

# Tweed Energy Access and Poverty Plan



## Energy poverty

The NSW Energy Efficiency Action Plan considers a household to be experiencing energy poverty when electricity costs are more than 10% of household income.

Households experiencing energy poverty may struggle to afford to heat or cool the home to a comfortable temperature and meet other energy needs. The main determinants of energy poverty are energy costs, household income and the energy efficiency of the household.

The impacts on people experiencing energy poverty can include financial stress, impacts on mental and physical wellbeing, social disadvantage from reduced access to information technology, as well as potential safety implications of unsafe lighting, heating and cooling practices to cut costs.

## Acknowledgement of the Bundjalung Aboriginal Nation

Tweed Shire Council acknowledges the Ngandowal and Minyungbal speaking people of the Bundjalung Country, in particular the Goodjinburra, Tul-gi-gin and Moorung – Moobah clans, as being the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters within the Tweed Shire boundaries. We also acknowledge and respect the Tweed Aboriginal community's right to speak for its Country and to care for its traditional Country in accordance with its lores, customs and traditions.



# Council values, vision and mission

## *What we value*

- Living and loving the Tweed.
- We look after people and places, explore all opportunities and are proud of our passionate approach.
- We care about each other, choose to be here, and are in this together.
- We have conversations where everyone can contribute and we are willing to have a go.
- We put back in to make a difference, so that our Tweed community is even better tomorrow than it is today.

## *Vision*

The Tweed will be recognised for its desirable lifestyle, strong community, unique character and environment and the opportunities its residents enjoy.

## *Mission*

Working with community and partners, provide leadership in facilitating and delivering services that manage growth sustainably, create opportunity and enhance the value of our civic and natural assets for this and future generations.

## Other related Council programs

- Draft Ageing Well in the Tweed Strategy
- [Reconciliation Action Plan May 2024 – May 2026](#)
- Draft Tweed Affordable Housing Strategy
- [Tweed's Access and Inclusion Plan 2023 – 2026](#)
- [Cool Towns](#) – Tweed Shire Urban Forest Program
- Target 160L and [Residential water rebates](#)



**Council's Energy Pop Up stall during Seniors Week 2024 assisted over 100 people to review their electricity provider or answer concerns about electricity bills**

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# Executive summary

This Energy Access and Poverty plan considers the issue of energy affordability in the Tweed community as part of an equitable response to climate change.

Addressing energy poverty recognises that people and communities on lower incomes and experiencing disadvantage are impacted first, worst and longest by climate change<sup>1</sup>.

Responding to energy poverty seeks to ensure everyone in our community can benefit from secure, sustainable and affordable electricity as our energy systems transition to low-carbon alternatives.

Approximately 2.5% or 1,000 Tweed households<sup>2</sup> are estimated to be experiencing energy poverty. Energy poverty in the Tweed is influenced by:

- High costs of energy
- Energy inefficient homes
- Higher than state average numbers of Tweed residents vulnerable to energy poverty due to living with varied abilities, long term health conditions and disadvantage
- Lack of personal capacity and support to improve energy efficiency
- Lack of information and trusted advice.

In 2022 – 2023, more than 17,400 Tweed households accessed nearly \$5 million worth of NSW Government energy rebates. Nearly \$1.9 million worth of rebates went unclaimed. This is a key opportunity for Council to encourage greater uptake of energy rebates.

The Tweed has had the highest uptake of rooftop solar in the Northern Rivers NSW, with solar installed on 61.4% of dwellings, equivalent to over 23,500 homes with solar on their roof.

Helping people experiencing energy poverty to benefit from solar is a future opportunity, particularly in partnership with social housing providers, if project resourcing can be found.

This, along with a range of other possible solutions have been investigated with local stakeholders.

Given Council's staff and budget resourcing, the following have been determined as Council's key focus areas that can be funded, tracked and reported:

- Action 1: Co-design promotional messaging with target audiences
- Action 2: Promote greater uptake of energy rebates
- Action 3: Promote World Energy Day on 22 October, encouraging households to review their electricity costs, provider and energy use.

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1. July 2024: Powering progress: Energy upgrades to low-income housing, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ACOSS-Deloitte-low-income-energy-upgrades-Final-July-2024.pdf>

2. This figure is based on income relative to average energy costs. Some households may have high levels of energy consumption eg due to electric vehicle charging, without struggling to meet other energy needs.

Council's Energy Access and Poverty plan goal is to reduce the percentage of Tweed households that spend more than 10% of their income on electricity to below 2% or 1,000 households.

With greater resources we could have greater impact. Key priorities for future advocacy, partnerships and funding include:

- Wishlist 1: Ongoing funding for an Energy Support Worker program
- Wishlist 2: Microgrid and community battery feasibility studies, particularly that support priority community members and social housing tenants in the Tweed
- Wishlist 3: Energy efficient existing homes standards
- Wishlist 4: Install more solar on social housing.

## Background

Since 2016, Tweed Shire Council has been a signatory to the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM), an international framework guiding, assessing and reporting on local governments' response to climate change. The program has over 11,000 signatories.

GCoM requires councils to assess, set targets and take action on three pillars related to climate change:

- Climate Change Mitigation: reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and accelerating decarbonisation
- Climate Change Adaptation: increasing the resilience and strengthening the capacity to adapt to unavoidable climate change impacts
- Access to Energy: allowing citizens to access secure, sustainable and affordable energy.

This Energy Access and Poverty plan is prepared in order to meet GCoM's Access to Energy requirements:

- Analyse the energy access and energy poverty conditions of the municipality
- Set and report city-side targets that alleviate energy poverty for their community
- Is formally adopted and dated
- Describes the stakeholder engagement process
- Describes actions including
  - Synergies, trade-offs, and co-benefits considered
  - Assessment of energy saving, renewable energy production, vulnerabilities tackled, potential (optional) GHG emissions reduction by action
- Describes targets and indicators

# Stakeholder engagement process: how this plan was prepared

Between March and April 2024, Tweed Shire Council invited the Tweed community to share experiences of energy poverty, and take action to reduce their power bills.

Engagement activities included:

- Presentation to the Tweed Community Care Forum, 13 February
- Community engagement via Seniors Week Energy Pop Up stall at Tweed City: 14 & 15 March
- Agenda item on the Equal Access Advisory Committee meeting, 10 April
- Energy bill affordability workshop, 17 April: 10 attendees shared their experiences and solutions to energy poverty from community, health and housing service providers and citizens
- 51 online and hard copy responses to a Home Energy Bills survey promoted at the Energy Pop Up stall, and media Council's media, community newsletters and social media channels.

