



Melbourne, Tuesday 8 September 2009
Andrew Blyth is available for interview on 0408 977 758

Informed customers must be ‘front and centre’ of plans for smart, new energy networks

Customer choices in the sourcing, price and storage of energy in their homes and businesses will be a key driver in massive changes sweeping across the electricity industry in Australia.

The Energy Networks Association (ENA), the peak body representing gas and electricity distribution businesses throughout Australia, believes customers must be “front and centre” as the electricity sector prepares for a carbon-constrained future.

ENA Chief Executive, Andrew Blyth, told a major energy conference in Melbourne that consumers were passive participants in the current process of electricity production and delivery.

“They have little or no choice about energy source and limited accessible information to demonstrate energy usage and costs apart from receiving a bill weeks after using the electricity,” he said at the Energy 21C conference at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

“In addition, the current design of the network is for a one-way flow of energy and information.

“As such, it will not meet the expectations of consumers to have a two-way energy and information exchange that supports the secure, affordable and environmentally friendly supply and use of energy.”

The ENA has released a smart networks position paper that provides a road map to Australia’s efforts to transform energy network businesses that deliver electricity and gas to 13.5 million customers.

“The electricity industry is poised to make the transformation from a centralised, producer-controlled network to one that is less centralised and more consumer interactive,” Mr Blyth said.

“The key drivers for this change are the need to respond to climate change through the reduction of carbon emissions, and the need to maintain and enhance energy security.

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“The involvement of energy users – consumers – is critical in responding to both drivers.

“We must change the relationship with customers transforming their role from uninformed and non-participative to informed, active and involved to help manage energy demand.

“A smart energy network will accommodate connection of widely distributed, renewable energy sources, for example from wind and solar technologies.

“It will facilitate market interactions providing customers with access to products and services with choice based on price and environmental concerns.

“It will accommodate new energy storage technologies enabling customers to choose the source of their energy and to optimise the efficiency of their energy use.”

Mr Blyth said a smart network was an enabling platform for environmentally sustainable growth of the electricity sector, but it would rely on customers being able to understand what new technologies, such as smart metering, could deliver.

“We are facing major transformation of the energy industry at the same time as a national high speed broadband network is being rolled out across Australia,” he said.

“We would like the Federal Government to appoint a joint working group, comprising energy industry and national broadband network representatives, to ensure the proposed investments in energy and communications infrastructure achieve the greatest possible synergies.”

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