



PowerWater

# August 2023 People's Panels – Outcomes Summary

August 2023

# Overview of Power and Water and the People's Panels

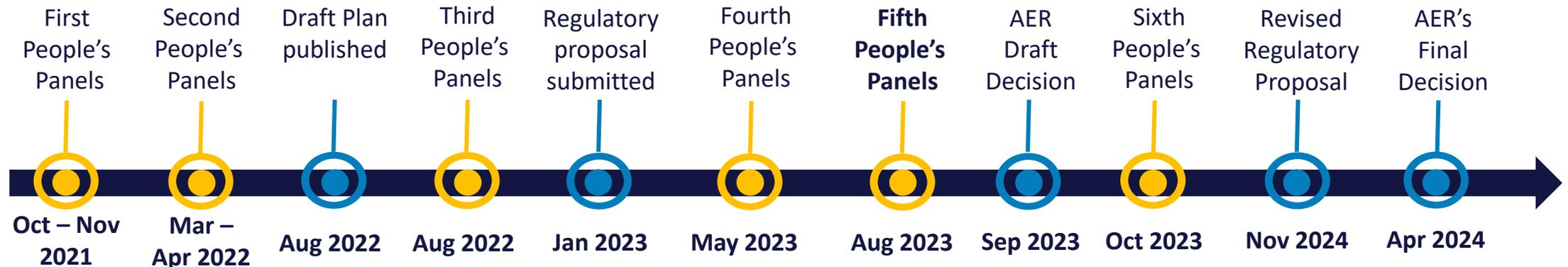
- Power and Water Corporation (Power and Water) is the essential service provider in the Northern Territory, providing electricity, gas, water and sewerage services to households and businesses.
- Every 5 years, Power and Water submits its plans for our 3 regulated networks – Darwin-Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek – to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) in its Regulatory Proposal.
- The People's Panels include 2 groups of customer representatives from these networks. They are an essential pillar of Power and Water's stakeholder engagement program to inform and provide feedback on our network investment and expenditure plans for the 2024-2029 period.
- In August 2023, the People's Panels were convened for the **fifth** time to be informed and provide feedback on our 2024-2029 investment plans.



# Objectives of the August 2023 People's Panels

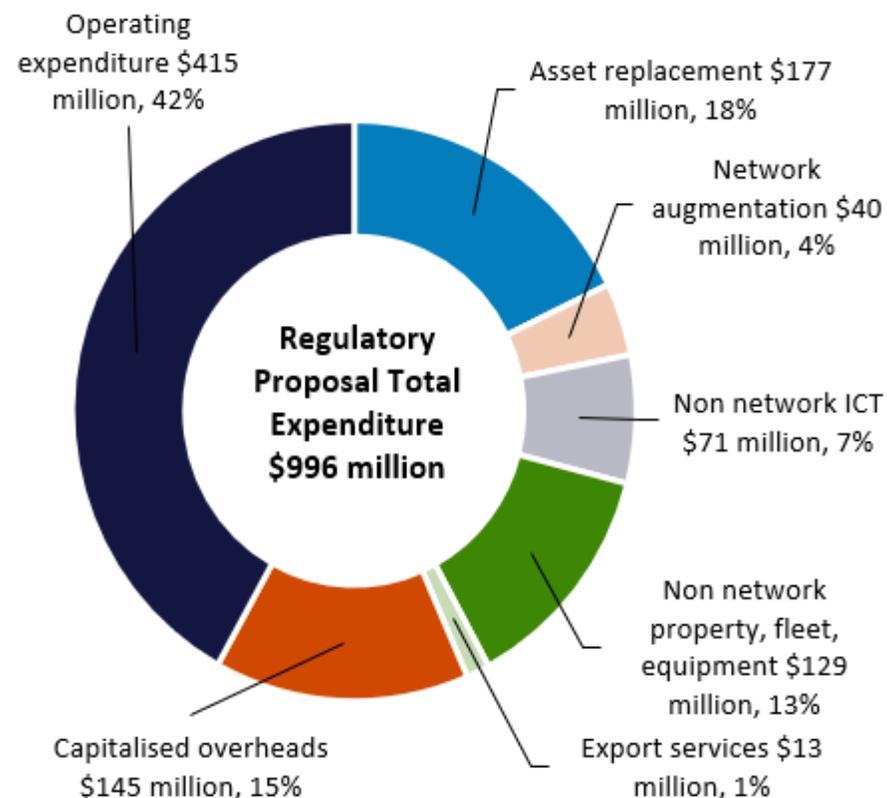
- The August 2023 session was held online and combined participants from the Darwin and Alice Springs People's Panels.
- An independent facilitator coordinated the conversation and feedback from these Panels.
- Participant representation was expanded from prior People's Panels to include 4 new participants across Tennant Creek, Katherine and Alice Springs.
- The objectives of this Panel was to **Inform** and:
  - ❖ *Provide an update in approach for some of the key projects and programs for the Revised Regulatory Proposal*
  - ❖ *Test outcomes from the May 2023 People's Panels to ensure these align with participants' views*
  - ❖ *Discuss the future of the People's Panels, including what topics the Panels wished to cover in future.*

