Submission to the AEMC

Draft determination and draft rule

National Electricity Amendment (Enhancing Distribution Network Planning and Reporting) Rule 2026

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Confidentiality: Public
Relevant interests/conflicts: None declared. This submission is made in an individual capacity and is not submitted on behalf of any organisation. I have no financial interest in any DNSP, retailer, CER provider, gas distributor or non-network solution provider affected by this rule change.
Relevant background and limits: I am a Deakin University biomedical science student and Research & Policy Coordinator and Policy Advisor with Darling Downs Environment Council. My comments are directed to the regulatory-design questions raised by the draft determination; I do not provide DNSP-specific operational, engineering, legal or cost evidence.
Reader, scope and exclusions: This submission is directed to the AEMC's decision on the ERC0410 draft rule. The primary decision-maker is the Commission. The AER is the main implementation reader for guideline, data-roadmap and regulatory-assessment matters. This submission accepts the draft rule's broad architecture and focuses on changes available within this rule-change process: the DNDP's role in regulatory assessment, annual-update materiality, distribution-network data reporting, electrification and fuel-switching disclosure, and engagement reporting. It does not ask ERC0410 to determine DNSP-specific expenditure allowances, engineering standards, gas-distribution data-sharing obligations, retail tariff design or jurisdictional electrification policy.

Recommendations at a glance

Priority	Recommendation	Purpose	Mechanism	Actor	Trigger /threshold	Timing	Why adoptable
1	Require the AER to have regard to the DNDP when assessing DNSP regulatory proposals, including substantial inconsistencies between the DNDP and the proposal.	Ensure the DNDP changes decisions, not only documents.	Final rule amendment creating a duty to consider and explain.	AEMC in the final rule; AER in distribution determinations.	When a DNSP submits a regulatory proposal and a DNDP is available.	Final rule stage.	Uses an existing planning document, does not require AER approval of the DNDP, and preserves AER discretion.
2	Require the AER planning guidelines to specify non-exhaustive material-change triggers for annual updates.	Stop five-year DNDPs becoming futile between planning cycles.	AER planning guidelines, supported by clarifying rule language if needed.	AER.	Meaningful changes to CER uptake, minimum demand, large loads, electrification, constraints, generation/storage or jurisdictional planning instruments.	Guideline development before first DNDP cycle.	Uses the annual-update structure already in the draft rule and leaves thresholds to AER consultation.

3	Require an early threshold set of already-identified, high-value network data in common fields, definitions, units and a minimum machine-readable format.	Make network data usable for CER, non-network solutions, EV charging, connection and consumer-impact decisions.	Rule-level minimum data obligation, AER data reporting guidelines and mandatory data roadmap.	AEMC and AER.	Data already held, reported or published through DAPR processes, regulatory reporting, planning systems or public portals.	Early threshold dataset as soon as practicable; fuller standardisation through AER guidelines and roadmap.	Phased, capability-based and privacy-protected; avoids waiting years for basic usable data.
4	Require DNDPs to disclose electrification and fuel-switching assumptions, data sources, data gaps and estimation methodology.	Make gas-to-electric load impacts visible in long-term electricity-network planning.	AER planning guidelines and coordination with GRC0082.	AER, with AEMC cross-process coordination.	Where a DNSP's footprint includes gas-connected premises or material electrification policy/load effects.	Guideline development and future review cycles.	Keeps gas-data-sharing obligations out of ERC0410 while requiring electricity DNSPs to disclose their own assumptions.

5	Require DNSPs to report engagement with under-represented consumer and market categories, and explain how feedback affected planning.	Prevent engagement reporting becoming a process checklist.	AER planning guidelines.	AER and DNSPs.	DNDP and annual-update engagement processes.	First DNDP and annual-update cycles.	Uses existing engagement-reporting obligations and becomes more useful for decision making without prescribing investment outcomes.

Reform logic: The final rule should ensure that DNDPs affect AER regulatory assessment, annual updates respond to material change, network data is usable early enough to support CER and non-network decisions, electrification-load assumptions are transparent, and engagement reporting shows how under-represented consumers and market participants influenced planning rather than merely recording that engagement occurred.

Key message: I support the draft rule, but the final rule should do more to ensure the new DNDP framework changes regulatory decisions, not only planning documents. The two changes that matter most are: first, the DNDP should have a defined role in AER regulatory assessment; second, already-identified high-value network data should be standardised early enough to be usable. The AER guideline process should then specify material-change triggers, electrification scenario disclosure and engagement reporting that shows how stakeholder input affected planning choices.

1. Overall position

This submission supports the draft rule. Specifically, this submission supports:

- the Commission's diagnosis that the existing distribution annual planning process can no longer fulfil its two purposes – efficient network planning (including non-network options) and transparency and information-sharing – in a high consumer energy resources (CER) environment;

- the replacement of the Distribution Annual Planning Report (DAPR) with a Distribution Network Development Plan (DNDP) prepared every five years, supported by a targeted annual update;
- the 20-year planning horizon for sub-transmission, high-voltage and medium-voltage networks, with higher-level treatment of low-voltage assets and more detailed forecasts for the first five years;
- alignment with AEMO's Inputs, Assumptions and Scenarios Report (IASR) as the baseline for DNDP scenarios, with flexibility to depart with disclosure;
- the new principles-based distribution network data reporting framework, implemented through AER guidelines under amended clause 5.13A of the National Electricity Rules (NER); and
- the AER's discretion to require DNSPs to implement a data roadmap and to set transitional arrangements according to DNSP capability.