See the full description of stakeholder engagement activities and outcomes in Appendix 1.



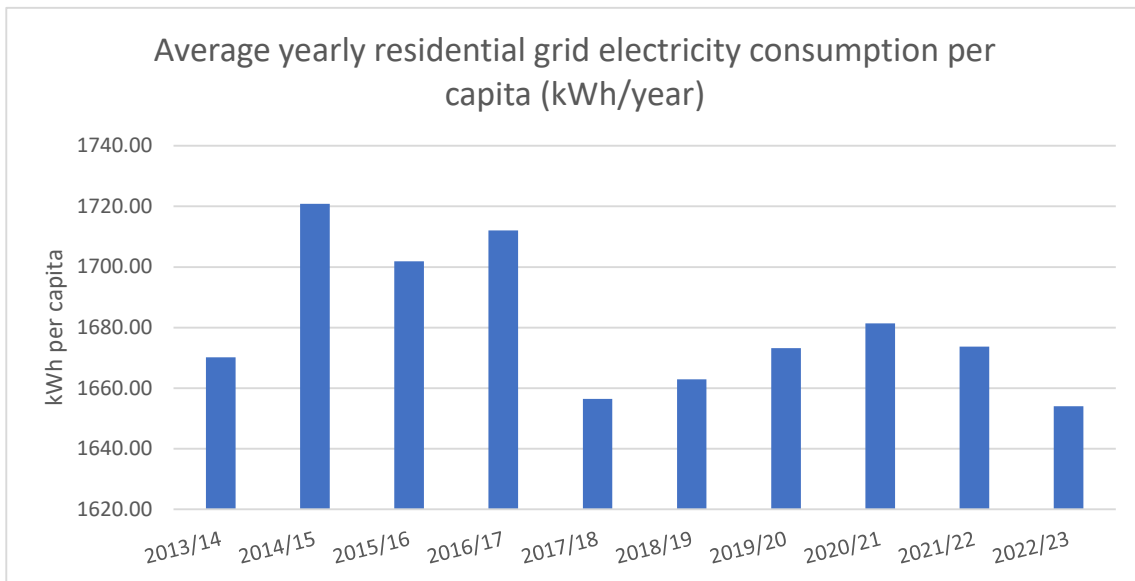
**Energy meters can be borrowed from the library to help understand how much power appliances use**



**Sealing drafts can make homes more energy efficiency to heat and cool**

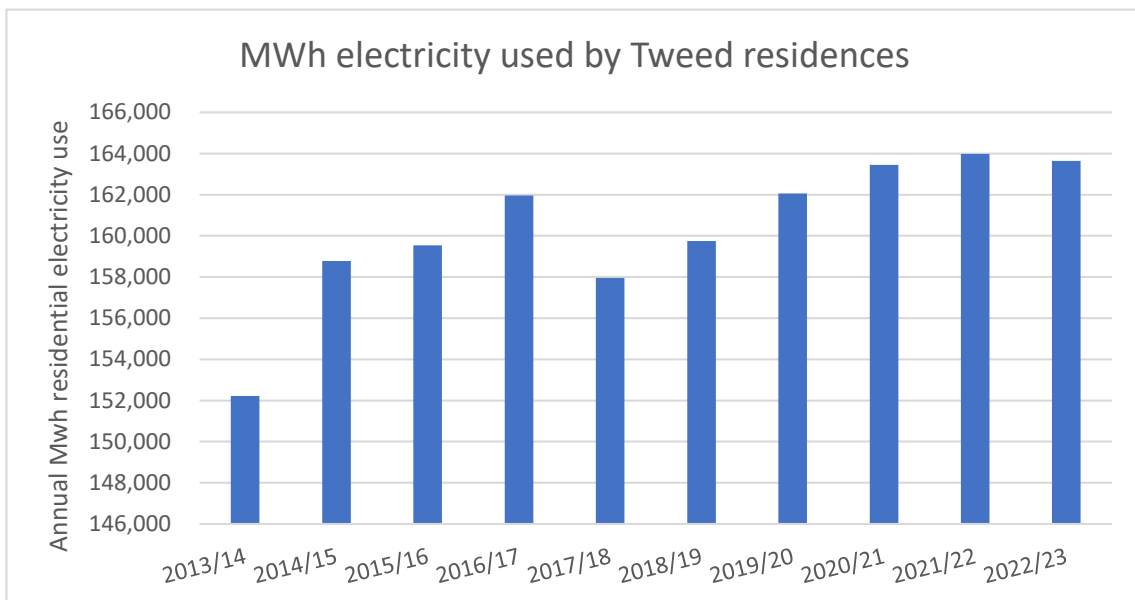


# Residential electricity use and sources in the Tweed

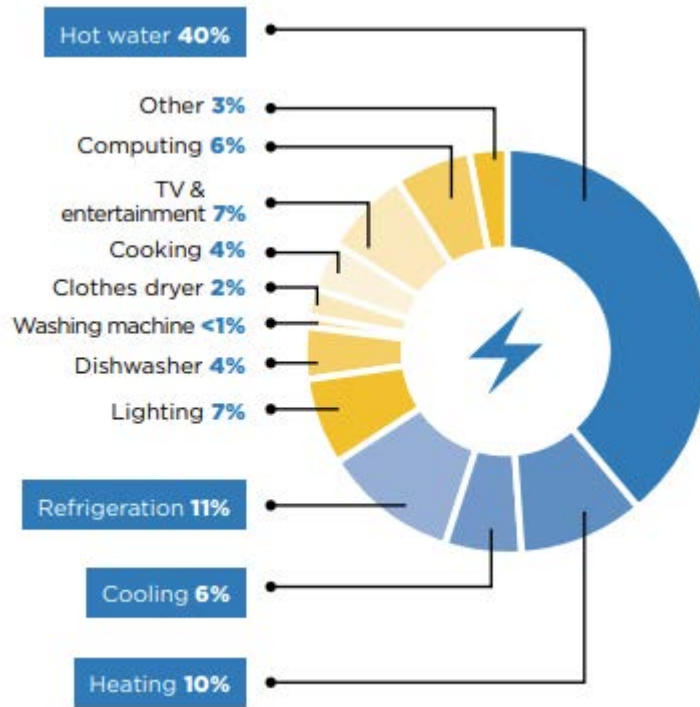


Source: <https://profile.id.com.au/tweed/population-estimate>, <https://www.essentialenergy.com.au/our-network/network-pricing-and-regulatory-reporting/regulatory-reports-and-network-information>

Tweed homes consume between 1,670 and 1,712 kWh per person per year on average, equivalent to 5kWh per person per day.



