



## **Launch of the Flexible Pricing Public Information Campaign**

**Presentation by Jo Benvenuti, Executive Officer, Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre**

**Monday 15 July 2013**

**1.45 for 2.00pm**

**Footscray Community Arts Centre**

**45 Moreland Street Footscray**

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Thank you, Sandra, for your introduction, and thank you, Minister, for inviting me to speak at this event. We at the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre think that good consumer information and education is of the utmost importance so I'm very pleased to be participating in the launch of the Flexible Pricing Information Campaign and the Energy Information Fund.

Today I want to tell you briefly about a new piece of work that CUAC is undertaking in conjunction with the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation on its Energy Information Fund. We are excited about this project because it encompasses two areas of work that we are particularly passionate about: consumer education, and advancing the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers. In particular we believe that every effort should be made to ensure that when policy changes are introduced, that these groups are not forgotten or ignored but supported, to ensure that they too can access any benefits.

The introduction of flexible pricing options is a major change to the way that many Victorian consumers will pay for and use electricity. Consumer information and education is a crucial plank in this reform. Why? Because to decide whether to take up voluntary flexible pricing or to stick with a flat tariff, consumers need to know what each of these are, how they work, and who they will suit. To choose a specific offer in what is a complex market, they will need to know about and have access to independent price comparator tools. When deciding to remain on their standing offer or move to a flexible offer – consumers need to be armed with knowledge about their rights. And, if they do choose a flexible tariff offer, advice and information about how they might change some of their energy use will help them to maximise savings.

Today we'll be seeing some of the tools and information that will be available to help Victorian consumers understand what flexible pricing is, whether it's right for their household, and how they might benefit from it. But there are also consumers who, because English is not their first language, or because of a lack of internet access or other barriers, will need extra assistance to find out about, understand and respond to the new flexible pricing options. In fact, having the information and support to make good decisions about energy offers and energy use is *especially* important for these consumers, many of whom are struggling to meet energy costs.

The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre is thrilled that the government is recognising and addressing this area of need with the creation of an Energy Information Fund. This new Fund will provide grants to community organisations who will work with their clients and members to make sure they are equipped to understand and make good decisions about energy. We're also excited to be involved in making the Energy Information Fund a success with our project, which is being funded by the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation.

Our project will kick-start the Fund with the production of a series of simple guides that come with tools and resources for community organisations to use with clients: on energy basics, smart meters, choosing an energy offer, and flexible pricing. These can be used and adapted by organisations in their work directly with consumers.

We'll also be launching the EnergyInfoHub website, which we hope will become the go-to place for community organisations looking for information about energy that they can use to help their clients and members, and for details on Energy Information Fund grants. Through the course of the project, we will be working hard to make sure that community organisations:

- know about the opportunity for funding to help clients with energy issues;
- are supported to do this work well; and that
- the knowledge generated through the Fund is captured and shared as widely as possible through the EnergyInfoHub website.

We know that many community organisations already have substantial expertise in assisting these groups with simple and helpful information aimed at reducing their costs and contributing to a more sustainable environment and we believe that this fund provides an opportunity for more innovation. CUAC is very much looking forward to working with government, with our colleagues in the community sector, and with industry, to see that Victorian consumers, including vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers, are empowered with the information and tools they need to understand and benefit from choices that support their circumstances. Minister, we congratulate the government on this initiative.