The amended National Electricity Objective includes an emissions-reduction limb, but in this rule change that limb is best advanced through decision-relevant distribution planning, usable data, transparent electrification assumptions and efficient CER/non-network integration, not by turning ERC0410 into a general climate-target or gas-transition policy process.

The recommendations that follow assume the structure of the draft rule and target specific amendments to maximise the probability that the framework produces decisions, and that it won't simply duplicate documents.

Decision lens applied in this submission

The draft rule will improve distribution planning and CER integration if four conditions are met simultaneously:

1. Planning has regulatory consequence (the DNDP is used in regulatory assessment, not parallel to it).
2. Planning is updated when meaningful changes occur (not only on the five year cycle).
3. Data is locally useful, comparable across DNSPs, and machine-readable.
4. Planning explicitly accounts for electrification-load and fuel-switching effects, including gas-to-electric substitution where meaningful, as these will substantially reshape distribution-network loads over the DNDP's 20-year horizon.
5. Implementation legitimacy depends on engagement that reaches beyond peak industry organisations to consumer and market categories least heard in current distribution planning.

Why this submission is being made

The draft rule has been made in the right direction. The risk is that the new DNDP framework improves planning documents without sufficiently changing the decisions that affect consumers, CER integration, non-network solutions and electrification readiness. This submission focuses on the points where the final rule and AER guidelines can close that gap.

The reason this risk matters is that the existing DAPR framework did not fail only because the document was too short or too infrequent. It failed because key information was not consistently gathered, retained, standardised, published or connected to the decisions external users needed to make. The final rule should therefore avoid replacing one planning document with another unless the new framework also improves decision consequences, data usability and update discipline.

What this submission adds

The submission does not seek to repeat the general case for replacing the DAPR with the DNDP. Its contribution is more specific: it identifies where the draft rule's effectiveness may depend on whether planning information is connected to regulatory decisions, whether annual updates respond to material changes, whether data is standardised early enough to be used, whether electrification assumptions are transparent, and whether engagement reporting captures consumer categories that may otherwise be under-represented. These are the implementation points most likely to determine whether the draft rule produces better decisions rather than better documents.

Mechanism-sufficiency

A DNDP is necessary but not sufficient. A better planning document does not automatically change regulatory assessment, market behaviour, non-network investment, CER integration or consumer outcomes. It must be paired with a defined role in AER assessment, material-change triggers for annual updates, standardised data that market participants and consumer advocates can use, transparent electrification assumptions and engagement reporting that explains how feedback affected planning choices.

2. Recommendations

The recommendations are set out in the recommendations at a glance table at the start of this submission. In short, the submission asks the Commission to retain the draft rule's architecture but strengthen five implementation points: regulatory consequence, material-change updates, usable data, electrification scenario transparency and engagement reporting. The detailed rationale for each recommendation follows.

Each recommendation is intended to be capable of adoption without redesign of the draft rule. The implementation logic is set out in Section 3.

Recommendation 1 – Require the AER to have regard to the DNDP in regulatory assessment

Issue

The draft determination states that DNSPs would submit their DNDP to the AER, but the DNDP is not for the AER's approval; rather, it "can provide useful context for the DNSP's regulatory proposal and proposed investments". This wording leaves the DNDP without regulatory weight. Where a DNDP is submitted alongside a regulatory proposal but the AER is not required to consider it, the DNDP risks one of two outcomes: it simply duplicates information the AER already considers, in which case the cost of preparing it (passed on to consumers) is not justified; or it contains material the AER would find relevant in regulatory assessment but is not required to use, in which case the planning framework and the regulatory framework are misaligned at the point of decision.

This concern was not resolved by the draft rule text published on 23 April 2026 and was raised at AEMC's public forum on 14 May 2026. The issue is not whether the AER should approve the DNDP. The issue is whether a DNDP submitted with a regulatory proposal has a defined role in the AER's assessment of that proposal. That question is more specific and implementable than converting the DNDP into a separate approval instrument.

This matters because distribution planning sits within a regulated-network expenditure framework in which capital augmentation, non-network options and demand-side responses can have different commercial and regulatory implications for DNSPs. A DNDP that identifies constraints, non-network options or CER-related opportunities should therefore be visible at the point where expenditure proposals are assessed, so that the planning framework does not sit apart from the incentives and decisions that shape network investment.

Recommended amendment

Insert into the draft rule, in connection with the DNDP and the regulatory proposal process, a provision substantially as follows (drafting subject to the Commission's preferred legislative form):

> *When making a distribution determination, the AER must have regard to the most recently submitted Distribution Network Development Plan of the relevant Distribution Network Service Provider, including any meaningful inconsistency between the Plan and the regulatory proposal. The AER must record in its determination how it has had regard to the Plan and how any meaningful inconsistency has been considered in its assessment of the regulatory proposal.*

This submission does not prescribe the drafting pathway. The Commission may prefer to insert this duty within the DNDP provisions, or to achieve the same effect through other means within the existing AER assessment framework. The substantive request is a defined assessment role for the DNDP at the point of decision – not AER approval of the DNDP, and not any particular drafting pathway.

Precedent

Duties to "have regard to" specified factors are familiar in the NER. For example, clauses 6.5.6(e) and 6.5.7(e) require the AER to have regard to operating expenditure factors and capital expenditure factors respectively when assessing DNSP expenditure forecasts. The recommendation therefore uses a familiar regulatory drafting technique: a duty to consider and explain, not a duty to approve the DNDP or defer to it.

