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What is ourPower?

ourPower is a vision for clean, affordable, dependable energy for all.

ourPower identifies core values and establishes five principles (see figure).

The vision sets out what people want now and in a future energy system.

The guiding values help decision-makers identify what's most important when making choices.

The principles guide the development and evaluation of regulation, policy, products and services.

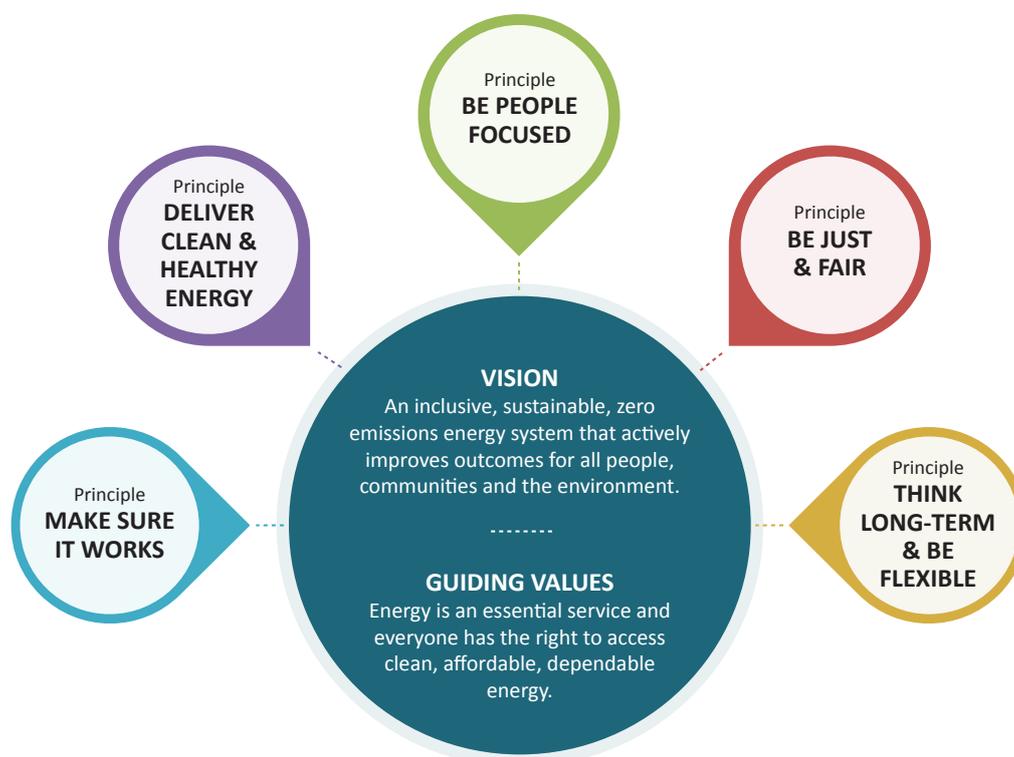
The principles in action guide how each principle can be applied. This guidance is provided to demonstrate how decision-makers, advocates and energy users might meet the intent of each principle. They are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive, and will evolve over time.

Where the application of one principle appears to be in conflict with another, solutions that reflect the spirit of the principles should be sought, with final decisions being transparent and justifiable in terms of the overarching vision.

The principles are not in priority order.

ourPower is a statement by energy users¹ about the future we want and a basis for working together with industry and governments to get there. It is based on the twin ideas that not only do we have a shared interest in the energy transition, but also that there is much we can already agree on. And everybody wins by agreeing on a direction and a set of commitments to each other.

ourPower is a tool that can be used to guide the development of public policy and market reforms as well as new products and services. By supporting **ourPower**, you are helping drive the transition to an inclusive, sustainable, zero emissions² energy system that actively improves outcomes for all people, communities and the environment.



