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The Australian Business Energy Playbook 2026

Industry-specific energy insights for smarter decisions in 2026

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Introduction

Why this playbook and what's inside

Energy is no longer a background cost for Australian businesses. Volatile pricing, rising network charges and increasing operational complexity mean energy decisions now directly affect margins, reliability and long-term growth.

The Australian Business Energy Playbook 2026 is designed to help business leaders understand how energy impacts their industry, where common risks sit, and what smarter organisations are doing to stay in control.

Who this playbook is for

- Business owners and operators
- Finance & operations leaders
- Property & facilities decision-makers
- Growing multi-site organisations

What's inside

- Industry-specific snapshots
- Small and large business challenges
- Common energy mistakes
- Practical 2026 energy checklists
- What smart businesses do differently

Industries covered

Restaurants
Mining
Hotels
Farms

Offices
Construction
Gyms
Retail stores

Manufacturing
Education
Golf clubs
Strata



Restaurants

Managing peak demand, tight margins, and energy-intensive kitchens

Industry energy snapshot

Energy is a major operating cost for restaurants, directly impacting margins, reliability and service delivery. Long trading hours and energy-intensive equipment mean even small inefficiencies can significantly affect profitability.



Typical energy profile

- High energy use during breakfast, lunch and dinner peaks
- Energy-intensive equipment including refrigeration, cooking appliances and HVAC
- Extended operating hours, often seven days a week
- Mix of single-site operators and growing multi-venue groups

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium restaurants

- Energy bills fluctuate without explanation
- Little visibility into peak usage and demand charges
- Rising costs pressure tight margins
- Limited time or expertise to manage

Key energy challenges for larger restaurant groups

- Energy bills fluctuate without explanation
- Little visibility into peak usage and demand charges
- Rising costs pressure tight margins
- Limited time or expertise to manage

Common energy mistakes we see

- Treating energy as “set and forget”
- Choosing price over structure
- Ignoring demand charges
- Not reviewing contracts as hours change

2026 restaurant energy checklist

- Understand kitchen peak demand
- Review contract structure
- Check network charges
- Identify inefficient equipment
- Plan energy for expansion

What smarter businesses in this industry do differently

- Align energy contracts to operating patterns
- Monitor peak demand and avoid unnecessary waste
- Plan energy alongside growth decisions





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Energy saving story

Ooshman partners with Zembla to cut energy costs



Success story highlights

- Solution: Bill comparison
- Savings: \$9,400
- Industry: Quick Service Restaurant
- Location: NSW & ACT



Mining

Remote operations,
heavy equipment loads,
and high energy exposure

Industry energy snapshot

For mining operations, energy is a mission-critical input. Power reliability, peak demand control, and cost certainty directly affect production, safety, and operating margins, particularly across remote and multi-site operations.



Typical energy profile

- Continuous or near-continuous power demand
- Energy-intensive equipment including crushers, pumps, and ventilation
- Remote or semi-remote sites with limited supply options
- Mix of permanent infrastructure and temporary site power

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium operators

- Limited visibility across temporary and mobile sites
- Exposure to peak demand penalties
- Complex contracts inherited from project timelines
- Diesel and grid cost volatility

Key energy challenges for larger mining operators

- Managing demand across multi-sites
- Aligning contracts, tariffs, and metering across portfolios
- Power quality and reliability risks
- Increasing reporting and efficiency expectation standards

Common energy mistakes we see

- Overlapping high-load equipment start-ups
- Not prioritising temporary power
- Failing to review contracts as operations scale over time

2026 mining energy checklist

- Map major loads and overlap risk
- Review demand charge exposure
- Align contracts across sites
- Audit temporary and camp power
- Plan energy alongside growth

What smarter mining operators do differently

- Actively manage peak demand windows
- Standardise site energy settings
- Align contracts with production cycles





Hotels

Continuous operation,
HVAC and hot water
demand, day and night

Industry energy snapshot

Hotels operate around the clock, with energy playing a constant role in daily operations and essential services. It directly affects guest comfort, service reliability, and operating margins across the entire property.



