and thank all Traditional Owners for continuing to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection to it. Powercor honours Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

First Peoples engagement

Our network is located across 20 First Peoples language groups, with our 14 offices and depots being located on the traditional lands of the:

- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung (Melbourne CBD)
- Bunurong and Boon Wurrung (Brooklyn)
- Wadawurrung (Ballarat and Geelong)
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans (Bendigo and Maryborough)
- Yorta Yorta Nations (Cobram, Echuca and Shepparton)
- Eastern Maar (Colac)
- Latji Latji (Mildura)
- Wotjobaluk (Horsham)
- Taungurung (Kyneton)
- Eastern Maar and Gunditjmara (Warrnambool)

Powercor is home to approximately 28,185 First Peoples customers, 11 Registered Aboriginal Parties, and 18 Co-operatives and Gathering Places. Given our network footprint across First Peoples Countries, we have established dedicated roles within our business to drive First Peoples engagement, the establishment of a First Peoples Advisory Committee (FPAC) and the development of our business' first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The establishment of our RAP is an important milestone for empowering and increasing the self-determination of Victoria's First Peoples communities. This is achieved through mutually beneficial partnerships through training, employment, and business opportunities.

In addition to the Customer Advisory Panel (CAP), the FPAC was established in mid-2023 to provide expert advice on First Peoples engagement and the development of our RAP. The Chair of our FPAC has also been incorporated as a member of the CAP. Their role has been to ensure recommendations provided by the FPAC are actively considered and represented, engaging on a range of topics including customer vulnerability, reliability, resilience and affordability.

1.1 Objectives and methodology

First Peoples are our customers, community members and businesses which operate across our network. Traditional Owners have a deep and continual connection to Country and a long-standing history of land custodianship. To better understand the energy equity gap for First Peoples we held tailored engagement sessions to learn about First Peoples energy-related concerns and priorities.

First Peoples engagement objectives:

- Support our longer-term goal to establish strong relationships with First Peoples
- Identify and understand customers' current needs and preferences for the immediate and longer-term
- Understand how customers' unmet needs could be met through investment or divestment in our network
- Identify the key themes and priority areas for First Peoples
- Identify areas of energy inequity and consider how as a distribution company we can reduce the energy equity gap

1.1.1 IAP2 Spectrum engagement:

The First Peoples engagement was a mixture of involve, collaborate and empower to ensure First Peoples self-determined what programs were most important to their communities. First Peoples self-

determined which priorities were most important for their communities and the FPAC will hold the decision making over the programs.

	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	ENGAGEMENT STEPS TAKEN
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	First Peoples living on Yorta Yorta Country, the VACSAL football/netball carnival and the online survey were engagements that we consulted on to understand the energy priorities for their household and communities. This identified needs and prioritised that helped us shape which programs would be put forward under the First Peoples Program.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Registered Aboriginal Parties, Aboriginal Organisations and our FPAC helped shape the focus of further engagement and shaped the final initiatives, ensuring that concerns and aspirations were continually raised and considered
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Engagement programs and questions to include in the design were developed in collaboration with the First Peoples Advisory Committee.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.	

1.2 Yorta Yorta Country engagement

In March 2023, our First Peoples team facilitated a First Peoples regulatory reset workshop with 38 community members in partnership with Rumbalara. Due to the engagement occurring shortly after the 2022 Shepparton floods, we heard about the devastation, limited access to energy and the communities experience with the network at the time. First Peoples also expressed that reliability, affordability and equity was key to addressing the widening energy equity gap.

As detailed in the [Yorta Yorta Broad and Wide Engagement summary report](#) the four themes for discussion were:

- Affordability and Equity
- Energy Transformation
- Customer Experience



- Reliability and Resilience

Overall, the most important topic identified was Affordability and Equity. Specifically, First Peoples customers were concerned about the high price of electricity, understanding how to reduce their electricity bills, with solar seen to be part of this solution. Strong feedback was shared regarding compensation to First Peoples for the use of their Country for networks assets and operation and the community wanted the network to facilitate greater contribution to their community.