Why this is implementable

- "Have regard to" is a familiar standard in Australian energy and administrative law; it imposes a duty to consider without converting the DNDP into a separate approval document.
- The amendment requires no new instrument or new data; it gives the existing planning document regulatory effect.
- The duty to record how the AER has had regard to the DNDP is consistent with existing AER practice of publishing reasoned decisions, and creates a transparent audit trail without requiring new reporting infrastructure.
- It addresses the Commission's own stated purpose for the DNDP – "to maximise the long-term interests of consumers across a range of future scenarios" – by ensuring that purpose is actually applied to the expenditure decisions that shape consumer outcomes.

Counterargument and response

Three counterarguments merit direct engagement.

First, giving the DNDP regulatory weight may create incentives for DNSPs to align DNDPs with their regulatory proposals, reducing the planning document's independence. That concern is legitimate. This submission's response is that the AER's duty is to have regard to the DNDP, not to defer to it; the AER retains full discretion to assess proposals critically. The duty to record how meaningful inconsistencies are considered creates a public-facing accountability mechanism that disincentivises self-serving alignment. The alternative – a DNDP without regulatory weight – produces a worse outcome: a planning document that is read but not acted on.

Second, the Commission may consider that the AER will, as a matter of administrative practice, give appropriate weight to the DNDP without express direction in the Rules. This is possible but an inadequate basis to leave the question to administrative practice given the 20 year horizon the DNDP sets. The cost of express direction is low (a single clause); the cost of getting it wrong is substantial (a planning instrument that does not feed back into decisions for an entire regulatory cycle).

Third, a bare "have regard to" duty may be too weak to change regulatory outcomes. That is why this submission pairs the duty to consider the DNDP with a duty to record how any meaningful inconsistency between the DNDP and regulatory proposal has been

considered. The practical value of the amendment lies in the explanation requirement: it makes divergence visible, contestable and reviewable through the AER's published reasoning, without requiring the AER to approve the DNDP or defer to it.

Design detail for AER and AEMC consultation

The evidence of the recommendation is firmly grounded: without an express link between the DNDP and regulatory assessment, there is a foreseeable risk of misalignment between non-binding planning documents and binding expenditure determinations. The exact legislative drafting is properly a matter for the Commission and Parliamentary Counsel; this submission does not seek to prescribe it.

Recommendation 2 – Specify material-change triggers in the AER planning guidelines

Issue

The draft rule sensibly retains annual transparency by introducing an annual update between five-year DNDPs. The annual update is intended to capture meaningful changes since the DNDP or the previous annual update across network operating changes, investment and planning coordination, project delivery and planning activity, and non-network actions and engagement. This is a clear improvement on a five-yearly cycle alone.

Without explicit guidance on what counts as a "meaningful change", however, DNSPs may interpret significance inconsistently. The Commission's own diagnosis of the existing DAPR regime cites inconsistent voluntary practice as a core problem – "valuable information, such as low voltage circuit power flows and power quality data, (is) not being consistently gathered, calculated or retained, even on constrained circuits". Without specification, the same inconsistency can re-emerge in the annual update.

Recommended amendment

This preserves flexibility over thresholds while ensuring the annual-update framework cannot omit the major categories of change most relevant to CER integration, electrification and network planning. Suggested trigger categories include, where material to decisions regarding network planning assumptions, forecast constraints, planned augmentation, non-network opportunities or consumer-facing outcomes, material changes in CER uptake, large new loads, electrification and gas-disconnection effects, minimum demand, export constraints, distribution-connected generation or storage, and jurisdictional planning instruments. A fuller illustrative list is provided in Appendix A. The AER should determine exact thresholds through guideline consultation.

A clarifying provision should be inserted into the draft rule confirming that the AER's guidelines must specify a non-exhaustive set of material-change categories for annual updates, while leaving exact thresholds, evidence requirements and reporting detail to AER guideline consultation.

Why this is implementable

- It builds entirely on the annual update structure already in the draft rule; no new instrument is required.
- It assigns specification to the AER guidelines, which the draft rule already requires the AER to prepare by 1 March 2028 and to review at least every five years.
- Many of the underlying inputs are already captured by DNSPs for network planning, regulatory reporting or emerging demand-side-factor obligations, although the AER would need to test capability, thresholds and reporting burden through guideline consultation.
- It addresses the Commission's own stated concern about inconsistent reporting without imposing a new five-year-cycle commitment.

Design detail for AER consultation

Material-change specification is needed if the annual update is to deliver the consistency the Commission seeks. The exact list and thresholds are properly a matter for the AER's guideline-development consultation, which is better positioned than this submission to test against current and emerging DNSP reporting capabilities.

Recommendation 3 – Standardised, machine-readable distribution-network data with a phased roadmap

Issue

The Commission's diagnosis is correct: voluntary DNSP publication has produced inconsistent transparency across the National Electricity Market (NEM). The draft rule's remedy – a principles-based framework implemented through AER guidelines – is the right structural choice. There is a residual risk, however, that flexibility without minimum standardisation reproduces the underlying problem the framework is intended to solve. Network proponents, CER aggregators, EV charge-point operators and non-network solution providers cannot use data that is in inconsistent formats, definitions or units across DNSPs.

This concern is shared by the rule change proponent. In its submission to the directions paper, Energy Consumers Australia urged the Commission to adopt a more prescriptive approach to network data reporting where the evidence base and knowledge already exist to support specific data acquisition and reporting. ECA's position is that greater transparency on network reporting was a clear driver and identified outcome of the rule change request, and that meaningful reporting decisions should not be deferred entirely to later cost-benefit assessment where particular data needs have already been identified by the AER, the rule change request and stakeholders.

Thus, the central question is not only whether data specifications sit in AER guidelines or a data roadmap, but whether the rule itself requires reporting of a threshold set of already known, high value data needs.

