

2026 Integrated System Plan (ISP) Consumer Panel Response

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2026 ISP Stakeholder Engagement Plan¹

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Acknowledgement of country

The 2026 Integrated System Plan Consumer Panel acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, seas and waters across Australia. We honour the wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and embrace future generations.

We acknowledge that, wherever we work, we do so on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. We pay respect to the world's oldest continuing culture and First Nations peoples' deep and continuing connection to Country; and hope that our work can benefit both people and Country.

¹ Available at: <https://aemo.com.au/energy-systems/major-publications/integrated-system-plan-isp/2026-integrated-system-plan-isp/opportunities-for-engagement>

1 Context

The Integrated System Plan (ISP) is one of the most significant processes associated with the pragmatic aspects of planning for Australia's transition to net zero carbon emissions – the energy transition.

As such, engagement with stakeholders at all key stages in development of an Integrated System Plan is crucial to enable data and ideas from the breadth of energy markets to be available for ISP development. The 2026 ISP Consumer Panel, not surprisingly, considers energy “end” consumers to be a crucial component of stakeholders; they are the people, associations, businesses and companies that pay energy bills and consequently have a direct interest in the question of ‘who pays’ for the projects identified in the ISP and the impact on bills?

The ISP process needs to be vigilant in addressing ‘social licence’ considerations: failure to obtain social licence both in the communities most directly impacted by “ISP projects” and for support for processes to achieve the energy transition across the general population will undermine the ISP.

The 2024 ISP Consumer Panel recommended in its response to the draft 2024 ISP that:

AEMO continue to maintain an active focus on improving social license as part of its work program.

Effective stakeholder engagement is fundamental to the achievement of social licence. The 2026 ISP Consumer Panel recognises that AEMO, in developing the ISP, is not the only body impacting social licence, but it is important. This includes in demonstrating to other contributors to social licence (governments, network businesses, energy retailers, environmental group etc) the merits of sound stakeholder engagement practices.

2 General response

The Panel affirms the direction taken by AEMO in the 2026 ISP Stakeholder engagement plan (the Plan), this includes our support for the stated purpose, goal, objectives and commitments.

We also commend AEMO, and their engagement staff in particular, for actively seeking to improve AEMO's engagement approaches over recent years. The Panel continues to appreciate the efforts made by AEMO staff to engage regularly and meaningfully, including with us.

The Plan rightly recognises that the ISP is an evolving process that deals with substantial uncertainty. The commitment from AEMO to regard the Plan as an evolving process is supported as is the understanding that this is a ‘living document’, meaning that it can change as circumstances change or a better approach to an aspect of engagement is identified.

The Engagement goal is given as:

Provide interested stakeholders with appropriate time and opportunity to access and provide meaningful input into our planning. We want interested stakeholders to get involved and shape our planning for the efficient development of the energy system, for the benefit of all Australians as we work to achieve a net-zero future.

This is a bold goal and supported by the Panel, while recognising that the ‘pace’ of the ISP process may hamper ‘appropriate time’ for some stakeholders to respond some of the time. We recognise that AEMO will make every

effort to hear stakeholders who want to respond to a particular topic and are hampered in their capacity to respond formally.

3 Specific comments

3.1 Key Stakeholders

Figure 2 from the Plan is a very effective chart in demonstrating the span of stakeholders with an interest in, at least some aspect of the ISP. We are pleased to see "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" listed as a group that is part of the "Consumer and community" segment of this figure. We think that developing a plan for engagement with relevant indigenous groups will be an appropriate near future step for this Plan.

Similarly, we are pleased to see "Community and Landholders" listed as a group in this segment. We opine that there is a tendency in energy markets to only consider individuals as customers when communities are very important too. Some communities have already made significant efforts in responding to energy market challenges (e.g. Esperance gas transition, Totally Renewable Yackandandah, Whyalla – aiming to be 100% net renewable generation by 2027 and many more communities). The voices of communities like these will be important in informing the 2026 ISP and future ISP's. The Panel thinks that effort needs to be made to increase the level of ISP input from communities, including those at the forefront of enabling the transition at local and even regional levels.

We also ask where environmental groups fit into the list of stakeholders, for example, are they a part of the "consumer advocates" grouping? If so, there would be value in identifying energy and environmental advocacy groups separately, both are important with different foci. Similarly, we ask where transition enabling groups fit in, e.g. ARENA, Clean Energy Council etc?

3.2 Communications

AEMO and the Panel have recently discussed the report "Strengthening Regional Transition Narratives" a research report that was produced by Essential Media and RE-Alliance. This report identifies the importance of informing regional communities about the transition and how it will impact them (different communities, different impacts).

This discussion has highlighted the importance of trustworthy information being communicated to stakeholders, suggesting that AEMO should explore how their Communications strategy and Stakeholder engagement Plan support each other. This is additional to section 4 "Engagement and Communication methods" which is also important but is more about the specific communication aspects of various engagement methods.

3.3 Evaluation

The inclusion of a section about evaluation of stakeholder engagement is also welcome and reinforces the evolving nature of AEMO's stakeholder engagement.