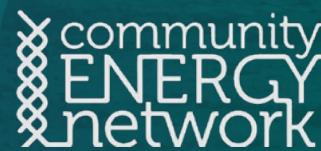


2025 Energy Resilience and Affordability Conference: summary report

Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 7-9 October 2025



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Summary



The third Ara Ake conference was held 7-9 October 2025 in Wellington, Te Whanganui-a-Tara with an attendance of almost 200. This included representatives from government organisations, research, and the electricity sector, but the majority continued to be from not-for-profit community groups and iwi who are on the ground, working directly with those living in energy hardship.

This conference brought together more than 30 speakers under the theme “**Regional Solutions for Equitable Energy**.” Discussions centred on how regional partnerships, innovation, and collaboration can strengthen energy affordability, resilience, and support an affordable energy transition across Aotearoa.

Each speaker contributed a distinct lens on the essential steps required to overcome energy hardship and improve regional resilience and energy affordability. The event collectively emphasised the need to shift from our current trajectory of increasing energy hardship to one that safeguards the wellbeing of those most at risk during Aotearoa’s transition to a clean energy future. This report is a collation of presentations, panel and roundtable discussions, and interviews during the 2-day conference, coupled with some background context to help set the scene.

Key Takeaways

- **Energy hardship is still increasing** – Despite improved measurement and continued government programmes aimed at reducing energy hardship, structural drivers such as poor housing, low incomes, and rising energy costs continue to worsen household wellbeing.
- **Energy injustice persists** – Inequities remain embedded in Aotearoa’s energy system; Māori, Pasifika, renters, and remote communities still bear the highest burdens.
- **Regional resilience and sovereignty** – Worsening extreme weather events have underscored the need for locally-governed, islandable energy systems (microgrids, community solar, backup) and Māori-led solutions to improve regional self-reliance.
- **Funding remains inadequate** – Despite ongoing funding for initiatives such as Warmer Kiwi Homes and the Winter Energy Payments, the \$2 million in Budget 2025/26 allocated to “Assisting Households in Energy Hardship” is short-term, competitive and siloed, with limited reach into high-need groups and remote regions.

- **Energy literacy is low** – Workshops like Energy 101 and Home Performance Advisor (HPA) Training highlighted the public's limited understanding of energy use, pricing, and technology – and show a way forward to tackling low energy literacy in this country. A coordinated national framework for energy education and workforce training is still lacking.
- **Cross-sector collaboration is critical** – The community sector continues to lead frontline delivery but needs stronger, longer-term partnerships with government, industry, and philanthropy. The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority's (EECA) CEO voiced strong support for deeper collaboration through a proposed Energy Wellbeing Network (EWN) led by CEN.
- **Māori and Pasifika perspectives** – Presenters reinforced that centring Te Ao Māori, Mātauranga Māori, and Te Tiriti-consistent governance is vital to a **just transition**, and that Māori and Pasifika communities remain among the most vulnerable to energy hardship.
- **A culture-first approach** – We need to create culture change, not just structural change. And this conference, among the many other conversations taking place between and within stakeholders working on different aspects of the energy transition, is an important step towards achieving that.

Core Calls to Action

- We need to continue to co-create (and co-fund) a national Energy Wellbeing Network to coordinate regional delivery and share resources, data, and learnings.
- This will help the community sector have a stronger, unified voice able to lobby and advocate government and industry on behalf of priority underserved energy users.
- We need to start embedding **energy justice principles—distributive, procedural, recognition, restorative**—into all policy and programme design related to the energy transition.
- We also need to increase long-term, integrated funding across energy, housing, health, and regional resilience sectors.
- Although great mahi like HPA training and Eco Design Advisor certifications exist, we need to strengthen energy literacy and training pathways through sustained investment in community-led education and qualifications.
- We need to continue to ensure Māori governance and co-design in energy transition planning and local infrastructure development.



“If you want to change systems, everyone starts at the structure – the organisations, the rules, the laws and the kind of things you can write down easily, which is all very good. But until you’ve got the culture right, you will hit roadblocks when you try to create structural change. So, you have to start with the culture, and ultimately, to change cultures, you have to start with conversations. You have to start creating the spaces for different people to come together and have the right conversations about the right topics, the big topics.”

Sam Elder, Founder and Director, Climate Navigator (pictured above)

Introduction

The third Energy Resilience and Affordability Conference (formerly Reducing Energy Hardship Conference), hosted by [Ara Ake](#), [Community Energy Network](#), and [WISE Charitable Trust](#), was held on the 8th and 9th October 2025 at the Harbourside Event Centre in Wellington, Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

The event attracted almost 200 in-person and online attendees, representing a variety of organisations across the community, and included iwi, government, research, technology and social innovators, as well as electricity generators, distribution businesses and retailers. A pre-event, on the afternoon of October 7, held two 3-hour workshops, one an “Energy Sector Explainer” introducing the energy sector and its key players, the other called “At Home with HPA”, delving into the Home Performance Advisor training programme of how to raise the standard of providing better energy advice to Kiwis.