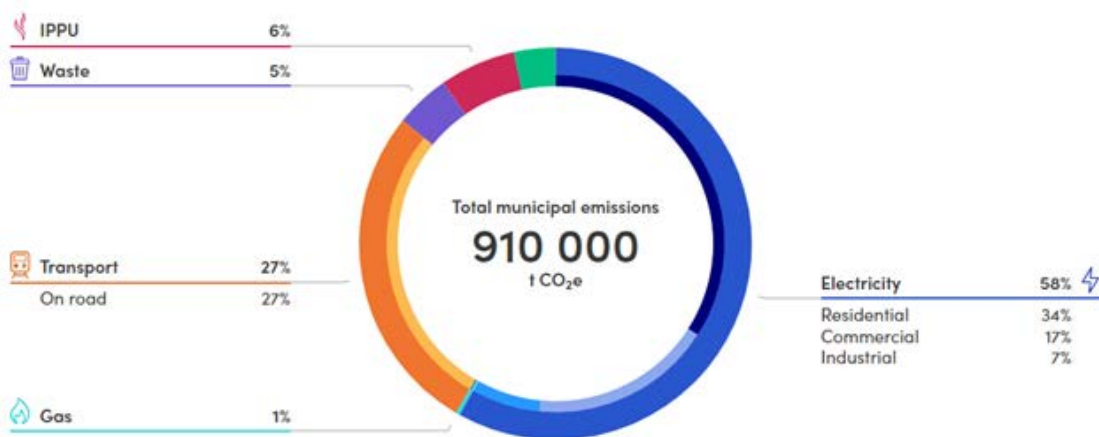
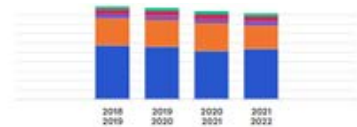
Source: <https://www.essentialenergy.com.au/our-network/network-pricing-and-regulatory-reporting/regulatory-reports-and-network-information>



Source: [Take control of your energy use \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/take-control-your-energy-use)

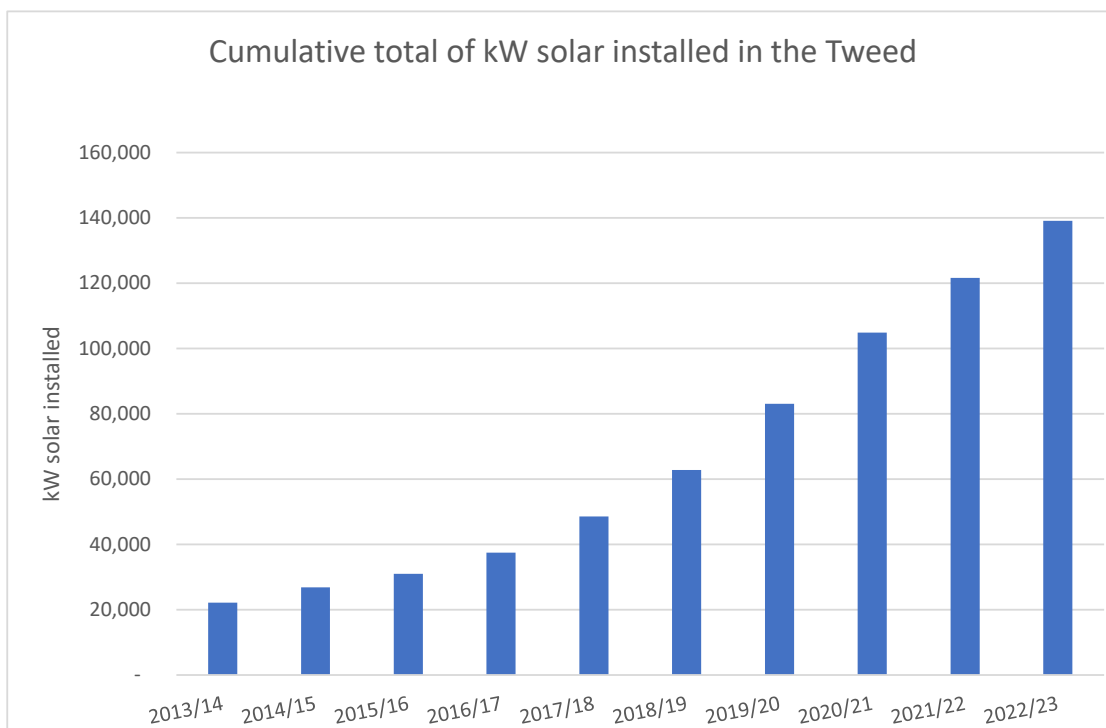
Grid electricity use is the Tweed community’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, so the adoption of energy efficient technology and practices, along with a shift to low emissions energy sources, is an important way for us to reduce our contribution to climate change.

## Tweed 2021/22 municipal emissions snapshot



Source: [Tweed, NSW :: Snapshot \(snapshotclimate.com.au\)](https://www.snapshotclimate.com.au/tweed-nsw)

The Tweed has had the highest uptake of rooftop solar in the Northern Rivers NSW, with solar installed on 61.4% of dwellings, equivalent to over 23,500 homes with solar on their roof.



Source: <https://pv-map.apvi.org.au/postcode>

With 118,634 kW of solar installed on Tweed homes at 2023/2024, during daylight hours, solar in the Tweed could potentially be generating over 177,500MWh of solar across a 12 month period, exceeding the total annual residential electricity demand.

The challenge in the transition to a low-emissions electricity grid is to share the benefits across our community through reduced electricity bills and reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and avoid people being left behind from sharing in those benefits.



**The Tweed has the highest uptake of rooftop solar in the Northern Rivers NSW**

# What is the experience of energy poverty in the Tweed?

In Australia Nance (2013) estimates that between 2% and 14% of households live in energy poverty, depending on how energy poverty is defined<sup>3</sup>.