## People's Panel timeline



# Our 2024-2029 Regulatory Proposal

- During the May 2023 People's Panels, Power and Water discussed and tested elements of our 2024-2029 Regulatory Proposal including large projects and programs.
- Since then, we have been responding to questions from the AER and refining our plans based on stakeholder feedback.
- In the first session in August, the Panels revisited key elements of the Regulatory Proposal and were provided with a summary of the outcomes from the Panels convened in May and the sessions on customer preferences and contingent projects.
- Panellists were asked to indicate whether these outcomes reflected their views. Most respondents indicated they fully or somewhat supported the information provided. For future People's Panels, we will provide representatives with materials in advance of the Panel to allow time to absorb and provide a more informed response.
- The Alice Springs Panel reiterated that it was unable to provide material feedback on some projects as these projects are all located in the Darwin-Katherine network.





## Consolidating Darwin staff into one location

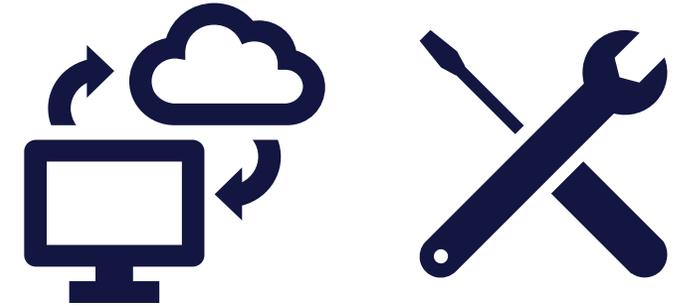
- The single site consolidation project was introduced to People's Panel representatives during the May 2023 Panels. This project involves consolidating most of the Darwin staff into one location.
- The Panels revisited the drivers for this expenditure and were provided with an update on the project, including Power and Water's focus on reducing the expenditure required to undertake the consolidation and the identification of potential additional benefits.
- Panellists provided the following feedback:
  - ❖ *Power and Water should consider the social impacts of consolidation, e.g. impact on public facilities, increased traffic etc*
  - ❖ *The Panels should be presented more information, such as a business case, at the next session which includes unpacking some of the costs and benefits for all networks*
  - ❖ *Power and Water need to ensure that staff are retrained where their role is no longer required.*

# Our future networks

- The future networks program has been an area of interest across the 5 previously convened Panels, with customers at these Panels expressing a preference for Power and Water to invest in the future network.
- In August 2023, Power and Water provided an update to the Panels on its future networks program, including some possible changes in our approach in response to AER feedback suggesting we provide greater justification for program expenditure.
- Panellists provided the following feedback:
  - ❖ *More information should be provided about battery options for residential customers*
  - ❖ *More education assistance is needed concerning different renewable technologies*
  - ❖ *The Alice Springs Future Grid [which is not a project in the Proposal but introduced to inform panellists about the current state of renewables in Alice Springs] should be revisited at the October Panel*
  - ❖ *Greater detail about the projects is required for panellists to provide well-informed feedback.*
- Power and Water will make additional information available in October.