1 End users of the energy supply chain have traditionally been referred to as customers or consumers. There are two problems with this terminology. One, it implies a contractual or passive relationship. And two, more than a quarter of Australian households now supply their own energy from rooftop solar systems, so they are generators as well as consumers. The term prosumers has become more common, but it does not include those who do not generate their own energy. Other suggestions potentially appropriate to the energy transition include users or energy users, energy citizens, partners and people. Without wishing to be prescriptive, we have opted for energy users or people, depending on the context.

2 Greenhouse gas emissions

Why do we need ourPower?

Energy is an essential service. It plays a critical role in the health and wellbeing of people and powers the economy.

The energy system is changing rapidly and profoundly, as shown below.

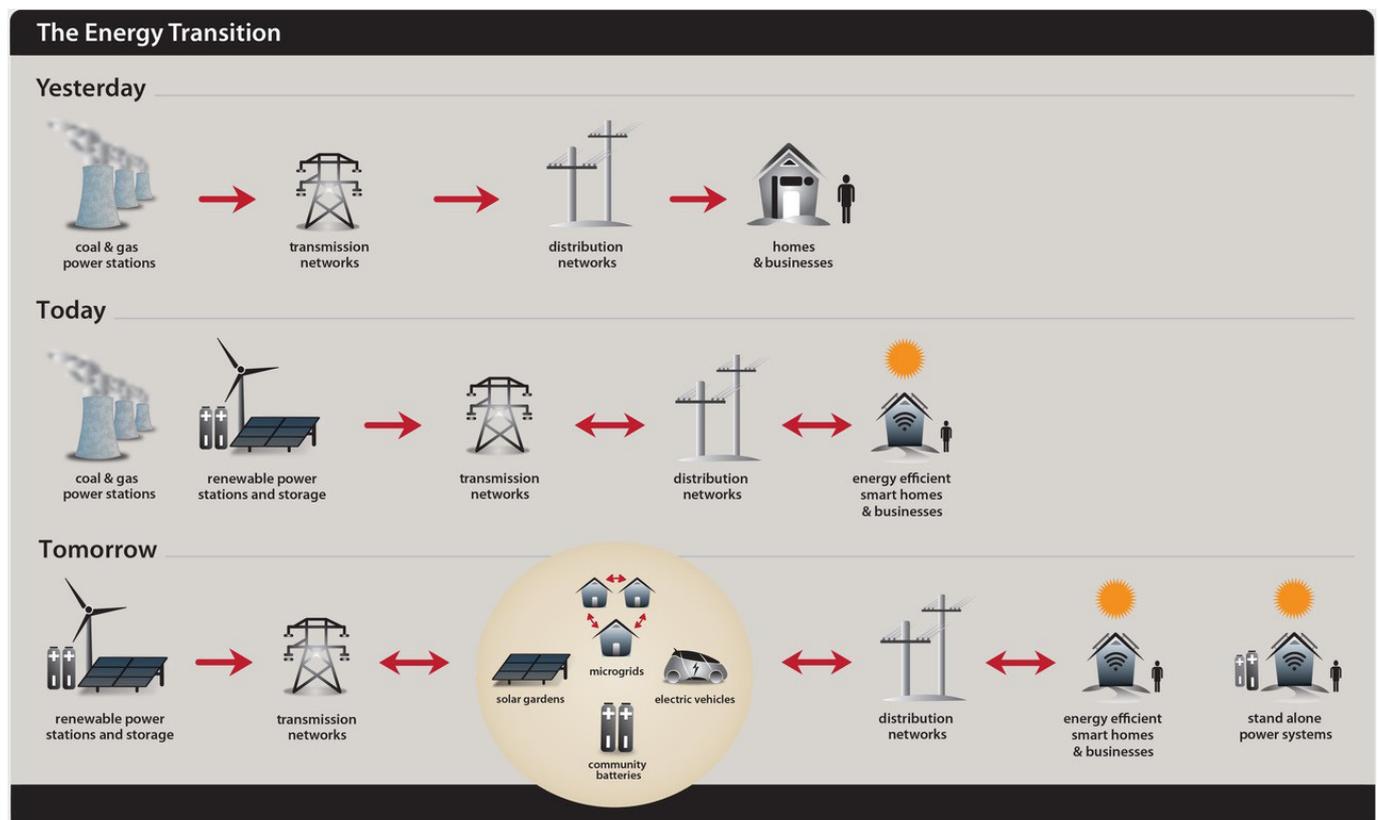
In the old centralised system, energy was generated by a few large coal and gas plants and then transported often long distances to passive energy users.