The NCOSS 'Barely Hanging On' 2023 report<sup>4</sup> noted 77% of people living in the Tweed who participated in their research say that utility costs have been put under pressure due to rising living costs. 38% of people indicated they could not pay utilities, housing, essential travel, credit card and/or telecoms costs in the past 12 months. 51% could not pay utility bills on time at least once.

The ACOSS Summer Heat Survey 2024<sup>5</sup> noted people experiencing financial and social disadvantage, especially those living with disability or a health condition, and First Nations peoples' experience risks associated with exposure to high heat, exacerbated by homes with poor energy performance, high energy prices and low incomes. A higher proportion of Tweed residents experience varied abilities, long term health conditions and are of Australian Aboriginal ancestry compared to state averages, which reinforces the need to focus energy poverty efforts for these priority members of our community.

Based on average electricity costs in the Tweed, average electricity consumption figures, average household size and average household income figures, Tweed households spend an estimated 3% of their household income on electricity costs on average.

According to 2021 Census household income figures, approximately 1,000 or 2.5% of Tweed households have a weekly household income of less than \$150 per week, and therefore could potentially be paying more than 10% of their household income on electricity, based on average Tweed electricity consumption estimates.

From 51 responses to Council's Home Energy Bills community survey, 27% of respondents have experienced difficulty paying for their power bill in the past 12 months. 7 people (14% of respondents) confirmed they spend more than 10% of their household income on electricity.

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3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0140988321001249#:~:text=Thus%2C%20unlike%20most%20European%20countries,%2Dheat%2Drelated%20health%20issues>

4. <https://www.ncoss.org.au/policy-advocacy/policy-research-publications/barely-hanging-on-the-cost-of-living-crisis-in-nsw/>

5. <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ACOSSHeatSurveyReport2024.pdf>

# What's influencing the Tweed community's experience of energy poverty?

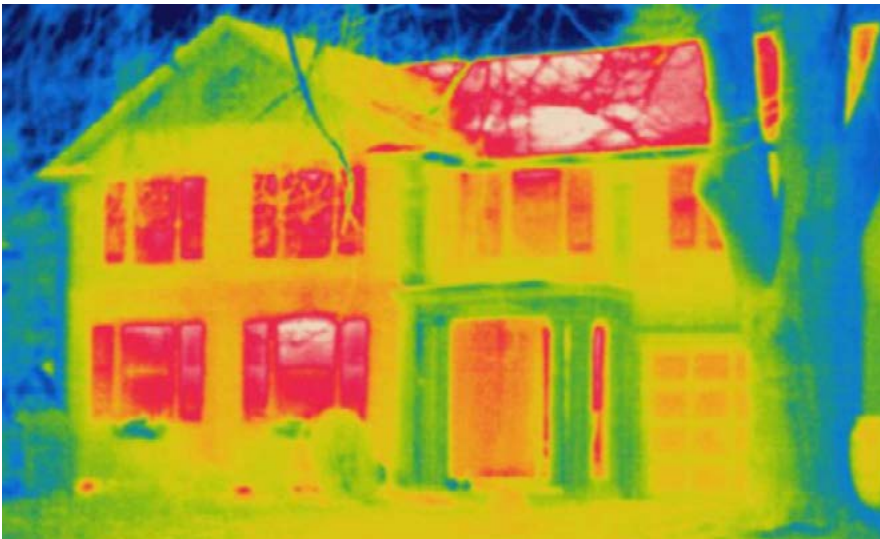
## High costs of electricity

Electricity costs have gone up by approximately 20% in the past 12 months. The average annual residential bill in the Essential Energy network went from \$1,961 in 2023 to \$2,356 in 2024<sup>6</sup>.

According to NSW Energy Rebates reports<sup>7</sup>, Tweed residents consistently pay the highest average cost of electricity and gas in the state, with the latest figures indicating average energy costs of 60.7c/kWh and 12.8c/MJ for electricity and gas respectively (including both usage and service charges). Potential explanations for this include high loyalty to existing electricity retailers, and selection of electricity retailers based on solar feed-in tariffs, potentially at the expense of higher use tariffs.

## Energy inefficient homes

Advocacy campaigns and a national plan to improve the energy efficiency of all Australian homes acknowledge that homes built before building energy standards were introduced are wasting energy. State<sup>8</sup> and Federal<sup>9</sup> government have incentives in place to help residents to switch to energy-efficient appliances or upgrades. The Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme will be expanded and upgraded to apply to existing homes.<sup>10</sup>



Homes built prior to energy efficiency standards cost more to heat and cool

6. <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/changes-retail-prices-over-time>

7. <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/regulation-and-policy/social-programs-energy-code/social-programs-energy>

8. <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/regulation-and-policy/energy-security-safeguard/energy-savings-scheme>

9. <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/mcallister/media-releases/helping-australians-save-energy-save-energy-bills>

10. <https://energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Energy-Efficient-Housing-PUBLIC-Report.pdf>

## Personal capacity

Researchers<sup>11</sup> note that 'households more likely to be vulnerable to energy stress are those subsisting on unemployment or student allowance, pensioners, renters, single-parent families, people living in poverty while in paid work, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, and households where someone has a disability or medical condition.'

Advocates recommend practical and targeted assistance to help decarbonise and lower energy bills, particularly for those least able to do it on their own. In particular, free energy audits for low-income/cash-poor households are recommended, as is funding for local councils to provide financial incentives and/or council rate discounts for community bulk solar rooftop purchases.

Feedback received locally indicates that personal capacity to take action on energy poverty is limited by:

- People struggling to find information needed to make informed decisions
- Perceptions that it costs too much to make changes, that there is nothing more that can be done to reduce energy use, or a lack of knowledge about what else could reduce energy use further remain the top barriers
- Lack of confidence: one-on-one guidance needed.

## Lack of trusted advice

Researchers<sup>12 13</sup> also recommend the potential for 'trusted intermediaries such as people working in health, energy and social services can play a vital role in identifying and supporting such households. General practitioners and other health professionals could help identify energy vulnerability among patients with medical conditions of concern.' Integrating energy poverty assessment in community support services e.g. Aged Care in-home care system new & existing climate screening processes is also recommended.



