

## **David Ansley – Enabling the Transformation of the Energy Sector Paper Submission**

### **Background**

I am a strata committee member for the 1965, 24-unit, 8-storey plus parking, concrete column & slab with brick walls, strata building where I live. The strata company is self-managed and, having a background in engineering and construction, I have taken the role of looking after the building structure and services.

Our long-term capital plan had an upgrade of the electrical system (switchboard, cabling, fuses & meters) planned for some time in the 2020-2030 decade but a proposal by Ausgrid to replace the substation that supplies our building and the need to install NBN to the building lead us to reconsider timing since these 2 events could impact the electrical system and potentially there were synergies to be gained.

After significant investigation it was proposed to the strata owners that the electrical upgrade be brought forward so that a Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) NBN solution could be installed using the services duct that the existing electrical cabling was in, while new cable paths would be created for the new electrical system (also allowing the new system to be installed before removing the old one so disruption to electricity supply to residents could be limited to 1 day while changeover was completed). The new cable paths would also be created for an upgrade of the mains from the substation to the switchboard in preparation for the substation replacement.

After Owners approval the work was undertaken in 2019.

FYI, based on the experience gained on this project I am assisting a neighbouring building to undertake a similar upgrade with the same electrical contractor in 2022.

### **RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:**

1e. What are the benefits and challenges for customers moving onto cost reflective tariffs?

I did a comparison of residents' previous electrical charges (many had off-peak meters for their own electric, storage hot water services) with the options that would be available once smart meters were installed. The differences were small under estimated demand patterns but residents were encouraged to assess their plan selection once they had access to 1 or 2 months of time of use data.

2e. What are the main challenges to replacing basic meters or smart meters that reach their end of life?

When trying to upgrade the whole electrical system (likely a major requirement for the many 69s, 70s & 80s buildings in NSW) the complexity of getting all residents, who were

all very supportive, to go through their retailers processes to approve the installation of a new smart meter, get a work order raised and allocated to one smart meter supplier so our designated Level 2 electrician could obtain the meters for installation on the new boards in time for our change-over to the new system (since the old system was being de-commissioned immediately after changeover). This process took over 6 months with continual follow up for some retailers.

3b. Are you aware of any regulatory or non-regulatory barriers that may be contributing to delays in the installation of smart meters?

I'm not sure what the regulatory issues may be but the challenges noted under 2e above are serious barriers to the installation of smart meters – we had 24 very willing electricity customers and the strata company was paying for the meters and installation but it took 6 months of effort dealing with the disparate business processes of the retailers to get access to the meters (we ended up not succeeding with one retailer so we have one old meter on the new board).

3c. What additional measures would need to be implemented to unlock these customer benefits?

Provide a separate process for strata building smart meter upgrades or remove the need for the retailer to be involved if the strata is paying for the meters & installation.

3d. Are there any benefits for customers to allowing third parties to be able to manage the installation of a smart meter on their behalf?

I can't speak about individual houses but I would think this approach should be the norm for strata buildings since it makes sense to incorporate the work with other upgrades that need to be done for the whole strata – new switchboards (size, asbestos, old fuses, circuit capacity - 32 vs 63 amps), upgrade wiring (capacity, insulation, fire regulations), etc.

4a. Should there be a requirement to replace meter boards that are older than a specified age (e.g. 30 years) as a prerequisite to installing a smart meter?

Again, for strata buildings, new meter boards are likely to be a necessity for the reasons noted under 3d above.

4b. What challenges would prevent electricity retailers and metering providers from offering a meter board survey service to customers before a smart meter is installed?

For strata buildings there are typically multiple retailers serving the residents. Under the current system the retailers control the meter upgrade process but none of them would represent all owners of a strata building. And metering providers wouldn't be able to address the related issues noted in 3d above. From an electrical system perspective, it doesn't make sense to treat a meter upgrade as a stand-alone project.

4c. If a meter board survey service can be provided, how much should customers pay for the service? Can the service be offered for free?

See 4b.

4d. Should electricity retailers and/or metering providers receive a report on the state of a customer's meter board? If not, why?

The information that would be useful to retailers and metering providers would be whether a new meter would fit (size), whether the board has asbestos (require special treatment or replacement prior to new meter installation), and whether other work needs to be done in conjunction with a meter replacement. For strata buildings where there are multiple retailers involved and a need to consider the electrical system as a whole, information on the state of a meter board is insufficient to make sensible decisions