Today, with the need to decarbonise the system to tackle the climate crisis and the decline in cost of renewable energy, fossil fuels are being replaced by renewable energy. The centralised system is also being replaced by a more decentralised system in which energy users can generate, store and trade as well as consume their own energy.

Rooftop solar is leading the way, but will increasingly be complemented by home and community scale batteries, electric vehicles, smart homes and flexible demand. All these technologies have the potential to be shared in local communities and the wider market at a relatively low cost, as the system is transformed.

But ‘rewiring’ the energy system is not just an engineering task. Because energy is so tightly enmeshed in our economy and society, changing the way we relate to energy has big implications for how we live and work.

If we get it right, in the future energy won’t just be clean, it will also be cheaper and fairer for everyone. But if we get it wrong – and if energy choices become even more complicated – people who can’t afford or access the technology could be left behind. Energy users could also end up paying for overpriced infrastructure that becomes obsolete as new and better technologies emerge.



How to use ourPower

Who is ourPower for?

ourPower is a tool for anyone making decisions about the energy transition - policy makers, regulators, industry leaders or groups representing energy users and communities.

It provides decision-makers with high-level guidance about the energy futures that energy users want (the vision, values and principles), how to ensure that people and communities are heard in the process, and how to reflect their interests in policy development, planning and service design (applying **ourPower**).

ourPower is already being used by consumer groups to guide input into the energy transition. For example, it was used by the Distributed Energy Integration Program (DEIP) Access and Pricing Working Group to design a collaborative process to develop new, more equitable arrangements for the electricity grid to support small-scale solar and other new energy technologies like batteries.

ourPower is not prescriptive

Decision-makers do not need to endorse every word or element of **ourPower** to use it as a tool to improve their decision-making.

ourPower is a principles-based resource that decision-makers can use and adapt to suit the opportunity or challenge they are working on. Because the energy transition raises novel, complex problems, **ourPower** does not seek to provide detailed answers for decision-makers.

Applying **ourPower** is about helping decision-makers adopt an open, positive and innovative mindset in their roles. The often polarised and confrontational debate about climate change and the energy transition in Australia can obscure areas of agreement amongst energy users, communities, and energy sector stakeholders. **ourPower** should give decision-makers the confidence and assurance they need to engage broadly, develop long-term solutions, and create win-win outcomes.

How does ourPower relate to the national energy objectives?

Decisions in the National Energy Market are made according to a set of [legislated objectives](#) known as the National Electricity Objective and the National Gas Objective. These objectives define the long-term interests of consumers as an energy system that promotes system security, reliability and economic efficiency. Unfortunately, they do *not* currently include responding to the decarbonisation challenge; the need to ensure the energy transition is managed equitably; or the emerging issue of resilience.

Energy user representatives, community representatives, and the public were clear during the consultation process for **ourPower** that the new context requires a broader definition of 'the long term interests' of energy users. This up-to-date perspective ensures that **ourPower** provides a relevant guide for decision makers to take a broader, legitimate view about their mandates.

How does ourPower relate to other initiatives?

Other initiatives and frameworks have emerged to help the energy and other sectors manage complex issues and transformations. For instance, [The Energy Charter](#) was developed by Australian energy companies, with input from consumer groups, to improve their practices and rebuild trust with their customers.

ourPower is a statement by people, energy users and communities of their expectations for the whole energy ecosystem now and for the future. **ourPower** also speaks not only to energy companies but to all stakeholders making decisions about the energy transition.

See also the section on how different stakeholder groups can use **ourPower**.

Principles in action

We will...

Be people focused

We will design with and for people and communities today and for the future. We will educate and empower people to participate in the energy system. We will meet people where they are at and deliver their energy needs. We will aim to reduce complexity and be honest and transparent about our actions. People and communities who are socially or financially disadvantaged must be front and centre.