A further market-use issue is that data transparency alone may not be sufficient to support investment, procurement, operational or connection decisions. Market participants need data that is sufficiently accurate, timely, consistent across DNSPs and capable of being used within real market, procurement or connection processes. The data-reporting framework should therefore make clear not only what data is published, but also how current it is, what level of reliance users can reasonably place on it, and how it connects to practical commercial or network-access opportunities.

The draft determination contemplates that AER guidelines could be consolidated with planning guidelines, "enabling common data standards and improving comparability". This submission urges the Commission to go further than enabling this outcome – to require it as the threshold standard.

Recommended amendment

The final rule and AER data reporting guidelines should together require, at minimum:

1. common data fields, definitions, units and reporting periods across all DNSPs;
2. an early threshold set of network data elements that must be reported because they have already been identified as necessary to support CER integration, electrification planning, non-network solutions and efficient network utilisation;
3. minimum metadata on data currency, accuracy, update frequency, aggregation level, limitations and intended use, so users can understand the level of reliance that can reasonably be placed on each dataset;
4. a minimum publication standard that is machine-readable, for example CSV or JSON via standardised endpoints, in addition to any human-readable narrative reports;
5. a required phased data roadmap that publishes high-value, low-risk datasets first and sequences more granular or capability-dependent datasets through AER guideline consultation; and
6. an explicit interpretation of "net economic benefit" in the draft rule's data-reporting principles that recognises avoided network augmentation, faster deployment of non-network solutions, improved CER and connection investment signals, and reduced friction at the connection interface.

This reflects the principle advanced by Energy Consumers Australia: that a certain level of network data visibility is essential to support the energy transition, even where the full value of that visibility is difficult to capture through a traditional cost-benefit assessment. This principle should be applied only to already-identified threshold datasets. More granular, novel or capability-dependent datasets should remain subject to AER guideline consultation, phasing, privacy protection and net-economic-benefit assessment.

Suggested phasing

The AER should determine exact phasing through guideline consultation. This submission recommends a three-stage approach: an early threshold dataset, standardised Phase 1 publication, and later roadmap datasets for more granular or capability-dependent information. The detailed illustrative phasing is set out in Appendix A.

Distributional and small-business visibility

The data roadmap should also consider a distributional reporting stream where this can be done without identifying individual customers. At minimum, the AER should consult on whether DNSPs can publish aggregated residential consumption and export data at suburb, postcode, feeder or zone-substation level, separated where feasible between solar, solar-and-battery, battery-only and non-solar households. Over time, this should include separate treatment of smart-meter and accumulation-meter households where data quality permits. The AER should also consider whether comparable aggregated reporting is feasible for small business customers, including consumption and export patterns for solar, battery and non-solar customers, because small businesses may otherwise be less visible than large industrial customers in network planning and cost-recovery processes. Any such reporting should be aggregated, privacy-protected and subject to the draft rule's confidentiality, data-quality and net-economic-benefit principles.

The AER's data roadmap power in the draft rule provides the right vehicle for this phasing; the recommendation is that the roadmap is required, not optional, and includes phase-by-phase coverage commitments.

Why this is implementable

- It uses the existing draft-rule mechanisms (AER guidelines and the AER's data roadmap power); no new instrument is required.
- It aligns with the National Consumer Energy Resources Roadmap and the AEMO/AusNet/ARENA Consumer Energy Resources Data Exchange initiative, which together are building the digital infrastructure to support exactly the data flows this recommendation contemplates.
- Some DNSPs already publish portions of the early threshold dataset voluntarily through DAPR or network data portals, demonstrating that the recommendation builds on existing practice rather than requiring wholly novel data systems.
- In many cases the relevant data already exists within DNSP network management systems, but publication may require validation, aggregation, privacy review and standardisation. The phased data roadmap recommended above is designed to manage these costs, by publishing high-value, low-risk datasets first and deferring more complex data (such as low-voltage circuit power flows) until the AER's capability assessment supports it.

This staged approach also manages reliance risk. Early datasets should be those that can be published with sufficient quality, consistency and explanatory metadata to be useful for market participants, rather than publishing more granular data before users can understand its limitations or act on it safely.

The purpose of the early threshold dataset is to avoid a gap where the final rule acknowledges the need for network data but practical data needed for CER, VPP, EV charging and non-network investment decisions remains unavailable until after key investment and connection decisions have already been made.

Design detail for AER consultation

Minimum standardisation is necessary if the framework is to deliver the practical benefits the Commission identifies. The rule should prescribe a threshold set of already-identified, high-value data needs, while leaving the AER to test capability variance, privacy constraints, phasing, formats, metadata, aggregation levels and future expansion through guideline consultation. The specific Phase 1/2/3 phasing above is illustrative. This submission's core design principle is: mandate known essential data now; phase, refine and expand the rest through AER guidelines and the data roadmap.

Recommendation 4 – Require explicit electrification-load and fuel-switching assumptions in DNDP scenarios

Issue

Over the DNDP's 20-year planning horizon, gas-to-electric substitution will be a substantial driver of distribution-network loads in jurisdictions with significant residential and commercial gas use, particularly Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, parts of New South Wales and parts of South Australia. AEMO's Gas-Electricity Meter Data Linking Project Report finds that homes with electric heating exhibit pronounced electricity-import peaks in colder months, and that, in Victoria, widespread electrification may shift peak demand from summer to winter as heating demand surpasses cooling demand. AEMO's 2026 Victorian Gas Planning Report Update also states that 2026 1-in-2 and 1-in-20 peak-day system demands are forecast to be 8.5 per cent and 8.7 per cent lower than forecast in the 2025 VGPR, due to increased electrification of gas demand. This reinforces the significance of electrification for distribution-load planning over the DNDP horizon.