Within the discussion, the below areas were highlighted for Powercor to focus on through the Regulatory Reset:

- A large concern within the community was the high prices of electricity, especially as the cost of living overall was increasing. This was the sentiment felt across working households, as well as vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people in hardship programs and those living in commission homes
- The Yorta Yorta community identified support required to understand what contributes to their high bills, and how to reduce their bills through payment solutions and everyday actions.
- Some community members had installed solar on their homes to help with reducing the electricity bill, however it was felt that they were not seeing a return on their investment, which was thought to be mainly due to the low feed in tariff. To support this concern, there was a desire to understand how to optimise this asset to reduce their bills.
- There were questions from the community about the role the network played to support First Peoples economic, social and environmental health of communities and Country. Individuals shared that they wanted investment in protection of their local cultural heritage rather than destroying land and environment from business operations.
- Many community members experienced flooding in October 2022 where unplanned outages occurred for individuals which spanned from 2 hours to several days. Within the town, all generators were bought and for those without power it meant that food was spoilt, heating and cooling could not be used, and phones could not be charged to understand when the power would be back on.
- There was recognition that Mooroopna and Shepparton were located in a flood prone area, and therefore, the community wanted the network to put in place mitigation plans to prevent outages occurring during floods. Solutions such as raising the infrastructure or ways to prevent the assets from getting flooded was suggested. Ultimately the community did not want weather events to negatively impact the infrastructure in the future.
- For some customers unplanned outages were regular and recent stories were shared about the power going out frequently at work, schools, and homes. This negatively impacted the community and day to day living, especially when running households with family and children. For some families this caused financial strain, and an example shared was having to re-purchase food that had spoiled or needing to drive home (from a relative's house) to check if the electricity had come back on. Affected areas that were shared in this consultation included Nagambie, Barmah and Euroa.

1.3 Engagement with community organisations

In addition, we have engaged with three Registered Aboriginal Parties and two community organisations on their energy related priorities. We also attended the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy roundtable in Geelong where we heard about the need for capacity building including energy literacy and First Peoples want to build, own and maintain renewable energy projects.

Throughout the engagement, the below table outlines First Peoples customer priorities identified for the network.

FIRST PEOPLES PRIORITY SENTIMENTS AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Access to energy is a human right	a) First Peoples haven't been afforded the same generational wealth as the wider population. The health and equity gaps continue to widen, highlighting the need for programs that help those who are struggling to pay for electricity. b) Due to the fear of rising electricity bills. Elders within First Peoples communities aren't using their heating or cooling, which is leading to knowledge holders becoming severely unwell.
Energy literacy	First Peoples noted the importance of independent and unbiased energy literacy resources that aren't being given by the Government or energy retailers due to the distrust with these organisations. It was recommended that energy distributors like Powercor could provide information on how to read bills, energy efficiency, and information on renewable energy that is easy to read and unbiased.
Renewables	First Peoples responsibilities to care and protect Country go hand-in-hand with the transition to more cleaner energy sources. It was recommended by First Peoples that the network could provide assistance with connecting and provide specific information on what is/isn't possible at the proposed connection of the renewable energy project. It was also requested that Powercor provide an investment fund for First Peoples to invest in Renewable Energy, similarly to the Water Utilities funding Water is Life. First Peoples also shared the sentiment of wanting funding to undertake feasibility studies, build, own or co-invest in renewable energy projects. The lack of funding and support was noted as frustrating.

1.4 First Peoples Advisory Committee regulatory reset input and prioritisation

In June 2023 we established the FPAC, made up of 5 community members (currently 4) from across our network. The Chair of the FPAC also sits on the Customer Advisory Panel. The FPAC has met 7 times to date with the First Peoples team and has also provided feedback, input and endorsement of the proposed First Peoples program in our regulatory reset.

In June 2024, we engaged the committee to hear their feedback on key initiatives included in the regulatory reset proposal. Their feedback and recommendations are detailed in the table below.