Typical energy profile

- HVAC across rooms and common areas, driving heating, cooling, and ventilation demands
- Hot water, laundry, and kitchens, with high and often continuous thermal loads
- 24/7 base load

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium hotels

- Seasonal demand swings, leading to fluctuating occupancy and energy use
- High hot water costs, driven by guest usage, laundry, and kitchens
- Limited energy oversight, with few tools to actively manage consumption

Key energy challenges for larger hotel groups

- Multi-site benchmarking, with inconsistent data across properties
- Demand exposure, driven by high peak loads and occupancy patterns
- Contract consistency, complicated by different sites, suppliers, and terms

Common energy mistakes we see

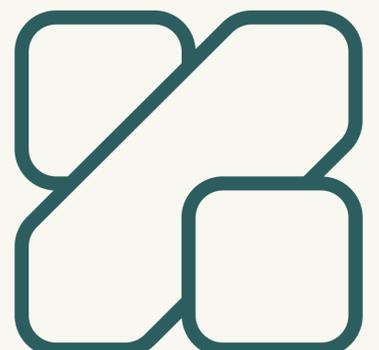
- Over-heating or cooling rooms, increasing unnecessary energy use
- Poor laundry scheduling, driving avoidable peak demand
- Ignoring demand charges

2026 hotel energy checklist

- Review HVAC setpoints
- Schedule laundry off-peak
- Check demand exposure
- Align contracts
- Plan efficiency upgrades

What smarter hotel operators do differently

- Standardise room set-points
- Schedule laundry intelligently
- Align energy with occupancy



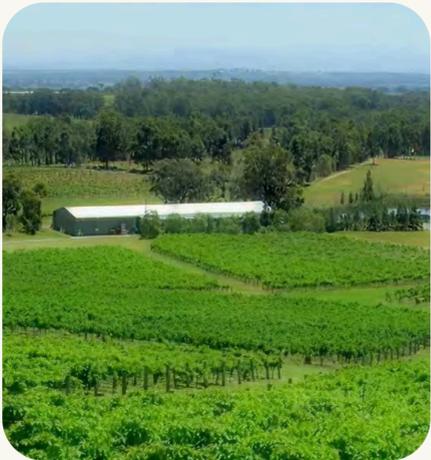


Farms

Seasonal loads,
pumping and refrigeration,
driven by production

Industry energy snapshot

For farms, energy costs are highly seasonal and driven by operational load. Pumps, refrigeration, and processing equipment often run intensively during peak periods, turning strong production seasons into high energy bills.



Typical energy profile

- Irrigation pumps and motors, operating intensively during growing periods
- Refrigeration and cold storage running continuously
- Seasonal spikes tied to weather and harvest, driving short but intense energy demand

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium farms

- Tariff complexity, making it difficult to understand true energy costs
- Limited time during peak activity
- Seasonal bill shock, caused by short periods of very high consumption

Key energy challenges for larger farm operations

- Multiple meters and sites
- Aligning contracts across properties, with varying tariffs and terms
- Demand charges from concurrent large-scale pumping operations, driving high peak costs

Common energy mistakes we see

- Running pumps simultaneously, increasing peak demand
- Over-cooling storage, using more energy than necessary
- Leaving auxiliary equipment on

2026 farm energy checklist

- Review pump schedules
- Check cold room efficiency
- Understand tariff structure
- Align contracts across sites
- Plan upgrades ahead of peak season

What smarter farm operators do differently

- Stagger pumping schedules
- Maintain refrigeration properly
- Align energy planning with seasons





Offices

Daytime demand, HVAC, lighting, and IT, plus after-hours load

Industry energy snapshot

Office energy use is generally steady but often inefficient over time. HVAC drift, after-hours usage, and unmanaged IT loads can quietly accumulate, inflating energy costs without being immediately visible.