**Knowing what temperature to set thermostats can help keep homes comfortable while using less electricity**

11, 12. [https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ACOSS\\_BSL\\_TCI\\_Empowering-households.pdf](https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ACOSS_BSL_TCI_Empowering-households.pdf), 2017, The Climate Institute, ACOSS, Brotherhood of St Laurence

13. <https://theconversation.com/1-in-4-households-struggle-to-pay-power-bills-here-are-5-ways-to-tackle-hidden-energy-poverty-204672>



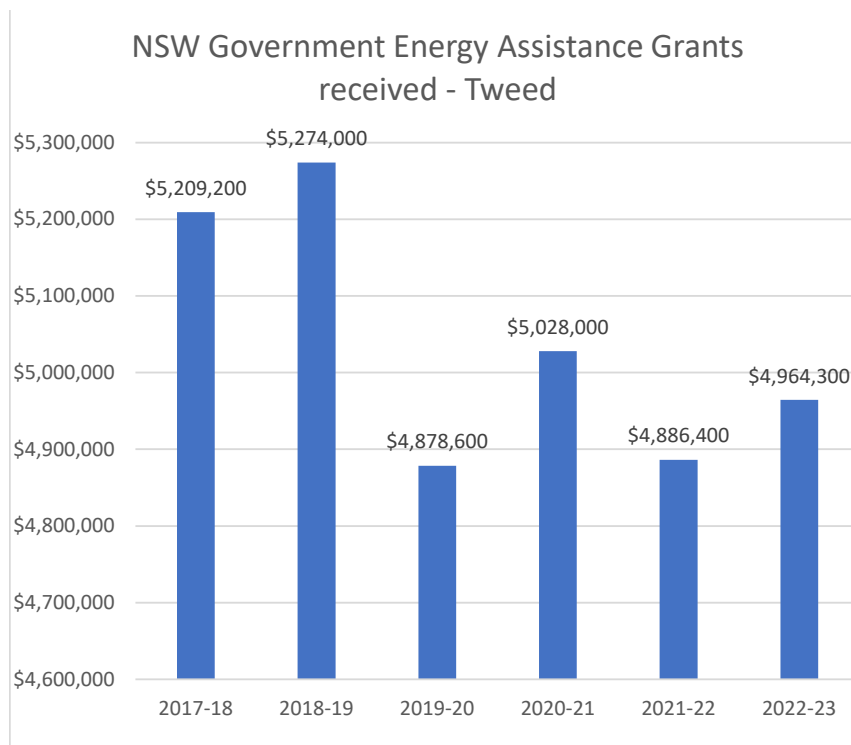
## Uptake of energy rebates

The Federal and NSW Governments offer a variety of concessions and rebates to help people meet their energy needs.

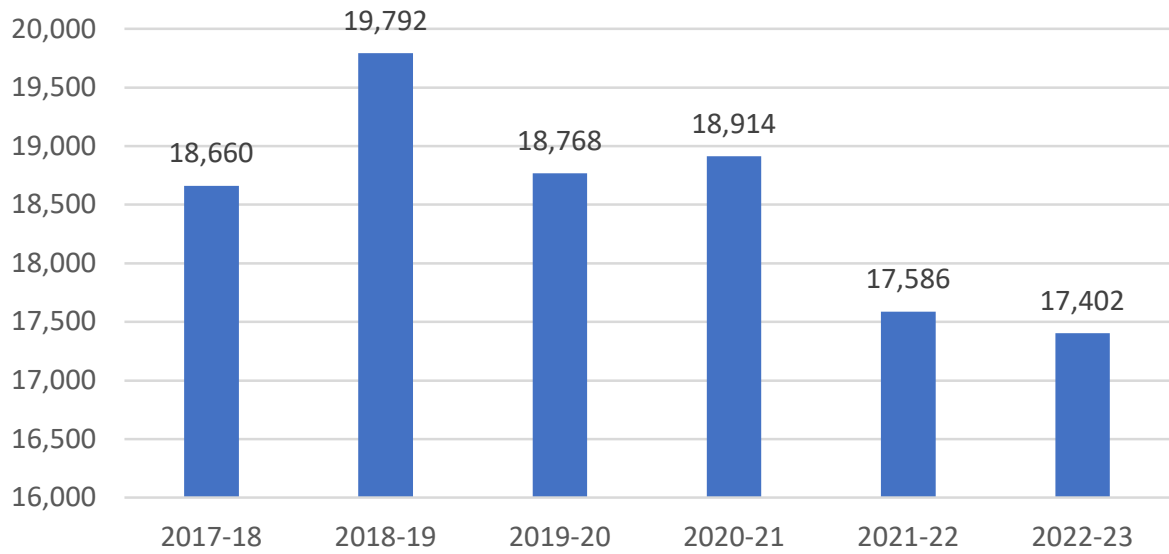
Data about take up of NSW Government energy support programs is available on a six-monthly basis.

Based on the latest available data, between July 2022 and June 2023 an estimated \$1.9 million worth of NSW Government rebates went unclaimed in the Tweed:

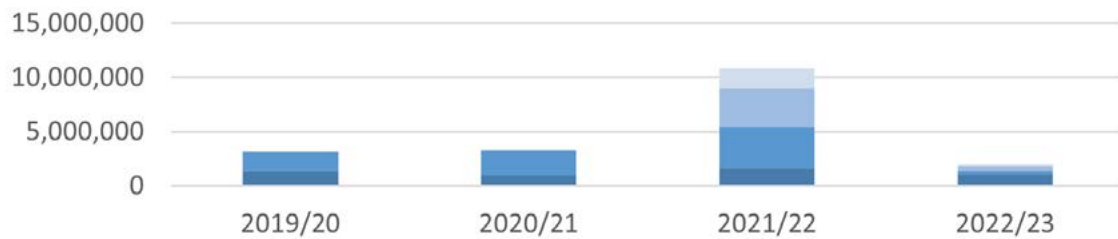
- 21,041 Tweed customers were eligible for the Low Income Household Rebate of \$250, but only 80% were receiving it, so over 4,200 Tweed households did not claim
- 50% of eligible customers in the Tweed took advantage of the Seniors Energy Rebate of \$200, so over 1,450 Tweed households did not claim
- 28% of eligible customers in the Tweed took advantage of the Family Energy Rebate of up to \$275, so over 1,650 Tweed households did not claim
- 495 customer accounts made use of the Energy Account Payment Assistance scheme, 40% more than the previous year
- Overall, 17,402 Tweed electricity and gas account holders received rebates valued at approximately \$5 million, equivalent to \$285 per customer.