Examples of this principle in action

- Ensure energy rules, policies and measures are designed to enable access to clean, affordable, dependable energy for everyone.
- Ensure energy rules, policies and measures do not disadvantage people if they cannot or do not want to participate in new energy products and services.
- Be honest, ethical and transparent to build trust.
- Understand and engage with people, businesses and communities to meet their needs, provide real choices and improve outcomes.
- Provide education to inform and support people to access and manage energy to meet their needs.
- Enable real choice and decision-making by ensuring options and tools are ethical, clear, transparent, learnable, in plain language and accessible.
- Enable people, businesses and communities to contribute to society, economic development and a sustainable environment.
- Give energy users control over how their data is used and shared in a way that is consistent with community expectations as well as privacy and other legal frameworks.
- Ensure energy service platforms are open and people can move between them without being locked in, to support innovation and provide real choices.
- Implement human-centred co-design processes when developing new policy, regulation, services and products, to ensure diversity of energy users views and needs.
- Ensure adequate protections are in place to enable full participation in the energy system.
- Ensure that people understand their responsibilities and the impacts on others of their energy choices.

We will...

Think long term and be flexible

We will focus on delivering the energy system we are likely to need in the future to improve the outcomes for people, communities, and the environment. It will be flexible, innovative, responsive, and based on people's expectations (clean, affordable and dependable). Future risks, including stranded assets and costs involved in the transition, will be identified and managed. Where there is uncertainty, we will identify and implement actions that are 'no regrets' (actions that are worth taking because they are likely to be beneficial no matter what happens in the future).



Examples of this principle in action

- Articulate clear long-term objectives, consistent with the vision, to facilitate efficient investment and innovation and minimise unnecessary costs or the risk of stranded assets.
- Focus investments on actions with long-term economic, social and environmental benefits, including reducing inequity between different types of energy users.
- Be flexible and innovative in response to changes in people's needs and preferences, the environment and technology.
- Focus investment on innovation, research and development to deliver products and services that meet the diverse needs of people, businesses and communities.
- Future risks involved in the transition are identified and early action is taken to minimise the potential impacts on people and communities, especially for those who are least able to manage risks.
- Draw people, energy users, energy experts and stakeholders early into reform processes to co-design and test solutions prior to full implementation, including through pilots and trials.
- Test reforms against a range of future outcomes, including their ability to withstand large and sudden changes, impacts on system reliability and security, costs and effects on people.
- Where there is uncertainty, identify and implement actions that are no regrets.

We will...

Be just and fair

We will manage the energy system and the energy transition in a way that is just, fair and inclusive, and ensure no one is left behind. This includes people who are socially and financially disadvantaged, and workers and communities impacted by the evolution of the energy system. The costs and benefits of the transition must be equitably shared, recognising that governments will play a role in supporting access to clean, affordable, dependable energy and just and fair outcomes.



Examples of this principle in action

- Public spending should be targeted to achieve economic and environmental benefits and reduce inequality. Public policy related costs should be met through progressive means like government budgets and not regressively via energy bills.
- Distribute costs, benefits and risks transparently and fairly to facilitate positive outcomes.
- Positive outcomes should not depend on people's ability to engage with the energy system.
- Ensure the costs and benefits of initiatives are transparent, so that people, decision-makers and advocates can respond appropriately. Cross-subsidies should be transparent and justifiable.
- Facilitate a just transition for impacted workers and communities through economic and employment diversification policies, social protection measures and education and training. This should be managed through formal consultation with stakeholders including trade unions, workers, employers and communities.
- Other complementary or non-market measures may be required to ensure a just and fair energy system.
- Where energy remains unaffordable for people experiencing financial disadvantage, governments should provide adequate and equitable financial support to meet their essential needs.
- To maintain access to energy, identify and manage hardship and vulnerability early and without penalties, and provide assistance through trusted and appropriate experienced community services.
- Implement policies that ensure fair pricing and conduct by energy service providers.

We will...

