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NTCOSS Policy Statement: Energy in the NT

Access to safe, clean, reliable, and affordable energy is a basic need for everyone. Yet many households in the Northern Territory, particularly in remote and very remote communities, cannot afford the power they need for safe, healthy and comfortable living.

Energy consumption per household in the NT is relatively high. The NT experiences extreme temperatures, and poor quality housing and the effects of climate change are pushing Territorians to use ever more energy. This leaves disadvantaged households even worse off, and many cannot afford the energy they need, resulting in unmanageable power bills and frequent disconnections.

People living in remote NT – mostly Aboriginal people – experience extremely high levels of energy hardship. Households using pre-payment meters – mostly without choice, and mostly Aboriginal – experience particularly high levels of energy hardship, and experience extremely high levels of involuntary self-disconnection, leading to loss of food and medicine, and making already

Effects of climate change are already being felt across the Northern Territory, and it is predicted that temperatures will rise, rainfall patterns will be less predictable, cyclones will be less frequent but more intense. We need an energy system that is safe and sustainable into the future, delivering affordable, clean energy to households across the NT.

The Northern Territory has made a commitment to reach zero net emissions by 2050 and has committed to 50% of energy being from renewable sources by 2030, including a target of 70% renewable power for remote communities where electricity is currently supplied through the Indigenous Essential Service (IES) program.

This policy statement is consistent with all the Domains in the Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework and the 9 Healthy Living Practices

NTCOSS advocates for

- a f**air and equitable energy** system in the NT that ensures all households have access to and can afford the energy they need
- targeted energy concession schemes that address **affordability**
- **improved energy performance** of housing in the NT
- a planned and timely **transition to renewable energy** and development of safe, clean energy infrastructure throughout the NT

NTCOSS Energy Policy: a fair and equitable energy system in the NT

Energy is an essential service - all Territorians have the right to access clean, affordable, dependable power.

How energy is made, distributed and sold is changing – we need policies and practices that ensure everyone benefits the future energy system.

NTCOSS advocates for an inclusive, sustainable, zero emissions energy system that actively improves outcomes for households, the community and the environment.

NTCOSS calls on the NT government to:

- fund community energy consumer advocacy to represent the long-term interests of low-income residential, small business, and community sector energy consumers in decision making on climate and energy policy and programs.
- ensure the continuing development of the NT Electricity Market (NEM) deliver facilitates a just transition to renewable energy in the NT and ensures all Territorians have access to affordable energy
- require NT energy retailers to provide publicly available, regularly published information about energy use, energy concessions, hardship policies, disconnection rates and dispute resolution processes
- ensure national customer standards developed for NEM jurisdictions are reflected in the NT energy system
- fund an independent review of electricity pricing in the NT and its impact on energy affordability for low income households and Territorians experiencing disadvantage
- invest in and undertake workforce planning and skills training to ensure adequate capacity to deliver high quality services across the energy and efficiency sectors, and create jobs

NTCOSS Energy Policy: Affordability

Despite the fact that electricity in the NT is cheaper than in most other states and territories in Australia, a large number of households face energy hardship. This is due to poverty, overcrowding, poor quality housing and appliances, and the NT climate.

The NT experiences extreme temperatures, and poor quality housing and the effects of climate change are pushing Territorians to use ever more energy.

While many households experience seasonal or temporary energy hardship, a large number of households experience ongoing and severe energy hardship. Energy hardship in the NT is caused or exacerbated by extremely poor quality housing and overcrowding. Rates of disconnection among pre-pay customers in the NT are significant in frequency, duration and impact.

NTCOSS advocates for targeted concession schemes that address energy affordability for low income households, programs that improve the energy efficiency of low income housing (including appliances and fittings), and energy hardship programs that are accessible, up to date and fit for purpose.

NTCOSS calls on the Northern Territory Government to:

- ensure NT Concession Scheme eligibility is adequate and targeted toward need (including to Commonwealth Health Card holders) and continues and extends the provision of Energy Support Payment Vouchers
- ensure households with pre-paid meters have access to the same protections and supports available to post-payment customers
- ensure pre-paid meter pricing does not effectively mean PPM users pay a higher price per KWH than post-payment energy consumers
- plan and implement programs that provide solar power to communities, low income households and public buildings, and ensure the benefits of low cost, renewable electricity are shared by all Territorians
- plan and implement a program to improve energy efficiency of dwellings and appliances for low income households regardless of tenure
- plan and implement a program to assist low income households replace inefficient appliances and fittings, including replacement subsidies and targeted no interest loan schemes (NILS)
- ensure social housing in the NT is built and maintained to maximise energy efficiency, supported by regular and scheduled maintenance programs.