## NSW Government Energy Assistance Grant recipients - Tweed



## Value of unclaimed NSW Energy Rebates - Tweed



- Eligible customers
- Low Income Housing Rebate
- Unclaimed customers
- Eligible customers
- Seniors Energy Rebate
- Unclaimed customers
- Unclaimed customers
- Unclaimed customers
- Unclaimed customers
- Gas Rebate
- Unclaimed customers
- Eligible customers
- Family Energy Rebate

## What ideas have been considered as possible solutions?

A range of ideas have been identified through community engagement and research including:

- Employing an Energy Support Worker or team
- Using a support worker/network to help people with switching energy providers to reduce their energy costs
- Explore microgrids and community batteries at social housing precincts in partnership with social housing providers, Essential Energy network provider and solar installers
- Provide advice to households about common electricity cost and savings opportunities in homes e.g. Energy Savings Scheme
- Promote low and no cost actions in the home to save money on power bills
- Encourage people to apply for energy rebates
- Help people find out about solar
- Develop a fun 'bill buster' school program to engage students about the importance of reducing electricity use and costs
- Promote an annual 'Flick the Switch' campaign and reminder to shop around and check the 'green' credentials of electricity providers
- Providing 'hands on' crisis support, not just information
- Financial counselling to help people understand where their energy costs are coming from
- Developing an education program about electricity, healthy living, thermal performance of homes, retrofitting, using air conditioning on 'dry' settings etc.
- Supporting others' through advocacy: eg ACOSS' proposal to establish an Australian Efficiency Resilience Retrofit Fund (AERRF)<sup>14</sup>, Energy Consumers Australia's campaign to limit the rental of inefficient and unhealthy homes<sup>15</sup>
- Regional 'solar on social housing' forum
- Expanding the Essential Energy Wattwatcher monitor program to help people experiencing energy poverty and measure the improvement in their bills as a result.



**Tweed retiree Brenda from Hastings Point won an energy saving home assessment in 2022 and was surprised at how much she learned from the home energy assessor**

14. July 2024: Powering progress: Energy upgrades to low-income housing, [ACOSS-Deloitte-low-income-energy-upgrades-Final-July-2024.pdf](#)

15. [Energy Efficient Housing Research, Energy Consumers Australia & RENEW, August 2022](#)

## What key actions will Tweed Shire Council focus on to alleviate energy poverty?

Council has existing programs designed to reduce the economic and environmental impacts of electricity in the Tweed community such as:

- Council’s [Residential Water Rebate](#) offers a one-off rebate of up to \$100 by installing a 3 star WELS rated showerhead or 4 star WELS rated tapware
- Council’s energy webpage and monthly [Environment and Sustainability e-newsletter](#) aim to raise awareness of energy efficiency tips, tricks and opportunities to save money, switch to renewables and find rebates
- Council-run events such as the [Sustainable Living Festival](#), which aim to inspire visitors to take action to reduce their environmental footprint
- [Community Action Network](#), a quarterly gathering of people wanting to progress community-led action on climate change, focusing on topics such as energy, transport, food and waste.

Given Council’s staff and budget resourcing, the following actions have been determined as Council’s key focus areas to address energy poverty, particularly as the following actions can be funded, tracked and reported according to GCoM requirements:

Detail	Target	Base year	Target year	Cost/resourcing	Benefits	How we’ll measure progress
<b>Action 1: Co-design promotional messaging with target audiences</b>						
Connect with target audiences and relevant service providers	Consult with target audiences and advocate groups such as the Aboriginal Advisory Committee, Access and Inclusion Committee, Community Care Forum about how to target energy campaigns to reach priority audiences	2024	2025	10 days 1 Full Time Equivalent staff time  Sustainability & Environment, Inclusive & Creative Communities, Communications	Promotions connect and benefit priority audiences	Data collection at face-to-face events
<b>Action 2: Promote greater uptake of energy rebates</b>						
Quarterly reminders on all of Comms channels and social support networks to check eligibility for energy rebates	Energy rebate uptake in the Tweed increases to at least 75%	2022	2025	1 day per quarter, 1.5 Full Time Equivalent staff time (Sustainability & Environment, Inclusive & Creative Communities, Communications)	More of the unclaimed \$1.9M in NSW Government benefits flow to eligible Tweed recipients.	NSW Government <a href="#">Social Programs data</a>

Detail	Target	Base year	Target year	Cost/resourcing	Benefits	How we'll measure progress
Action 3: Promote World Energy Day on 22 October						
Two day pop up stall at local shopping centre with access to Energy Made Easy website	Engage over 100 households to compare their electricity costs, provider and energy use	2024	Annually	3.5 days, 2 Full Time Equivalent staff time  (Sustainability & Environment)	People switch to the most cost effective energy provider to reduce electricity costs.	Energy Pop Up stall: record #s of provider reviews or energy assistance provided
Desired outcome:	Reduce the percentage of households that spend more than 10% of income on electricity to below 2% or 1,000 households in the Tweed					
Use electricity use, cost and Census 2026 data to calculate average cost of electricity per capita per year in the Tweed, and the number of households whose weekly household income indicates they experience energy poverty		2022	2027	10 days per year 1 Full Time Equivalent staff time  (Sustainability & Environment) as	Keep track of energy poverty as an indicator of community wellbeing part of annual GCoM reporting	Publicly available data and GCoM reporting

With greater resources we could have greater impact. These are key priorities for advocacy, partnerships and funding:

Wishlist	Council's role	Target	Benefits
1. Ongoing funding for an Energy Support Worker program	Program development & delivery, identify/apply for funding, engage technical expertise for program officer	<p>\$200,000 per annum to fund an Energy Support Worker to complete 250 priority home energy assessments per year and make \$250 worth of minor improvements on each</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on priority homes: One-on-one advice and site-specific restorative action taken</li> <li>Community education</li> <li>Capacity building in the community support and health sector</li> </ul>	<p>As identified in the community co-design session (see Appendix 1 for details), engaging an Energy Support Worker would support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 priority home visits each week for 45 weeks = 270 homes assisted per year</li> <li>Energy savings (depends on the situation e.g. build quality, appliance, behaviour): Reduce 1kWh per home per day = 98,550 kWh saved</li> <li>Cost savings: 98,550 kWh saved x \$0.35/kWh = \$35,500 saved or \$125 per home</li> <li>Greenhouse gas emissions: 98,550kWh x 0.68 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e/MWh = 67 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e</li> </ul> <p>Similar benefits could be amplified through quarterly community and 'train the trainer' workshops for health professionals and community support workers.</p>