	ABOUT THE INITIATIVE	FPAC RECOMMENDATIONS
Customer vulnerability	Initiatives designed to alleviate the burden on customers experiencing vulnerability due to energy poverty. The package includes community outreach programs, web-based resources, energy advisory services, First People's programs, and enhanced outage notification service for vulnerable and life support customers.	Discussion touched on the role of the broader supply chain in contributing to this, difference between retailers and distributors. It was recommended that the network learn off the water vulnerability programs for customers and run programs that contribute to closing the equity gap. The risks of leaving people behind and making sure to bring people along the journey as an essential service was highlighted.
Network Resilience	Targeted network hardening to reduce the likelihood of high-risk townships being off supply for extended periods through microgrids, tie lines and deployable generation units.	The committee recommended improving resilience, by future proofing the network and reducing risks of power outages. It was recommended that the network is proactive rather than reactive.
Community resilience	Provision of community support to prepare for, and on the ground support for, extreme weather events	It was highlighted how many climate events affect First Peoples communities. It was recommended that the network champions and participates in the Vic Emergency, CFA or Fire Rescue meetings. This will enable the network to engage mob holistically rather than contribute to over engagement. It was suggested that First Peoples community liaison officers would be helpful for when climate emergencies occur.
Lowest reliability areas and average reliability	Reduce the annual minutes off supply for customers with the lowest reliability through targeted network investments. Changing the average annual minutes off supply experienced by customers.	FPAC recommended that equity be looked at and evaluated to ensure we aren't further disadvantaging those with low reliability by pushing up their energy costs. Sentiment was shared that compensation should be brought down to 4hrs+ as that's when your food goes off. Especially if you have an old fridge/freezer and community members can't afford to buy a new one.
Regional and rural supply	A package of initiatives to support regional and rural supply upgrades to homes and businesses that enable further growth opportunities in regional communities.	It was highlighted that there is a still a huge potential for First Peoples communities to miss out on generational wealth from renewable energy. It was recommended that Powercor looks at

		ways to assess First Peoples projects and focus on regional development. Strong consideration is needed of what the supply chain looks like and ways to change generational wealth.
Supporting additional solar power	Allow residential customers and businesses to connect and export more excess energy produced from small scale generation units	Question asked on where First Peoples voices are at the start of these conversations (using solar as an example), highlighting the importance of engaging First Peoples at the start of the process. It was recommended that the network could support access to information, funding and partnerships for solar, batteries and microgrids etc.
Large scale renewable energy generation	Network support to connect additional large scale renewable generation capacity, lowering emissions for Victorian customers and powering homes with renewable energy	FPAC agreed that large scale energy generation should prioritise access of energy to vulnerable customers or low reliability areas. In addition, a credit pool was discussed in regard to redistributing energy to those who can't afford it.

1.5 VACSAL Football and Netball Carnival & online survey

During the Regulatory Reset period we have engaged with First Peoples to better understand their lived experience with our distribution network and to identify First Peoples energy related issues and priorities through attending key community events and running an online survey.

In September and October to better understand First Peoples energy related priorities we attended the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd.'s Football and Netball Carnival.

Here we engaged with over 110 First Peoples on the regulatory reset, with 75 respondents residing in the Powercor network. In this engagement, we tested the initiatives that we had heard from the Yorta Yorta engagement, what we had heard from Registered Aboriginal Parties and Community organisations and our First Peoples Advisory Committee's feedback on programs that are a priority for communities. In addition, we had another 9 First Peoples customers respond to our online survey.

We heard from the community that affordability was key and concerns around the energy equity gap widening due to cost-of-living increases. Community members stressed the inaccessibility to new energy appliances, the impacts that climate emergencies are having on their communities and the need to help Elders have access to heating and cooling. The table below outlines the key findings from this initiative.



TOPIC	ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS
Value from the overall regulatory proposal	47% of respondents felt the bill impact represents the value for the service they received and expect from us.
Resilience	55% of respondents experienced a prolonged outage from an extreme weather event. 24% of those who experienced a prolonged power outage had no power for 24 or more hours.
First Peoples customers	58% of respondents say that access to affordable energy is the most important energy priority for their household - Only 12% of respondents had solar installed on their house.
Energy literacy	24% of all respondents don't look at their electricity bill 75% of respondents would like tailored information on how to read and reduce electricity bills, information on energy efficiency programs and government rebates 53% of respondents didn't know who their distributor was or what their role is in energy supply.
First Peoples top 3 priorities	1 Heating and cooling rebates for Elders 2 Programs that help low-income households upgrade to more energy efficient appliances 3 Funding for designing, developing and connecting community solar and battery projects.
Respondents' additional commentary	- First Peoples liaison required to help with questions and/or medically vulnerable customers & emergencies - Suggestion to work with co-ops to install solar and batteries - Set up community programs to help young/new adults understand electricity bills, how to pay and read them.

1.6 Endorsements

On Monday 25th of November 2024 we met with the FPAC to present an overview of our engagement, key findings and proposed First Peoples Program. The FPAC were satisfied with the engagement, outcomes, proposed initiatives and endorsed the program. The program was later presented to the Customer Advisory Panel who also endorsed the programs.



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