NTCOSS Energy Policy: energy efficiency

Many households in the NT face energy hardship as defined by the United Nations Sustainable Goals: the lack of affordable, renewable and reliable energy services. It can be temporary or persistent. Low income, poor quality housing and inefficient appliances combined with the harsh climate leave many households unable to afford the power they need when they need it.

Due to age, design and condition of housing, poor maintenance and low quality appliances, many households across the NT – and especially in remote and very remote NT – simply cannot afford to cool or warm their home so it is healthy and comfortable. Inefficient appliances exacerbate the problem.

Improved energy performance of housing in the NT and an appliance replacement program would mean healthier and more resilient homes, lower energy bills, lower carbon emissions, and reduced demand on the NT electricity grid, at the same time as creating jobs and stimulating the economy.

NTCOSS calls on the Northern Territory Government to:

- develop and implement an NT wide Energy Efficiency Plan for new and existing buildings in the NT to reflect commitments made through the COAG Energy Council (now called Energy Ministers Meeting)
- ensure all residential buildings in the NT achieve a minimum 7 star rating for energy efficiency and, in keeping with in other states and territories, require progressively higher minimum standards for new buildings to increase to 8 or 9 star rating
- introduce legislation for minimum energy performance requirements for rental properties,
- establish a package to assist low income households make energy efficiency related improvements to existing dwellings
- establish a package to assist social housing providers make energy efficiency related improvements to existing dwellings
- establish programs to assist low income households to replace inefficient appliances
- expand energy efficiency and productivity programs for low-income and rental households, aligned with the proposed National Low-income Energy Productivity Program
- work with communities to identify priority actions to improve energy efficiency in existing housing
- establish a mechanism or process to identify the energy rating of existing housing (eg conduct an audit of existing dwellings to identify energy rating, or require dwellings to be rated at time of sale or change of lease)

- establish and support regular and scheduled maintenance programs for public and community housing across the NT

NTCOSS Energy Policy: Climate Justice

The NT is already being significantly impacted by climate change. Everyone is affected by climate change, and it is people with the least who are impacted the most as they have fewer resources to cope, adapt and recover from climate impacts.

We need governments to take effective action to reduce emissions and to support people and communities to become resilient to extreme weather and natural disasters. Addressing climate change is an opportunity to address long term social and economic disadvantage and exclusion in the NT.

A well managed transition to renewable energy and development of clean energy infrastructure, improvements to energy efficiency of housing and an end to fossil fuel subsidies can reduce poverty, exclusion and disadvantage at the same time as reducing carbon emissions.

NTCOSS calls on the Northern Territory Government to:

- develop a roadmap for low-income and other vulnerable households in the transition to a zero emission energy system that identifies and addresses barriers, ensuring no one is left behind
- support communities to develop place based energy solutions that provide affordable, reliable, clean safe power to people living in remote and regional NT
- establish and fund a process to support workers and communities to transition away from fossil fuel industries
- work with local government, unions and communities to transform and diversify economies and support their transition
- resource the collection of detailed data to monitor and evaluate the transition to a clean energy future, and assess whether a just transition is occurring in the Northern Territory
- ensure no public funds are used to subsidise fossil fuel industries
- establish a mechanism for joint governance of a just transition by community, government, technical experts, and business

NT Social Outcomes Framework

NTCOSS's Energy Policy statement is consistent with all Domains in the NT Social Outcomes Framework, in particular:

- Territorians are able to live a healthy life
- Territorians have appropriate and secure housing
- The Territory has a natural and built environment that supports a high quality of life
- Territorians are financially secure and have material basics

9 Healthy Living Practices (HLP)
These principles for healthy housing standards were developed by Healthhabitat and are widely accepted by communities and governments. Healthy living environments support health living practice, and have a significant impact on energy use. The 9 Health Housing Practices inform the NTG's Town camp Futures Framework – as this 2019 project update illustrates

Safety and Life-threatening issues always come first.
HLP 1 – Washing People
HLP 2 – Washing clothes and bedding
HLP 3 – Removing wastewater safely
HLP 4 – Improving nutrition, the ability to store prepare and cook food
HLP 5 – Reducing the negative impacts of over-crowding
HLP 6 – Reducing the negative effects of animals, insects and vermin
HLP 7 – Reducing the health impacts of dust
HLP 8 – Controlling the temperature of the living environment
HLP 9 – Reducing hazards that cause trauma

The United Nations' sustainability goals define energy hardship as **the lack of affordable, renewable and reliable energy services**. It can be temporary or persistent; is experienced across a spectrum; and can be measured using a quantitative (objective) or a qualitative (subjective) approach.

About energy hardship in Australia
https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/migration/documents/PES-FR338-Daniel-1E.pdf

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