Wishlist	Council's role	Target	Benefits
2. Microgrid and community battery feasibility studies	Identify/apply for funding, outsource technical analysis, seek community partners	\$1,000,000 to undertake feasibility studies to support microgrids and community batteries that support priority community members and social housing tenants in the Tweed.	Attract funding and technical expertise for <a href="#">future microgrid and community batteries</a> grant rounds to understand the intricacies and investigate the technical feasibility, costs, benefits and governance models of community-owned renewable energy resources.
3. Energy efficient existing homes standards	Advocacy	Support efforts to improve the energy efficiency of all Australian homes, including rental property standards.	Improve the thermal comfort of homes for all to reduce heating and cooling requirements, costs, and improve health outcomes.
4. Install more solar on social housing	Facilitation with local housing providers	\$2 million + project management costs for 100 solar and battery systems on social housing units.  Investigate potential state & federal government funds and reallocation of energy rebate/concession benefits.	Enable zero emissions electricity independence for social housing residents, saving 581 tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> -e/year.  [This was an aspirational unfunded item in the <a href="#">Tweed Shire Council Interim Climate Change Action Plan</a> ]

## Monitoring, evaluation and updates

Council will track the delivery of actions and outcomes from this plan through annual Tweed Shire Council reporting and via GCoM's annual reporting cycle. The plan is required to be reviewed in 5 years.

## References

Better Renting advocacy campaign: [National advocacy initiative for minimum energy efficiency requirements for rental properties | Energy Consumers Australia](#)

Essential Energy wattwatcher program: [https://engage.essentialenergy.com.au/smart-energy-communities-trial?\\_gl=1\\*hcdxgz\\*\\_ga\\*NzA2Mjc2MjEOLjE2OTM4ODc0Mjg.\\*\\_ga\\_225ZS5CXEF\\*MTcwMjg3MzUzMC4zLjEuMTcwMjg3NTI5MS4yNC4wLjA](https://engage.essentialenergy.com.au/smart-energy-communities-trial?_gl=1*hcdxgz*_ga*NzA2Mjc2MjEOLjE2OTM4ODc0Mjg.*_ga_225ZS5CXEF*MTcwMjg3MzUzMC4zLjEuMTcwMjg3NTI5MS4yNC4wLjA)

People at the Centre of the Clean Energy Package, 2023, ACOSS <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Briefing-Note-People-at-the-Centre-of-Clean-Energy-Package-October-2023.pdf>



# Appendix 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Findings

## Shopping Mall Pop Up Stall

Council hosted a Power Pop Up stall at Tweed City shopping centre on Thursday 14 and 15 March 2024, offering help to people with high electricity bills. Advice, free brochures and giveaways such as Council's 4-minute shower timer were on offer. Over 50 people visited the stall each day.

Promotions as part of the Tweed Seniors Week festival encouraged people to bring recent energy bills, which many visitors to the stall did. Visitors were invited to share their thoughts on Council's Home Energy Bills Survey, and go in the draw to win a home energy visit from an accredited Residential Scorecard consultant, valued at \$400.

## Home Energy Bills Survey

36 people responded to the in-person survey:

- 4 from 2484 (eg Round Mountain to Mt Burrell)
- 6 from 2485 (eg Tweed Heads)
- 17 from 2486 (eg Bilambil to Chinderah).
- 5 from 2487 (eg Fingal, Kingscliff)
- 3 from 2489 (eg Pottsville)

83% of survey participants are home owners. 30% of people who responded confirmed they use gas in their homes for cooking (6 +2 bbqs) and hot water heating (3).

15 people responded to the survey online:

- 2 from 2484 (eg Round Mountain to Mt Burrell)
- 2 from 2485 (eg Tweed Heads)
- 4 from 2486 (eg Bilambil to Chinderah)
- 5 from 2487 (eg Fingal, Kingscliff)
- 1 from 2489 (eg Pottsville)

11 people (73%) of online survey participants are home owners. 2 survey participants live in social housing. 2 participants use gas for cooking.

## Survey Findings

### ***Q: Is your home difficult to heat in winter or keep cool in summer?***

16 out of 36 respondents said 'yes' (44%). 15 out of 36 respondents (42%) said 'no'.

People who struggle to keep their home comfortable relied on appliances such as air conditioning or heating to be comfortable. For many, summer heat was a problem, but winter was ok, whereas others found winter less comfortable than summer.

- Old home. Timber floors
- Window fittings not energy efficient

- Ceiling fan does nothing. No aircon. No trees. Lunchtime – 8pm full sun.
- Without appliances is terrible.

People who responded that their homes weren't difficult to heat or cool mentioned design features of their land or home:

- Up high, no aircon
- Air con
- Tiles
- Sliding doors block off rooms.

***Q: Have you gone without heating and cooling because of concern about the costs?***

50% of survey respondents said 'yes', and 5 people who said 'no' or neither yes/no noted they consider, think or are aware of costs.

For those who have 'gone without' comments included

- Don't use air con during summer
- Wear thermals in winter
- Cooling at times, but not often.

***Q: Have you had difficulty paying your power bill in the past 12 months?***

19% said yes. 16% said they spend more than 10% of their household income on electricity.

***Q: What type of support would you find helpful for managing electricity bills***

Support ideas include:

- Advice: e.g. Home energy advisory consultant home visits
- Assistance with solar: including information and upfront rebates
- Budgeting advice
- Changing energy providers and finding the cheapest plan
- Monitoring to be able to see daily/hourly use and compare with others
- Knowledge/mythbusting: is it better to leave air con on all the time rather than turning it on/off?
- Information about energy rebates
- Simplified billing documents and websites.

**Q: Have you tried to make your home more energy efficient? In what ways? If no, what are the main reasons?**

Energy efficiency steps taken include:

- Energy efficient appliances and lights
- Using energy efficient settings on appliances
- Choosing when to use appliances
- Turn everything off
- Ceiling fans
- Curtains
- Replacing old appliances
- Window fittings
- Insulation
- Hot water heat pump
- Natural ventilation
- Using thermometers
- Induction cooktops.