# Upgrading and enhancing our ICT capabilities



- Our information and communication technology (ICT) systems are up to 20 years old and, in some cases, are no longer supported.
- We want to ensure our systems can safely monitor, manage and control our electricity networks and adapt for the energy transition.
- At the May 2023 People's Panels, participants were provided with a summary of our ICT investments and were asked to prioritise these investments based on their perceived level of importance. The results of this exercise are in the May 2023 summary report.
- At the August 2023 People's Panels, participants were provided with an update on the Operating Technology (OT) Capability Uplift, Cloud Migration and Cyber Security projects. We also re-tested the scope of our proposed cyber security program with our panellists.
- Panellists provided the following feedback:
  - ❖ *Improvement and oversight of ICT systems should be a continuous program*
  - ❖ *Power and Water need to have redundancies in the event of disaster*
  - ❖ *More details should be provided around the security of customer information*
  - ❖ *Strong cyber security measures are important and should be regularly reviewed.*

# Prices for customer-specific services

- Power and Water offers two types of services: **Standard Control Services**, which apply to all customers, and **Alternative Control Services**, which are customer-specific services.
- We are expecting the prices for Alternative Control Services will increase in the 2024-2029 period as they are adjusted to reflect the cost of delivering these services. As such, we want to ensure our customers are aware of these changes and provided with clear justification.
- These changes were first introduced in May 2023 before being revisited in August 2023 to ensure customers' views were captured. Panellists generally understood the reasoning for the change in prices, with feedback that:
  - ❖ *Power and Water should advertise the prices of its alternative control services so people in rural areas are aware of the costs for various services*
  - ❖ *More information about the reasoning for the changes will be appreciated in the October session*
  - ❖ *Power and Water should set up a dedicated webpage for the Panel to ask questions and be provided content to absorb between sessions so they can make well-informed feedback.*

Meter requests



Solar connections



Disconnect and re-energise



Complex new connections



Data requests



# How Power and Water is looking to improve the customer experience

Using an activity where panellists answered a series of questions about the customer experience, the Panels were informed about the development of an enhanced customer experience strategy. While this is in the early stages of development, the customer experience team wanted to hear initial feedback from the Panels about what is 'good' customer service.

## What is important to you as a customer?

- Affordability and fairness in price (particularly for vulnerable customers)
- Access to information – including an easy to navigate website
- Keeping the lights on – reliability
- Continuous, high-quality service
- Clear information about what Power and Water does and does not do in the networks
- Having a trusted energy provider

## What can Power and Water do better?

- A greater presence across the Territory – clearer information, face-to-face presence, inclusivity of cultural differences
- Provide opportunities to ask questions in the community
- Clarity on charges, service performance targets and delivery times
- Explain the operation of community batteries
- Open shop-fronts to engage and interact with Power and Water

## What is Power and Water doing well?

- Community engagement concerning notifications about outages
- People's Panels are good
- Supply of electricity

# The future of our People's Panels

- As we near the end of preparing for the 2024-2029 regulatory period, we have been discussing with the People's Panels how they would like to be engaged in future, including topics for discussion and the Panels' ongoing role. Panellists provided the following suggestions:
  - ❖ *Train a select number of panellists to be community ambassadors for the region they represent*
  - ❖ *Power and Water should be an information source and use different means, such as radio, TV, website or app, to improve community education about electricity and renewable technologies*
  - ❖ *Joint Panels would benefit from using laptops and headphones, noting that face-to-face is much better*
  - ❖ *Greater visibility should be provided about upcoming or current Alice Springs and Tennant Creek projects.*
- One of the presenters suggested that Power and Water could co-design with the People's Panel on how to best improve education about complex electricity topics. In-person People's Panels will be held in October in both Alice Springs and Darwin where this proposal may be considered further.
- We are also investigating how we could involve the People's Panels in the development of our customer experience strategy. An update on this will be provided at the October 2023 Panels.

## Next steps

Our **sixth** People's Panels will be held in **October 2023** where Power and Water will present the AER's Draft Decision feedback and re-test changes to be incorporated into our Revised Regulatory Proposal.

We have considered the following feedback:

- **Prioritise in-person People's Panels.** The October Panels will be in-person Panels in Alice Springs and Darwin.
- **Focus on region-specific projects.** The October Panels will aim to consult on projects relevant to the region, i.e. Darwin will discuss Darwin-Katherine specific projects.
- **Direct the People's Panels on where to find more information about specific topics such as renewables.** Power and Water will endeavour to revisit this issue in a session in October.