Make sure it works

We will make sure energy is affordable and the community can depend on the energy system.

Dependable means it needs to be resilient as well as reliable and secure. We will make sure the system is dependable and productive across the supply chain, promoting efficient energy use and new technologies and services that benefit people and the environment. There should be fair and efficient allocation of costs and fair allocation of risks. The energy system should also be resilient to extreme weather, cybersecurity and other unforeseeable or 'black swan' events.



Examples of this principle in action

- Ensure that investment in, and the operation of, the energy system is economically efficient and avoids wasting money and resources.
- There should be fair and efficient allocation of costs, which should be borne first by the beneficiaries of the energy transition.
- There should be fair allocation of risks, which should be borne by those who are best able to manage and mitigate them in the interests of energy users.
- Ensure that the energy system can operate safely and securely regardless of how energy is produced.
- Engage with people and communities on investment and services so that energy is delivered in line with expectations, particularly when it comes to price, reliability and resilience.
- Improve the resilience of people, communities, businesses and institutions as well as the energy system to manage the increasing frequency and intensity of severe weather events as well as cybersecurity and other unforeseeable or 'black swan' events such as Covid-19.
- Provide incentives and prioritise energy solutions relating to energy demand including energy efficiency.
- Improve the utilisation of existing generation and network infrastructure.
- Enable energy management technology and behaviour that enhances outcomes for energy users and reduces the costs of the energy system.
- Develop metrics for resilience, especially relating to localised long duration outages caused by severe weather events.
- Ensure the transparency of reliability, security and resilience data to inform decision-making and efficient investment.
- Strong and well-supported regulators to work with people, communities and energy participants to design, implement and oversee affordable, clean dependable energy.

We will...

Deliver clean and healthy energy

We will transform the energy system to achieve zero emissions by enabling the environmentally sustainable production and use of energy. The transition to a clean energy system is a shared responsibility, so it should be planned in line with scientific evidence and community expectations, enabling everyone to live healthy lives.