Some of the barriers identified included:

- Still rebuilding after the flood
- Don't know what to do.

### **Community co-design**

On 17 April 2024, 10 participants from the community, community services, energy services and local government sectors considered what could be done to help people experiencing bill shock and energy poverty.

Ideas included:

- Using a support worker/network to help people with switching energy providers to reduce their energy costs
- Finding out what uses the most electricity in homes
- Promoting low and no cost actions in the home to save money on power bills
- Applying for energy rebates
- Finding out about solar
- Employing Energy Support Worker or team
- Developing fun 'bill buster' school programs to engage students about the importance of reducing electricity use and costs
- Putting out an annual reminder to shop around and check the 'green' credentials of electricity providers
- Providing 'hands on' crisis support, not just information
- Financial counselling to help people understand where their energy costs are coming from
- Developing an education program about electricity, healthy living, thermal performance of homes, retrofitting, using air conditioning on 'dry' settings etc.

The three preferred ideas were then worked up as potential projects:

## Energy Support Workers/Teams

- 1 Intended outcome:
  - reduce energy poverty
  - reduce unnecessary energy use and costs
  - make energy support available regularly to community
  - provide advice on energy savings
  - help people build confidence to understand and take action
  - use education to build community knowledge and awareness of energy saving opportunities
  - provide capacity building for community support workers and 'train the trainer'
  
- 2 Impact: (H/M/L)
  - 6 vulnerable homes each week for 45 weeks = 270 homes assisted per year
  - Energy savings: Reduce 1kWh per home per day = 98,550 kWh saved
  - Cost savings: depends on the situation e.g. build quality, appliance, behaviour; 98,550 kWh saved x \$0.35/kWh = \$35,000 saved or \$125 per home
  - Greenhouse gas emissions: 98,550kWh x 0.68 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e/MWh = 67 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>-e
  - [Assume similar impact in non-vulnerable population with quarterly community workshops that reach 100 people per year]
  - community support network quarterly 'train the trainer' workshops that lead to reduced energy use in 100 more homes per year = \$600 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>-e abated]
  - Vulnerabilities addressed: lack of knowledge, lacking access to information, low income = vicious circle of energy poverty
  
- 3 What actions need to be taken?
  - Investigate who has developed a program like this before, what did they learn
  - Feedback from community organisations, housing providers, support providers on needs, gain buy in through engagement
  - Work out how the role would function: activities, frequency, location, promotion, monitoring/reporting
  - Gain funding
  - Recruitment
  - Tap into existing supports, outreach services, financial support services
  
- 4 What resources are needed
  - \$100k/year salary funding for at least 12 months to embed
  - \$100k/year+ funding for minor works in people's homes (\$250 per home for gap filling, draught-stoppers, energy efficient lightbulbs, energy meter, op shop blinds/curtains, electric throw blankets etc...
  - Potential co-funding from:
    - Participants: \$10 co-contribution = \$4,500
    - Housing providers if relevant
    - Pay it forward community fund raising
    - Identify relevant grants/funding for community resilience, addressing vulnerabilities, reducing carbon footprint etc.
  
- 5 What training is needed?
  - Worker needs qualifications/training/accreditation in energy efficiency
  - Training development and delivery skills needed for 'train the trainer' activities

- 6 Who is needed?
  - Suitable experienced, knowledgeable, qualified energy support worker
  - Skilled at developing community relationships, networking with stakeholders
- 7 Next steps?
  - Find funding

### ***Bill Busters School Programs***

- 1 Intended outcome:
  - Be able to measure impact – change in class kWh and therefore emissions reduction
- 2 Impact (H/M/L)
  - Cost savings: Med
  - Energy savings: Med
  - Greenhouse gas emissions reduction: Med
  - Vulnerabilities addressed: Focus on lower socio-economic status schools
- 3 What actions need to be taken?
  - Research previous programs e.g. Cool Schools
  - Check for curriculum links: science, maths
  - Talk to teachers: what would work, who's the champion, what's the best way to deliver the program, what's the best age group to target, is there interest in a regional school competition, should it extend to the school's electricity account
- 4 What resources are needed?
  - Fun activities for public events e.g. Earth Day
  - \$ for substitute teachers or educator to deliver program
- 5 What training is needed?
  - Train the teachers?
- 6 Who is needed?
  - Teachers
  - Energy Support Worker
  - Dorrroughby Environmental Education Centre
- 7 Next steps
  - Research

### ***Flick the Switch Day***

- 1 Intended outcome
  - People getting the best possible electricity plan and reviewing annually
- 2 Impact (H/M/L)
  - Cost savings: H/M
  - Energy savings: Low/none
  - Greenhouse gas emissions reductions: Low/none
  - Vulnerabilities addressed: high impact for low income households

- 3 What actions need to be taken?
  - Pick a date: In 2012, World Energy Forum established October 22 as 'World Energy Day'
  - Plan advertising, social media, Tweed Link
  - Flyer in rates notices
  - Hold a pop up in lead up to date to help people
  - Prepare checklist to give people to help
  - Approach energy providers to see how they can be involved
  
- 4 What resources are needed?
  - Advertising space and flyers etc
  - How to videos
  - Pop up 2 weeks before
  - Energy support workers to help people switch
  - Plain English guides on how to research and switch
  - Checklist: simple and easy to understand
  - Decision makers: what's important to you?
  - Budget
  
- 5 What training is needed?
  - Energy support workers trained in ready bills and helping to switch
  - Training support workers on electricity bills (NDIS)
  - Education – how to switch
  
- 6 Who is needed?
  - Energy support workers
  - Energy providers
  
- 7 Next steps
  - Check calendar and pick a date.



## Appendix 2: Communities and organisations engaged

The following stakeholders were engaged or invited to contribute to the preparation of this plan:

- Consumers
- Neighbourhood Centres: Banora Point Community Centre, Murwillumbah Community Centre, Pottsville Beach Neighbourhood Centre
- Tweed Community Care Forum: Aged Care providers across the Tweed and Northern Rivers region
- Tweed Disability Network
- Equal Access Advisory Committee
- Health service providers: Bugalwena General Practice, NSW Health
- NSW Government Energy rebate contacts
- Energy efficiency advisors: Seb Crangle, Colin George
- Financial counsellors and community workers



*Contact and connect*

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