Typical energy profile

- HVAC and lighting during business hours, forming the core daytime load
- Computers, servers, and peripherals, running throughout the workday
- After-hours usage creep

Key energy challenges for small to medium offices

- Little visibility into waste, making inefficiencies hard to spot
- Bills higher than expected, without a clear explanation
- No formal energy ownership, leaving costs unmanaged

Key energy challenges for larger office portfolios

- Multi-floor HVAC complexity, with varying occupancy and control zones
- Portfolio benchmarking, made difficult by inconsistent data
- Contract alignment, across buildings, tenants, and suppliers

Common energy mistakes we see

- Over-conditioning office spaces, heating or cooling beyond needs
- Unmanaged after-hours operation
- Always-on IT and peripherals, creating unnecessary base load

2026 office energy checklist

- Lock HVAC schedules
- Power-down IT
- Review after-hours usage
- Benchmark sites
- Align contracts

What smarter offices do differently

- Lock schedules and setpoints
- Standardise IT power management
- Review energy annually





Construction

Changing site loads,
temporary power use,
across build stages

Industry energy snapshot

Construction energy use is highly variable across projects and timelines. Costs fluctuate by project stage, site setup, and overlapping equipment use, which can make unmanaged energy a silent but persistent drain on margins.



Typical energy profile

- Temporary site sheds and HVAC
- Power tools, battery charging, and compressors
- Cranes, lifts, and hoists on larger sites
- Short-term sites with long contract terms

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium builders

- Bills spike without clear explanation, due to changing site conditions
- Off-peak opportunities often missed, increasing avoidable costs
- Contracts outlive projects, leading to charges after sites shut down

Key energy challenges for larger construction companies

- Multiple active sites at once
- Demand penalties from overlapping equipment use
- Limited portfolio-level visibility, making cost control and benchmarking difficult

Common energy mistakes we see

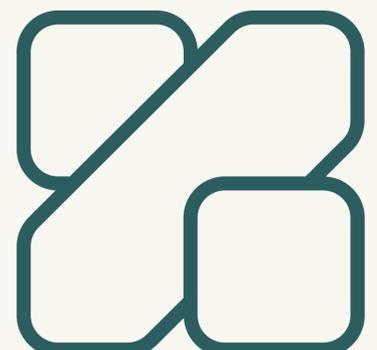
- Charging batteries during peak energy periods
- HVAC running outside crew hours
- Not closing accounts promptly at end of projects

2026 construction energy checklist

- Match contracts to project length
- Control charging times
- Set site shed HVAC timers
- Track active meters
- Close sites cleanly

What smarter builders do differently

- Align energy with project timelines
- Standardise site power routines
- Actively manage charging and HVAC schedules





Gyms

Extended hours,
HVAC and equipment
load, throughout the day

Industry energy snapshot

Gyms consume energy consistently throughout the day, with demand driven by HVAC systems, lighting, and specialised fitness equipment. Extended operating hours and varying occupancy levels add to the ongoing energy load.



Typical energy profile

- Extended operating hours, leading to long energy run times
- HVAC and ventilation, maintaining comfort and air quality throughout the day
- Equipment base load, from cardio machines, weights areas, and controls

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium gyms

- High base load, from always-on equipment and systems
- HVAC inefficiency, due to extended hours and variable occupancy
- Limited energy visibility, making it hard to identify waste

Key energy challenges for larger gym chains

- Multi-site benchmarking, complicated by differing layouts and energy usage patterns
- Peak demand exposure
- Contract alignment, across locations, suppliers, and tariff structures

Common energy mistakes we see

- HVAC running overnight, conditioning empty spaces unnecessarily
- Equipment left powered, creating avoidable base load
- No usage monitoring

2026 gym energy checklist

- Review HVAC schedules
- Manage overnight load
- Benchmark locations
- Review tariff fit
- Plan expansion energy

What smarter gym operators do differently

- Control base load
- Schedule HVAC precisely
- Benchmark sites





Retail stores

Long trading hours,
lighting and refrigeration,
driving demand

Industry energy snapshot

Retail energy costs are driven by long trading hours, extensive lighting, and refrigeration requirements. Over time, even small inefficiencies can compound across seasons and multiple sites, quietly increasing overall energy spend.



