

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Climate Action
Minister for Energy and Resources
Minister for the State Electricity Commission



Thursday, 4 July 2024

POST-STORMS NETWORK OUTAGE REVIEW ENTERS NEXT PHASE

The independent review into how privately owned power companies responded to February's destructive storms is moving into its next phase.

Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio today announced the Network Outage Review expert panel had delivered its interim report and is now opening further public consultation with affected communities.

The panel made up of Rosemary Sinclair, Gerard Brody and Kevin Kehl was appointed following the 13 February storms that left more than 530,000 electricity customers without power.

About 90 per cent of customers who lost power in the 13 February storms were restored within the first 72 hours, but the hardest hit communities in AusNet's distribution area – including Mirboo North, Emerald, Cockatoo, Gembrook and Monbulk – experienced prolonged outages.

Communities have already told the panel that making sure damaged infrastructure such as fallen powerlines were safe was most important and implementing temporary generation – particularly for main street services such as petrol stations and grocery stores – would improve their resilience and safety.

Communities also said that accurate and timely information about the situation was critical to know what was happening, and when they were likely to have power restored. The interim report notes AusNet's Outage Tracker failed and businesses should do more to communicate with customers with limited phone and internet access.

Having listened to affected communities and investigated the processes of the privately owned power companies that own the network, the panel will make recommendations on the operational response of the companies. It is looking at contingency planning, timely and effective resource deployment and restoring supply.

The review has also engaged and considered input from the Australian Energy Market Operator, Australian Energy Regulator, Energy Safe Victoria, the Essential Services Commission, Emergency Management Victoria and other regulators.

The interim report is available for consultation from early July via Engage Victoria, with sessions to be held in affected communities throughout July. The final report and recommendations will be released in August.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio

"It's clear that improvements must be made in the way privately owned power companies respond to extreme weather events and how they communicate with the residents and businesses who rely on them."

"I thank the panel for their comprehensive work to date and encourage all Victorians who were affected by these outages to get involved in the consultation."

Quote attributable to Network Outage Review chair Rosemary Sinclair

"We've heard from the resilient communities who suffered most during the February storms and subsequent power outages. There are lessons for all distribution businesses from these experiences to improve outcomes for Victorians in the future."

Media contact: Liam Miles 0492 504 682 | liam.miles@minstaff.vic.gov.au