This submission does not propose that ERC0410 attempt to resolve gas-distribution data sharing. That is properly the domain of GRC0082 (*Gas Networks in Transition*, final determination expected 17 December 2026) and of jurisdictional policy. What ERC0410 can and should do is require electricity DNSPs to be transparent about how they have incorporated electrification and fuel-switching into their own DNDP scenarios.

A clarifying provision should also confirm that DNDP scenario-disclosure requirements include electrification and fuel-switching assumptions where those assumptions are significant to distribution-network planning, with detailed content, thresholds and data-gap reporting to be specified through AER planning guidelines.

Recommended amendment

At the AER planning guideline level (the primary mechanism), the guidelines should require that, where a DNSP's footprint includes premises connected to a gas distribution network or where jurisdictional electrification policies are in force, the DNDP must disclose:

- the electrification and fuel-switching assumptions used in the DNDP's scenarios, including the data sources relied on and any departures from AEMO's IASR;
- the data inputs available to the DNSP about gas-network disconnection trajectories, premises types, and spatial concentration of electrified loads in the DNSP's footprint;
- meaningful data gaps the DNSP has identified – in particular, datasets that sit with gas distributors or jurisdictional bodies and are not currently available to the electricity DNSP; and
- where data is not available, the DNSP's methodology for estimating electrification-driven load growth at zone-substation level, and the resulting uncertainty range.

This is a scenario-disclosure obligation, not a gas-data-sharing obligation, so it is therefore in the scope of ERC0410. It tells stakeholders – and the AER – what the DNSP has assumed and what it does not know. It does not impose obligations on gas distributors.

Cross-process coordination

Before publishing the final ERC0410 rule, the Commission should formally coordinate with the GRC0082 process so that the AER's ERC0410 planning and data reporting guidelines, when issued, are drafted to be capable of incorporating gas-electric data once it becomes available through GRC0082 or successor processes. The first DNDPs will set the framework for the first cycles of 20-year distribution investment; the next opportunity to correct any omission is the AER's five-yearly guideline review.

Why this is implementable

- It sits inside the IASR-baseline approach the draft rule already adopts. DNSPs already have flexibility to depart from the IASR with disclosure; the recommendation specifies one matter on which that disclosure is required.
- It does not impose obligations on gas distributors; it requires electricity DNSPs to disclose what they have assumed and what data gaps remain. Gas-side reform is handled by GRC0082.

- It uses AEMO data infrastructure already in development, including the Gas-Electricity Meter Data Linking work and the Demand Side Factors Information Guidelines.
- The drafting effort is small: this is guideline content, not new rule architecture.

Design detail for AER consultation

That electrification will meaningfully affect DNDP outcomes in Victoria, the ACT and parts of other NEM jurisdictions is well established in AEMO's own data. The disclosure formulation above is illustrative; the AER and AEMO are better placed than this submission to set minimum thresholds and define what counts as meaningful. The recommendation is the disclosure obligation itself, not its exact wording.

Recommendation 5 – Specify under-represented stakeholder categories in engagement reporting

Issue

The draft rule requires DNSPs to report on engagement with relevant stakeholders, and allows DNSPs to draw on existing regulatory proposal consultation processes to reduce duplication. This is a reasonable starting point. The risk, however, is that without specification, DNSPs default to engagement with the set of capital-city peak bodies, large customers and active CER proponents who already engage – leaving regional consumers, renters, low-income households, small business, local governments and non-network solution providers under-represented in formal network planning engagement relative to large industrial customers and peak consumer bodies.

A further risk is that engagement reporting becomes process-based rather than outcome-based. DNSPs may report that engagement occurred while still treating engagement primarily as a way to inform stakeholders of planned decisions, rather than as a process that meaningfully shapes scenario assumptions, non-network options, augmentation choices or consumer-impact assessment. This is particularly important for consumers who are less able to access CER, smart appliances or flexible-demand opportunities but may still bear increasing network and jurisdictional scheme costs through tariffs and cost recovery.

At the AEMC's 14 May 2026 public forum, several participants noted this risk, which is important because engagement reporting can become process-based rather than outcome-based if guidelines do not require DNSPs to explain how engagement shaped planning decisions.

Recommended amendment

The AER's planning guidelines should require DNSPs, for each DNDP and annual update, to:

1. document engagement separately for the following categories: regional consumers, not exclusively through capital-city peak bodies; small business; local governments within the DNSP's service area; renters' organisations and tenants' advocates; low-income consumer advocates; CER service providers; and non-network solution providers including community energy proponents;
2. describe specifically how feedback from each category influenced, or did not influence, the DNDP and annual update, with reference to scenario assumptions, identified constraints, non-network options considered, planned augmentation, tariff or cost-recovery implications where relevant, and consumer-impact assessment; and
3. where engagement with a category was attempted but did not occur, or where feedback was received but not reflected in the DNDP, explain why.

This is an outcome-linked engagement reporting requirement rather than a substantive investment obligation. It is intended to make DNSP engagement choices transparent and contestable, without prescribing engagement outcomes.

Why this is implementable

- It applies to the AER planning guidelines the draft rule already requires.
- It does not impose a hard investment obligation; it specifies the content of reporting the draft rule already requires.
- It is consistent with the AEMC's purpose statement for the DNDP and with the NEM's consumer-interest framing.
- It complements the AER's existing Consumer Engagement Guideline and Consumer Challenge Panel processes without duplicating them.