Typical energy profile

- Lighting and HVAC during trading hours, forming the core operational load
- Refrigeration in food and convenience retail, running continuously to protect stock
- Seasonal demand spikes

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium retailers

- Bill volatility, caused by seasonal demand and changing tariffs
- Over-cooling or heating, increasing energy use during trading hours
- Limited time to review plans, leaving costs unchecked

Key energy challenges for larger retail chains

- Portfolio demand exposure, driven by simultaneous peak trading periods
- Inconsistent contracts, across stores, regions, and suppliers
- Site-to-site inefficiency, due to differing layouts, controls, practices

Common energy mistakes we see

- Doors left open, allowing conditioned air to escape
- Dirty fridge coils, reducing refrigeration efficiency
- Lighting left on unnecessarily

2026 retail energy checklist

- Check refrigeration settings
- Manage door policies
- Review lighting schedules
- Align contracts
- Track peak usage

What smarter retailers do differently

- Control airflow
- Maintain refrigeration
- Benchmark sites





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Energy saving story

ChemPro pharmacy group saves \$116,000 annually



Success story highlights

- Solution: Energy procurement
- Savings: \$116,000
- Industry: Retail
- Location: NSW & QLD



Manufacturing

Shift-based demand,
machinery and air,
on site

Industry energy snapshot

Manufacturing energy costs are driven by machinery, compressed air systems, and shift-based demand patterns. Poor sequencing, idle running, or ageing equipment can quietly push costs well beyond expectations.



Typical energy profile

- High daytime or shift-based demand, driven by rigorous production schedules
- Machinery, ovens, chillers, and compressors, forming the core process load
- Continuous or batch production

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium manufacturers

- Demand spikes from simultaneous start-ups, driving higher peak charges
- Inefficient compressed air systems, with leaks and oversized equipment
- Tariff confusion, making true energy costs hard to predict

Key energy challenges for larger manufacturing businesses

- Multi-site demand management
- Power quality issues, affecting sensitive equipment and uptime
- Procurement timing and risk, with exposure to market volatility

Common energy mistakes we see

- Running all equipment at once, creating unnecessary peak demand
- Ignoring compressed air leaks
- Treating tariffs as fixed, missing opportunities to optimise costs

2026 manufacturer energy checklist

- Review demand windows
- Fix air leaks
- Sequence machinery start-ups
- Check tariff fit
- Plan upgrades with energy in mind

What smarter manufacturers do differently

- Sequence start-ups
- Maintain equipment aggressively
- Align contracts with production cycles



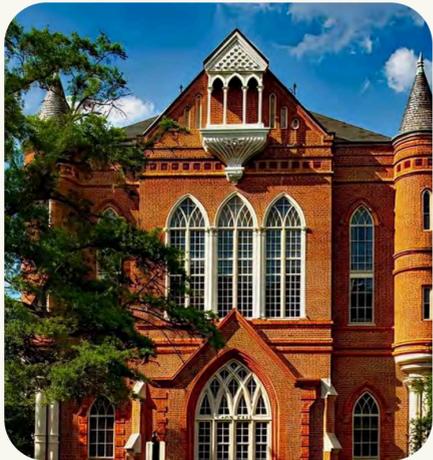


Education

Fixed schedules, HVAC and lighting, across campuses

Industry energy snapshot

Schools, colleges, and universities operate across multiple buildings with fixed schedules and strong seasonal extremes. Coordinating heating, cooling, and lighting across campuses makes effective energy management an ongoing challenge.