Examples of this principle in action

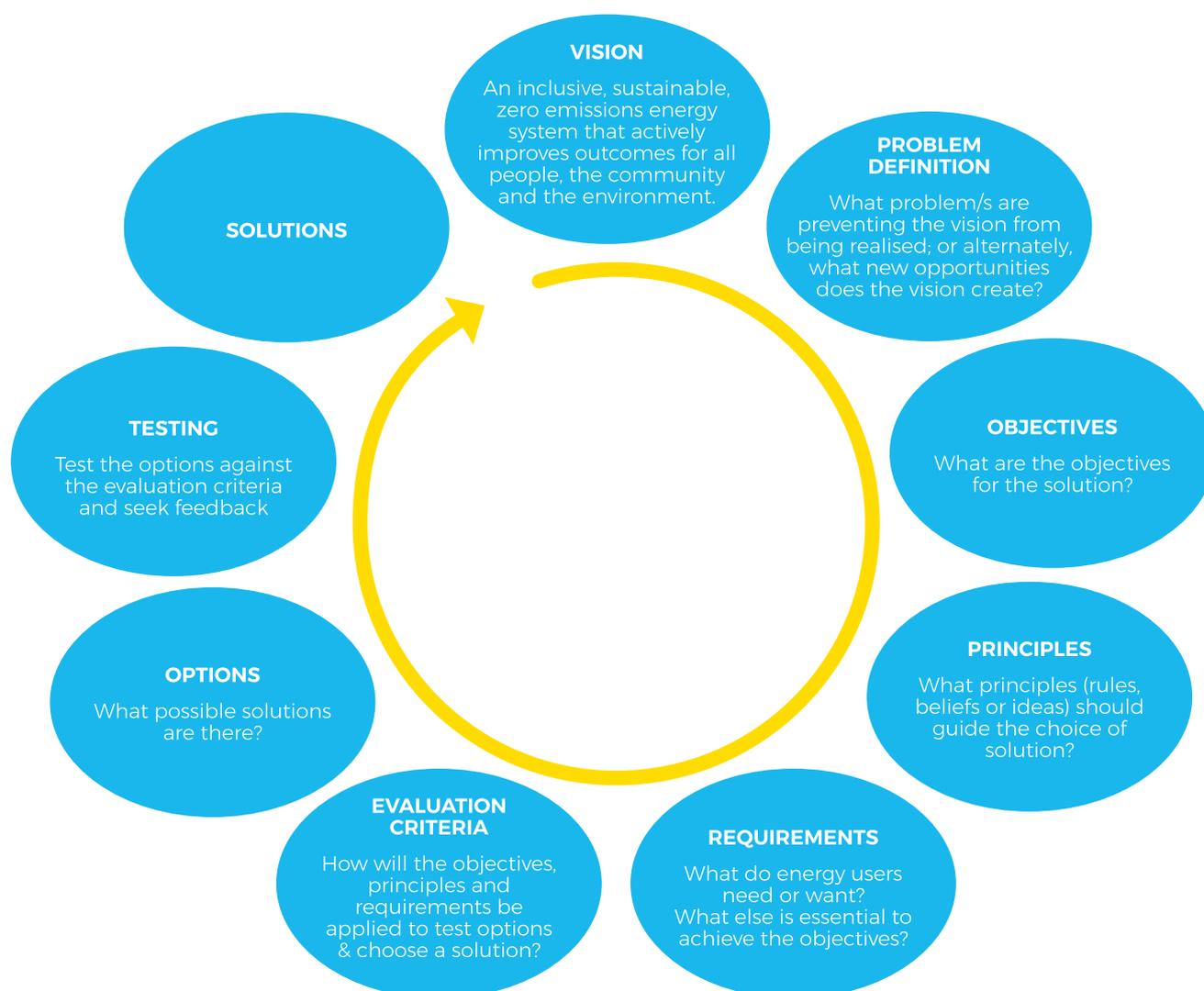
- Avoid energy sources that negatively impact the health and wellbeing of people and communities and are detrimental to the environment in their production and use (including global heating, coal dust, diesel particulates, noxious fumes from burning coal and gas, wood smoke, and groundwater pollution)
- Incentivise energy solutions that improve the health and well-being of people - for example, by improving the energy efficiency and energy productivity of homes, hospitals, schools, offices and other workplaces.
- Implement policies and strategies in line with the transition to net zero emissions by a date consistent with the scientific evidence to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, including incentives to decarbonise, prioritising investment in zero-emissions technology and deploying clean energy production.
- Be transparent and accountable in reporting on environmental performance.
- Ensure people, businesses and communities can play a role in the transition to zero-carbon energy.
- Build and dispose of energy infrastructure and components in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable way.

Applying ourPower

ourPower is a guide for decision-makers to deliver energy system and market reforms, and to develop new policies, products and services.

It encourages not only a different mindset but a new way of working. A good problem-solving process is one that brings together a range of stakeholders to **codesign solutions**, uses **human-centred design principles**, and aims to jointly agree on the vision, problem, objectives, principles, requirements and evaluation criteria to find an optimal solution.

The process should include human-centred design activities (such as brainstorming, workshops, interviews, questionnaires, story boards, use-cases) to inform the development of the stages. It should be **iterative**, and at any point, participants may need to go back and **revisit steps**.



Source: Incorporating the work of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC)

How stakeholder groups can use ourPower

ourPower is a statement about the future we want, and a basis for agreement with industry, market bodies and governments about how we can work together to get there. It is based on the idea that everybody wins by agreeing on a direction and a set of commitments to each other.

ourPower can be used to guide reforms and the development of public policy as well as new products and services. By utilising it, you are helping to drive the transition to an inclusive, sustainable, zero-emissions energy system that actively improves outcomes for people, communities and the environment.

See also the section on How to use **ourPower**.

Public

The public can use **ourPower** to guide conversations with energy companies, market bodies and governments to deliver products, services, policies and programs to better meet their needs and their communities' expectations.

The public can reference **ourPower** to set their expectations of how energy companies, market bodies and governments should engage and what they should be delivering on.