Design detail for AER consultation

Specification of under-represented categories is needed if the engagement-reporting obligation is to do the work the Commission expects of it. The exact category list above is illustrative; the AER will be better placed to test the list against current DNSP engagement practice and to align it with the AER's existing Consumer Engagement Guideline.

This submission does not assume that engagement reporting alone will resolve distributional inequity in the energy transition. Engagement reporting should be treated as a minimum process safeguard. The complementary data task is addressed in Recommendation 3, which proposes aggregated, privacy-protected reporting on consumption, export, CER access and cost impacts so governments, regulators and advocates can identify inequities and design more systemic responses.

3. Implementation pathway and minimum-viable fallback

The five recommendations above are complementary, not independent. Each addresses a different point in the planning-to-decision pipeline. Together, they convert the draft rule from a structurally improved DAPR into a framework where the planning document carries regulatory consequence, is updated when material changes occur, produces locally useful data, accounts explicitly for electrification, and is engaged with by the consumers most likely to be affected.

Implementation, safeguards and risk controls

Recommendation	Responsible actor	Instrument	Timing	Main implementation risk	Risk control
1. AER must have regard to the DNDP	AEMC, through the final rule	NER amendment	Final rule stage	DNDP becomes contextual material without changing assessment	AER must consider the DNDP and explain meaningful inconsistencies, without approving or deferring to it
2. Material-change triggers	AER	Planning guidelines	Guideline development before first DNDP cycle	Thresholds become inconsistent or overly prescriptive	Use a non-exhaustive trigger list and consult on thresholds, capability and burden

3. Standardised network data	AEMC and AER	Rule-level minimum obligation, AER data reporting guidelines and data roadmap	Early threshold dataset as soon as practicable; fuller standardisation through guidelines and roadmap	Data is published before quality, privacy, reliance or comparability issues are managed	Phase publication, require metadata, use aggregation and confidentiality controls, and prioritise high-value, low-risk datasets
4. Electrification and fuel-switching assumptions	AER, with AEMC cross-process coordination	Planning guidelines and coordination with GRC0082	Guideline development and future review cycles	ERC0410 is asked to solve gas data-sharing issues outside its scope	Require scenario disclosure only; leave gas data-sharing obligations to GRC0082 or successor processes

5. Under-represented stakeholder engagement	AER	Planning guidelines	DNDP and annual-update engagement reporting	Engagement becomes a process checklist rather than influencing planning assumptions	Require DNSPs to explain how feedback influenced, or did not influence, scenarios, constraints, non-network options, augmentation and consumer-impact assessment

Operational stress-test

Three implementation scenarios illustrate why the safeguards are needed. If CER uptake or minimum-demand conditions change meaningfully between five year DNDPs, Recommendation 2 ensures that the annual update records the change rather than waiting for the next full cycle. If a DNSP's regulatory proposal departs meaningfully from its DNDP, Recommendation 1 ensures that the AER and stakeholders can see how that inconsistency was considered. If electrification accelerates in a gas connected area before gas-electricity data-sharing issues are fully resolved, Recommendation 4 ensures the DNSP still discloses the assumptions, data gaps and uncertainty range used for electricity network planning.

It is acknowledged that DNSPs may prefer flexibility, lower reporting burden and protection of confidential or operationally sensitive information. Those concerns are legitimate, but they should not weaken the framework to the point where planning, data and engagement remain difficult for external users to test or rely on. The minimum necessary concessions are: thresholds should be set through AER consultation; privacy and confidentiality must be protected; granular or novel datasets should be phased; DNSP capability should inform transitional arrangements; and ERC0410 should not impose gas-distribution data-sharing obligations that belong in GRC0082 or successor processes.

This submission does not concede below the minimum effective version: the DNDP must have a defined role in regulatory assessment, early high-value network data must be standardised enough to be usable, meaningful assumptions and data gaps must be visible, and engagement reporting must show whether feedback affected planning choices.

If these issues are left unresolved, the draft rule may still improve the form of distribution planning but fail to change enough of its substance. The main risk is a planning document that is more comprehensive than the DAPR but still weakly connected to expenditure decisions, updated inconsistently between five year cycles, supported by data that is difficult to compare or use, unclear about electrification assumptions, and shaped mainly by stakeholders already able to participate in network planning processes.

Burden of proof and confidentiality boundary

The recommendations place explanation duties on the parties that hold the relevant information. DNSPs hold the planning assumptions, constraint information, data-quality information, engagement records and proposed investment rationale. Consumers, CER providers, non-network proponents and local governments generally cannot reconstruct those matters from outside the planning process.

Where confidentiality concerns arise, they should not be treated as a general reason to avoid disclosure. The information provided to the public/users should at the minimum include the existence of relevant constraints, data currency, aggregation level, update frequency, intended use, limitations, material assumptions, material inconsistencies and whether engagement affected planning choices. Genuinely sensitive operational, security, privacy or commercially confidential detail can be aggregated, redacted, delayed, provided to the regulator only, or sequenced through the AER's data roadmap.

These confidentiality boundaries should be applied through the AER data reporting guidelines under amended clause 5.13A and any confidentiality, data-quality and security provisions in the final rule.

Priority ordering by instrument

If the Commission can adopt only some of these recommendations, the submission proposes the following allocation by the instrument that should carry each change. This structure is intended to make the package easier to act on:

Must adopt in the final rule:

- Recommendation 1 (AER must have regard to the DNDP, with the duty to record how the regard has been given). This is the highest-priority single change and cannot be deferred to AER guideline-stage consultation.