Typical energy profile

- HVAC and lighting across campuses, serving classrooms, halls, and common areas
- IT and specialist facilities, including labs, libraries, data rooms
- Event-driven after-hours use, extending energy demand beyond normal schedules

Key energy challenges for smaller education facilities

- Limited resources, restricting active energy management
- Bills spike in heatwaves, driven by cooling demand
- Contract rollovers, often occurring without review

Key energy challenges for larger education campuses

- Multi-building complexity, with diverse uses and control systems
- Demand coordination, balancing loads across buildings and schedules
- Budget-cycle alignment, constraining the timing of energy decisions

Common energy mistakes we see

- HVAC running outside schedules
- Poor zoning, heating or cooling more area than needed
- No building-level visibility, limiting control over campus energy use

2026 school energy checklist

- Review HVAC schedules
- Benchmark buildings
- Stagger kitchen loads
- Check tariff fit
- Plan upgrades

What smarter education institutions do differently

- Lock schedules
- Monitor building usage
- Align contracts to budgets





Golf clubs

Seasonal demand, irrigation and facilities, driving load

Industry energy snapshot

Golf club energy use is driven by irrigation systems, clubhouse operations, and seasonal demand swings, with energy demand rising during peak playing seasons and periods of increased course maintenance.



Typical energy profile

- Irrigation pumps, operating intensively during both dry and growing periods
- Clubhouse HVAC and kitchens
- Event-driven peaks, from tournaments, functions, and peak visitor days

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium clubs

- Seasonal bill shock, driven by irrigation and peak usage periods
- Pumping inefficiencies, increasing energy use beyond requirements
- Limited energy expertise, restricting proactive cost management

Key energy challenges for larger golf clubs

- Multiple facilities, including courses, clubhouses, and amenities
- Demand from concurrent loads, such as irrigation, HVAC, and events
- Contract complexity, across meters, tariffs, and suppliers

Common energy mistakes we see

- Pump overlap, running multiple irrigation systems at the same time
- Over-cooling clubhouses
- Ignoring demand charges, leading to higher peak electricity costs

2026 golf club energy checklist

- Review irrigation schedules
- Check clubhouse HVAC
- Understand demand exposure
- Align contracts
- Plan seasonal energy

What smarter golf clubs do differently

- Stagger pumping
- Align energy with events
- Review contracts regularly





Strata

Shared services, lighting, lifts, and plant, running continuously

Industry energy snapshot

Energy consumption in strata properties is influenced by common area lighting, heating and cooling systems, and the varying needs of residents. Demand typically peaks during extreme weather conditions and when communal facilities are in high use.



Typical energy profile

- Common area lighting and services
- Centralised HVAC, pumps, and plant, serving shared spaces and amenities
- Continuous base load, from always-on equipment and shared infrastructure

Key energy challenges for small-to-medium strata managers

- Limited visibility across sites, making it hard to spot waste or anomalies
- Rising common-area energy costs, with little control over resident behaviour or usage
- Time and resource constraints

Key energy challenges for larger strata managers

- Portfolio-wide benchmarking, across many buildings and meter types
- Demand exposure from shared plant, lifts, pumps, and centralised services
- Contract and tariff complexity, across multiple owners, sites, and suppliers

Common energy mistakes we see

- Common-area lighting and systems left running, without timers or controls
- Outdated controls and settings
- No regular review of bills or tariffs, allowing costs to drift unnoticed

2026 strata energy checklist

- Review common-area operating hours
- Check shared plant performance
- Understand demand exposure
- Review and align energy contracts
- Plan upgrades seasonally

What smarter strata managers do differently

- Stagger shared equipment use
- Align energy use with occupancy and events
- Review contracts and bills regularly





Who is Zembl?

For more than 15 years, Zembl has been helping Australian businesses, from local cafés to large manufacturing plants, make smarter energy decisions and boost their bottom line.

Our work gives us a real-time, evolving view of energy rates, the National Energy Market (NEM), and the many factors that shape it. It also provides us with a deep understanding of how energy impacts Australian businesses across every sector.

Zembl provides both small business energy bill comparisons and energy procurement tendering for Commercial & Industrial businesses.



This report, The Australian Business Energy Playbook 2026, was published by Zembla in January 2026.

To learn more about Zembla energy procurement and bill comparison services for businesses, please visit our website.



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