



Experiences of energy consumption for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities

Highlights from an Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) research report

Background

The Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) is the peak body for all culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in NSW. Its main activities are advocacy, education and community development.

The ECC employs a pool of bilingual educators to work with CALD communities on a range of environment issues.

The educators became aware of concerns around energy consumption among the groups with whom they worked. The ECC was interested to investigate the experiences of energy consumption of CALD communities, both householders and small business owners, as there had been little previous research into these communities' views.

The topics investigated were: types of energy used; choice of energy retailer and changes made; appliance types and energy use; paying for energy; reliability of supply; making energy savings and knowledge of the carbon price.

Householder survey

To understand the experiences of and concerns about energy consumption of CALD householders, the research surveyed 78 people with an additional 31 taking part in focus groups.

Householders surveyed came from groups who arrived in Australia in three distinct post war periods:

the 1940s and 1950s (Greeks and Italians)

the 1970s and 1980s: (Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese (Cantonese) and Spanish speakers from Latin America)

newly arrived migrants and refugees: Sudanese (Arabic speakers), Chinese (Mandarin speakers), Tamil and Hazara (Afghan)

The research sought to investigate if there were any noteworthy differences between the groups based on length of time in Australia and if there were common responses across the groups.

Overall the groups who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s were the most knowl-

edgeable about aspects of energy supply, energy use and conservation. They were the most likely of the three groups to take action at home to reduce energy use; had a better understanding of the energy use of appliances than the other groups and could name a number of actions they took to conserve energy; wanted to save money but some also mentioned environmental considerations.

Counter to an assumption that the longer migrants have been in Australia the more familiar they are likely to be with information in a range of areas, the older Greeks and Italians surveyed were less likely than the other groups to be aware of various aspects of energy use and conservation.

Of the newly arrived migrants and refugees who have been in Australia an average of eight years, three quarters had been contacted by an energy retailer to change retailer. About half changed because they thought it would save money. Of those who didn't, said they didn't trust the companies or didn't think

it would make any difference. When this group took action to reduce their energy use, it was to save money.

Most of the newly arrived migrants and refugees prefer to pay their energy bills at the post office. This was also the preferred method of payment across all the groups surveyed.

Small business survey

Thirty small businesses took part in the research conducted between November 2011 and February 2012. Four types of ethno-specific businesses were surveyed: Asian restaurants, Vietnamese hot bread shops, kebab shops run by Arabic speaking owners, and small groceries run by Tamil and Afghan owners.

CALD small businesses:

are concerned about the impact of rising energy prices on their businesses. About half of the businesses had been visited by a retailer and the majority of these decided not to change. Most didn't think the answer to rising energy costs was to change retailer.

are not being provided with information about how they can reduce their energy use. Some owners don't think there is much scope in their business to reduce their energy consumption.

Some businesses reported taking energy saving actions, typically the obvious things that made sense: turning off unused lights and appliances; regular checks of temperatures and seals on freezers and refrigerators; educating staff.

Businesses taking actions to save energy were doing it to save money, although they had to weigh up considerations of customer comfort and maintaining their products in good condition in a competitive business field.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations to guide the ECC in its advocacy and education work.

These include:

All respondents in the household survey preferred to receive information about energy costs and savings in their first language. Develop information material in the major community languages as well as the languages of the new and emerging communities.

Use the post office as an outlet to disseminate information to CALD householders in community languages about any new technologies (smart meters), the financial help option and other information about energy consumption and conservation.

CALD small businesses need assistance to understand the different types of contracts and their implications. This information needs to be in community languages and developed as part of an energy information package for businesses.

CALD small businesses need assistance to understand their businesses' energy use and how they can reduce or conserve energy. This can be done through individual business energy audits and/or through information

sessions delivered in community languages.

Recruit and train bilingual educators in the languages of the new and emerging communities to deliver information sessions on energy markets and conservation, demand side participation and hardship assistance.

The impact of the carbon price on CALD households and small businesses is not well understood. Further information and clarification about how it will affect these consumers should be included in broader energy information sessions for CALD householders and small businesses.

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