Should guide AER guideline development under the rule:

- Recommendation 2 (material-change triggers in the annual update).
- Recommendation 3 (an early threshold set of already-identified, high-value network data, with AER guidelines and data roadmaps to standardise, protect, phase and expand additional datasets).

- Recommendation 5 (outcome-linked reporting on engagement with under-represented stakeholder categories).

Should be reflected as a DNDP scenario-disclosure requirement and cross-process alignment:

- Recommendation 4 (explicit electrification-load and fuel-switching scenario disclosure, with cross-process coordination with GRC0082).

Minimum-viable fallback

If, on balance, the Commission is not persuaded to adopt the full package, the minimum-viable amendment package consists of two changes:

1. Recommendation 1 in full (AER must have regard to the DNDP, with the duty to record how the regard has been given). If the Commission does not accept imposing an express "have regard to" obligation, the final rule or final determination should at minimum require DNSPs to identify and explain any meaningful inconsistency between the DNDP and regulatory proposal, and require the AER to explain how that inconsistency has been considered.
2. A condensed version of Recommendation 3: the final rule should require an early threshold dataset for already-identified, high-value network data needs, published in common fields, definitions, units and a minimum machine-readable format where feasible, using data already available through DAPR processes, regulatory reporting, network-planning systems or public portals. AER guidelines and data roadmaps should then refine, phase, standardise and expand the dataset, but the framework should not defer all data specification until future guideline processes.

These two amendments together deliver the largest marginal increase in the framework's practical effectiveness for the smallest drafting cost.

Proportionality and cost

The recommendations are aimed to support the long-term interests of consumers while managing implementation cost, reporting burden, confidentiality, data quality and DNSP capability.

Stakeholders have raised, including at the 14 May 2026 public forum, that the cost of preparing a DNDP will ultimately be borne by consumers, and this is acknowledged seriously. The recommendations in this submission have been chosen to avoid imposing new instruments or large new data-collection obligations: Recommendation 1 gives existing planning weight; Recommendations 2, 3 and 5 specify the content of guidelines the AER is already required to produce; Recommendation 4 specifies disclosure of assumptions a DNSP will, of necessity, already be making.

The early threshold dataset obligation has been deliberately limited to already-identified, high-value data needs, with priority implementation for data already held, already reported, already published or readily available through existing DNSP planning, reporting or network-management systems. More granular, novel or privacy-sensitive datasets should remain subject to AER guideline consultation, capability assessment, aggregation requirements and phased implementation. This preserves proportionality while avoiding a multi-year gap in access to basic network data that market participants and consumer advocates already need.

The submission accepts that additional reporting, data standardisation and explanation duties may involve implementation cost. The point is not that these changes are costless, but that they use instruments already contemplated by the draft rule: AER planning guidelines, AER data reporting guidelines, data roadmaps, annual updates and the regulatory proposal process. The cost of not addressing these issues is that the DNDP framework may impose new planning effort while still leaving key decisions, data and assumptions difficult for consumers, market participants and the AER to test or rely on.

Low-risk logic

The submission's confidence is highest on the general direction: the draft rule is more likely to produce practical benefits if the DNDP has a defined assessment role, annual updates respond to material changes, and network data is standardised into usable formats. Confidence is moderate on implementation detail: exact thresholds, formats, aggregation levels, data-quality requirements and transition dates should be tested through AER consultation because DNSP capability, privacy constraints and system costs will vary. Confidence is lower on precise magnitude: this submission does not quantify the consumer-cost impact of each reporting obligation or the avoided cost of better data and planning.

The recommendations made are low-risk and they don't close off other options. They strengthen recurring planning, disclosure and assessment cycles while leaving technical design to the AER's guideline and roadmap processes. Evidence that a proposed threshold or dataset would impose disproportionate cost, create meaningful privacy risk or produce data that users cannot safely rely on would justify narrowing, staging or delaying that specific element, but would not remove the need for decision-relevant planning, material-change discipline and usable data.

Timing

The draft rule sets an implementation timeline of: AER initial data reporting guidelines by 1 March 2028; DNSP compliance within six months (by 1 September 2028); AER discretion on transitional arrangements and data roadmap. This submission notes:

- the six-month compliance window should be used to standardise and operationalise the early threshold dataset, not to defer all material data specification. The AER's transitional-arrangements and data-roadmap powers should manage sequencing for more granular, novel or capability-dependent datasets;

- for NSW DNSPs whose 2030-2035 regulatory proposals are due in 2029, the transitional arrangements should align the first DNDP with the regulatory proposal to avoid duplication with a final DAPR in late 2027; and
- the AER's guideline-review obligation (at least every five years) provides the right mechanism to fold in outputs from the National CER Roadmap, the AEMO CER Data Exchange and the GRC0082 process as they mature.

Review hook

The AER should review the operation of the DNDP, annual update, electrification-disclosure and data-reporting guidelines after the first DNDP cycle. The review should test whether DNDPs were considered in regulatory determinations, whether material-change triggers were used consistently, whether electrification and fuel-switching assumptions were disclosed and improved, whether published data was used by CER providers and non-network proponents, and whether engagement reporting showed how feedback affected planning decisions.

4. Conclusion

The Commission has correctly identified that the existing distribution annual planning framework is no longer fit for purpose in a high-CER, electrifying system. The draft rule's structure – a five-yearly DNDP with annual updates, a 20-year horizon, IASR-aligned scenarios, AER planning guidelines, and a principles-based data reporting framework – is the right structural answer. This submission's recommendations are intended to give that structure the regulatory consequence, data quality, scenario realism and engagement legitimacy it will need to produce the outcomes the Commission seeks.