Energy user advocates

For people and organisations who advocate on behalf of energy users, **ourPower** is a tool for enhancing their engagement with energy companies, market bodies and governments. It sets out what good engagement looks like and provides guidance on what people and communities want, and how to reflect their interests in policy development, planning and service design.

The more advocates support and use **ourPower**, the greater the chance of influencing how energy companies, market bodies and governments should engage and what they should be delivering on energy users and communities.

Energy companies

ourPower is a tool that energy companies can use to inform the development and implementation of products and services that better meet the needs and expectations of their customers and the communities they serve.

ourPower provides high-level guidance about the energy system that energy users want (the vision, values and principles), and how to reflect their interests in policy development, planning and service design (applying **ourPower**).

It is different from the Energy Charter, which was developed by energy companies with input from consumer groups to improve their practice and rebuild trust with their customers. **ourPower** is a statement by people, energy users and communities which expresses their expectations about the delivery of energy now and in the future.

Because **ourPower** is a principles-based resource, energy companies can use and adapt it to suit the opportunity or challenge they are working on.

Market bodies

Decisions in the National Energy Market are made according to a set of legislated objectives known as the National Electricity Objective and the National Gas Objective, with the long-term interests of consumers defined as an energy system that promotes system security, reliability and economic efficiency. But during the consultation process for **ourPower** the public, energy user groups and community groups were clear in that the new energy context requires a modern and broader definition of 'the long term interests' of people and energy users.

By capturing and synthesising a contemporary view from energy users and communities, **ourPower** provides an up-to-date guide for the market bodies to take a broader, legitimate view about their mandates.

Market bodies can use **ourPower** to inform their decision-making processes to ensure they are adequately engaging and provides guidance on what good engagement looks like.

Because **ourPower** is a principles-based resource, market bodies can use and adapt it to suit the opportunity or challenge they are working on.

Governments

Governments and political decision-makers can use **ourPower** as a tool for making decisions about the energy transition that impact people, energy users and communities.

It provides decision-makers with high-level guidance about the energy system that energy users want (the vision, values and principles), and how to reflect their interests in policy development, planning and service design (applying **ourPower**).

Decision-makers can, for example, use **ourPower** as a set of questions to ask themselves to test the adequacy of their engagement and public consultation plans for a reform process. For instance, "Have I involved users early enough in the process or am I working from a predetermined technical view of the problem and the solution?"

Or they can use it to test whether policies are meeting the objective and achieving better outcomes for all. For instance, "Am I considering the views or needs of all stakeholders, or am I assuming that all energy users are homogenous?".

Because **ourPower** is a principles-based resource, decision-makers can use and adapt it to suit the opportunity or challenge they are working on.

About ourPower

ourPower is an initiative of the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the Total Environment Centre (TEC) with the support of Energy Consumers Australia (ECA).

The development of **ourPower** has been a collaborative process (see the timeline below) informed by expert advice and insights from a range of stakeholders, including the public; international and domestic research on what people expect from their energy system;³ and from experience in implementing early versions in a number of energy reform processes.

ourPower is intended to be a living document that will undergo review and revision periodically to ensure it reflects community values and expectations and reflects learnings from its use. As the stewards of **ourPower**, ACOSS, TEC and ECA will continue to support its development and implementation. It is envisaged that **ourPower** is owned by all that use it.

Reflections, feedback or examples of how you have utilised **ourPower** can be provided by emailing ourPower@energyconsumersaustralia.org.au



³ Energy Consumers Australia, Consumer Sentiment Survey; UK Energy Research Centre, *Transforming the UK Energy System – Public Values, Attitudes and Acceptability*; Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University, *Engaging households towards the Future Grid: Interim Report Experiences, expectations and emerging trends*.

Friends of ourPower

Your organisation can sign on to become a friend of **ourPower** to help put people at the centre of the energy transition.

As a friend of **ourPower**, you become part of a community of people and organisations who use **ourPower** to inform how you engage and bring the interests of all energy users to the centre of decisions about the energy transition.

[Become a friend.](#)

To see who has become a friend of ourPower, go to ourPower.org.au.