



**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**
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Energy Hardship Reference Group Terms of Reference



General matters:

- This Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Energy Hardship Reference Group (Reference Group) has been approved by Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).
- This ToR will remain in effect for two years from the time of appointment.
- MBIE may review this ToR from time to time to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Any substantive amendments will be discussed with Reference Group members.



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1. Background

The Electricity Price Review (EPR) found¹ that energy hardship is a pressing problem, and children are over-represented in affected households. The causes of energy hardship extend beyond the electricity sector, and the solutions require joint action by government, regulators and the industry. Reducing energy bills is as much about improving housing quality, consumer information and education, and energy efficiency, as it is about lower prices.

In this context and recognising the critical importance of co-ordination and communication, the Electricity Price Review recommended establishing a cross-sector energy hardship group to:

“bring together decision-makers from key government agencies, community organisations, consumer advocates, industry participants and regulators to develop and co-ordinate cohesive, cost-effective energy hardship initiatives” and to ensure that such initiatives are “well-considered, carefully co-ordinated and properly implemented”.

To give effect to this recommendation, the Minister of Energy and Resources has tasked the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) with forming an Energy Hardship Expert Panel (the Expert Panel) and an Energy Hardship Reference Group (the Reference Group). Collectively these two groups will deliver on this EPR recommendation which Cabinet supported.²

2. Purpose

The Reference Group will have three main roles:

1. To act as a forum to help members (including key government agencies, community organisations, consumer advocates, industry participants and regulators) to share information and encourage coordination to aid progression and development of energy hardship initiatives. The Reference Group also provides an opportunity for organisations to bring their energy hardship related work (existing or proposed initiatives) to discuss with the Reference Group.
2. To inform and help guide the work of the Expert Panel and its advice to government by sharing stories, technical and specialist knowledge and insights based on their experiences working on energy hardship related initiatives.
3. To provide insights to help shape and provide feedback on government’s existing as well as new or proposed energy hardship related work. This may include providing insights on the state of energy hardship, raising key issues and priorities, advising on how to expand and leverage existing work or by proposing new opportunities.

¹ <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/building-and-energy/energy-and-natural-resources/energy-consultations-and-reviews/electricity-price/>

² Refer to the [December 2019 Cabinet paper](#) and associated [Cabinet minute](#) proactively released in February 2020.



3. The role of members

Members will be asked to:

1. Share insights, learning and advice based on their experiences and understanding of communities in energy hardship and in the design and delivery of energy hardship related initiatives.
2. Assist in sharing information and promoting coordination between their own organisation, communities experiencing energy hardship and the Reference Group.
3. Represent their views in a constructive and solutions focused manner and recognising the Reference Group members may have diverse views and experiences.

4. Meetings

The Reference Group will likely meet quarterly. These meetings will be organised and facilitated by a small Secretariat within MBIE.

Additional meetings may be called when needed on particularly urgent or important issues.

Where such issues arise between scheduled meetings, MBIE may convene an additional meeting, or contact the Reference Group by email or teleconference to seek their views.

5. Membership

The Reference Group will bring together representatives from key government agencies, NGOs and industry organisations that have a good working knowledge and expertise about the drivers of energy hardship, and whose work is central to understanding the problems and to developing and delivering solutions.

MBIE will endeavour to engage with a wide range of organisations to ensure a good representation across government, NGOs, industry and community.

Membership of the Reference Group may change over time, reflecting changing work programmes of various organisations.

6. Remuneration

We acknowledged that funding may be a barrier to some member's participation in the Reference Group. Limited funding will be made available, upon application, to support participation by those from the not-for-profit sector. Members who work in the not-for-profit sector, who are not otherwise remunerated for their role in the Reference Group, may apply to MBIE for funding to assist with their expenses preparing for and attending Reference Group



meetings. MBIE will consider any such applications against its eligibility criteria and advise the applicant of the outcome.

Remuneration rates will be set in accordance with Cabinet Office instructions and the Cabinet Fees Framework.

7. Appointments and resignations

MBIE will appoint members after calling for nominations and considering nominees against the relevant criteria. Appointments are at the discretion of MBIE.

The Reference Group is being established for two years from the date of establishment. Appointments will be made for twelve months, and may be extended.

On occasion, members may delegate attendance at meetings by prior agreement with the Secretariat. If members are absent for more than two meetings, their membership may be reviewed.

Members may resign by providing the Secretariat with written notice 10 days prior to their departure.

MBIE may, at its discretion, end the appointment of any member at any point or disestablish the Reference Group.

8. Conflicts of interest

Reference Group members are likely to be directly involved in the design and delivery of energy hardship related initiatives. It is therefore expected and reasonable that members may have conflicting interests.

For the purposes of transparency, the Secretariat will actively manage a Register of Interest, and members will be required to actively disclose interests that may pose an actual, potential or perceived material conflict of interest.

9. Confidentiality and media relations

Members of the Reference Group may be presented with a range of private or confidential information, including on aspects of government agencies' business as well as commercially sensitive information. Where information is deemed confidential, members must not share or disclose that information outside the Reference Group.

The work of the Reference Group may also involve personal information. All members will ensure that the collection, use, disclosure, and storage of personal information in connection with the Reference Group is consistent with the Privacy Act 2020. These obligations continue, as appropriate, beyond membership in the Reference Group.



The Official Information Act 1982 applies to the records of the Reference Group.

Members have no media relations role and may not speak on behalf of the Reference Group.
MBIE is solely responsible for all media relations.