The practical request is limited: retain the draft rule's architecture, but strengthen the link between planning and regulatory assessment; require early standardisation of already-identified high-value network data; and direct the AER guideline process toward material-change triggers, electrification scenario disclosure and engagement reporting that shows how stakeholder input affected planning choices.

Where the submission has used specific evidence, the source is identified in Section 6. Where the submission has expressed a view that depends on legislative drafting, regulatory-impact analysis or DNSP capability evidence that is properly the domain of the Commission, the AER and AEMO, the recommendation is explained as a substantive ask, with the exact wording or threshold left to the responsible body.

The distribution network is where the energy transition is physically delivered to households and businesses. Planning that genuinely shapes investment decisions, rather than producing a document that is read but not acted on, is therefore central to whether that transition serves the long-term interests of consumers. That is the standard against which this rule should be judged.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation. I am able to provide further detail on any of the recommendations or to participate in any further consultation processes the Commission convenes ahead of the final determination expected on 16 July 2026.

Source and evidence method

This submission uses five source categories. First, it uses the AEMC draft determination, draft rule and public-forum materials as the primary sources for the rule-change scope. Second, it uses the National Electricity Rules for existing regulatory architecture and drafting analogies. Third, it uses AEMO materials for gas-electricity demand interaction and electrification-load evidence. AEMO materials are used as planning and forecasting evidence, not as determinative proof of the exact local load effect for each DNSP. Fourth, it uses Energy Consumers Australia materials where the submission refers to the rule-change proponent's position on network-data visibility. Fifth, it uses related AEMC, AER, AEMO, DCCEEW and jurisdictional materials where they clarify implementation pathways, related processes or data infrastructure.

The submission does not rely on media reporting for any core claim. Where a recommendation depends on DNSP capability, data quality, confidentiality, privacy, cost or threshold design, the submission treats that matter as a question for AER guideline consultation rather than asserting a fixed threshold. The source-use approach is agency-source-first: the AEMC's draft determination, draft rule, stated problem diagnosis and rule-change architecture provide the frame; external sources are used to test assumptions, support implementation design or identify related data pathways.

Appendix A – Illustrative material-change triggers and data phasing

A1. Illustrative material-change triggers for annual updates

The AER should determine exact thresholds through guideline consultation. Suggested trigger categories include, where relevant to network planning assumptions, forecast constraints, planned augmentation, non-network opportunities or consumer-facing outcomes:

- meaningful shifts in CER uptake trajectory at zone-substation level relative to the DNDP forecast;
- large load connections or pending connection applications, including data centres, electrified industrial sites, hydrogen production and EV depot loads;
- gas-network disconnection rates or jurisdictional electrification policy changes within the DNSP's footprint that materially affect electricity demand assumptions;
- observed reductions in minimum demand at zone-substation level beyond defined thresholds;
- emergence of new export constraints or expansion of existing curtailment;
- commissioning or decommissioning of distribution-connected generation or storage; and
- jurisdictional planning instrument changes, including new renewable energy zones, jurisdictional system plans or system-security obligations affecting the DNSP's footprint.

A2. Illustrative data-roadmap phasing
The AER should determine exact phasing through guideline consultation, but the roadmap should distinguish between three categories of data.

Early threshold dataset: As early as practicable after the final rule is made, DNSPs should publish a minimum dataset directed to already-identified, high-value data needs, with priority given to data already available through DAPR processes, regulatory reporting, network-planning systems, existing public portals or other readily available DNSP systems. This should prioritise zone-substation-level capacity, peak demand, minimum demand, indicative hosting capacity, known constraints, planned augmentation and planned non-network options, subject to privacy, confidentiality and data-quality controls.

Standardised Phase 1 dataset: By the draft rule's first compliance date, the AER's data reporting guidelines should standardise the early threshold dataset across DNSPs, including common fields, definitions, units, metadata, update frequency and machine-readable publication format.

Later roadmap datasets: Feeder-level, low-voltage, power-quality, curtailment, reverse-flow, embedded-generation, EV and electrification-load datasets should be phased according to DNSP capability, privacy risk, data quality and net economic benefit, with priority given to constrained circuits and high-value use cases.

5. Sources

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2. AEMC, *Public forum slides – Enhancing Distribution Network Planning and Reporting*, public forum held 14 May 2026.
3. Energy Consumers Australia, *Rule change request – Integrated Distribution System Planning*, January 2025.
4. Energy Consumers Australia, *Submission to the AEMC's Integrated Distribution System Planning Directions Paper*, 13 November 2025.
5. AEMC, *Final determination – Improving consideration of demand-side factors in the ISP*, 19 December 2024.
6. AEMC, *Gas Networks in Transition* (GRC0082), consultation paper September 2025 and directions paper March 2026; final determination expected by 17 December 2026.
7. National Electricity Rules, clause 5.13 and Schedule 5.8 – distribution annual planning report requirements.
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9. National Electricity Rules, clauses 6.5.6(e) and 6.5.7(e) – operating expenditure factors and capital expenditure factors the AER must have regard to when assessing DNSP expenditure forecasts.
10. AEMO, *Gas-Electricity Meter Data Linking Project Report*, January 2025.

11. AEMO, *Gas-Electricity Meter Data Linking Project* webpage, cited for the project's analysis of gas and electricity consumption patterns for around three million residential and small commercial customers.
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16. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *National Consumer Energy Resources Roadmap*, endorsed by Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, July 2024.
17. AEMO / AusNet / ARENA, *Consumer Energy Resources Data Exchange* industry co-design materials, 2024–2025.
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