The two conference days were split across the topics of regional resilience, innovation, and approaches to energy affordability and cross-sector collaboration; as well as government policy, community implementation, and energy education, training and research. Both days included several speaker panels, as well as interactive sessions and roundtables to incorporate audience feedback.

Across seven core sessions, over 30 speakers took to the stage, either individually or as part of a panel, to share their knowledge and experience in these subjects.

- **Day one** focused on setting the scene on what regional energy community resilience looks like, both here and in Australia, and innovative approaches and barriers to make energy more affordable.
- **Day two** highlighted initiatives currently underway in the community energy space in Aotearoa New Zealand, and what education and training as well as policy settings are needed to improve regional energy resilience and affordability.
- **To conclude** the conference, nine roundtable discussions were held on varying topics, led by community facilitators.

The kōrero continued to be raw, honest, and leading to eye-opening insights and strong calls to (more) action. The event was chaired by Victoria Crockford, an advocate for community housing, who during her opening monologue, set everyone in the room a challenge:



“We need to pull our heads out of the sand about the changes coming, and have robust conversations about the root causes and symptoms, and that true resilience and genuine affordability, relative to people’s incomes, will require addressing both. We need to move from ‘they should’ to ‘we could’ and leave here with a clear sense of what we could do to strengthen whānau and community resilience and ensure true affordability for all.”

Victoria Crockford, MC (pictured above)



Definitions of Energy Resilience, Affordability and Hardship

The first panel asked conference attendees to provide their own definitions for energy resilience and affordability. The top voted definitions were:

“Resilience is the ability to live well through disruptive events.”

“Resilience is the capacity to endure challenges and turn them into gains and opportunities.”

“Resilience is the ability to withstand an external disruption to a system.”

“Affordability is in the eye of the beholder. We should have a universal basic power allocation, so all whānau have access to some free power as a basic human right.”

“Resilience means a strong community. It’s about self-sufficiency and kaitiakitanga.”

“Resilience is having certainty that energy will be available and the ability to enjoy difficulties with courage and dignity.”

“Resilience is a systems word. It includes all parts, including core requirements like housing, food, water and energy that allows a community to thrive.”

“Resilience means security, affordability and continuance.”

“Resilience should be the confidence that natural resources should be a natural right that is accessible and affordable.”

To summarise, here are some overarching definitions to describe the terminology used in this report:

ENERGY RESILIENCE is the ability of an energy system, community, or household to withstand, adapt to, and rapidly recover from disruptions to ensure a consistent supply of energy.

ENERGY AFFORDABILITY is a household’s ability to pay for necessary energy services without undue financial strain.

ENERGY HARDSHIP is the situation when individuals, households and whānau are not able to obtain and afford adequate energy services to support their wellbeing in their home or kāinga.

Main Themes

Energy Hardship Is Still Increasing

Since 2023, the evidence base and [national monitoring](#) of energy hardship in Aotearoa has become clearer – although there continues to be disagreement among experts about its [actual extent](#). In mid-2023, the Government's *Energy Hardship Expert Panel* published a [wide-ranging review](#) that crystallised structural issues: higher power bills, poor-quality (cold, damp, under-insulated) housing, low incomes, and inefficient appliances are core causes of households' inability to secure adequate energy services. MBIE has also created a [formal energy wellbeing / hardship definition](#) and the first set of national measures to track energy hardship, and has just released another [report](#) (based on data from the [2023-24 Stats NZ Household Income and Housing Costs Census](#), as there was no 2024 report).

Measured indicators and survey evidence point to persistent – and in many areas worsening – household strain and energy hardship. Government, consumer and electricity sector reporting have continued to signal large numbers of households that cannot adequately heat their homes; sector surveys and consumer trackers through 2024–2025 show rising concern about bills, increased instances of households borrowing or delaying other costs to pay power, and clear signs that household electricity outgoings rose through 2024–25. For example, EECA's [Consumer Energy Monitor 2025](#) shows that 4 in 5 households are concerned about increasing electricity prices; just a third of New Zealanders are on off-peak power pricing plans, which help shift consumption behaviours; two out of five do not express confidence in their ability to understand and manage their energy use; and rising inequity and disempowerment between the 'haves' (higher income and home owners) vs the 'have nots' (whānau living in vulnerable circumstances, low income and renters).

The principal drivers for energy hardship remain a mix of structural and short-term pressures, amounting to an increasing energy crisis. Structurally, Aotearoa's poor-quality housing stock and heavy reliance on electric heating means that low-income households use more energy to reach adequate warmth, compounding affordability problems – or they self-restrict and under consume, increasing energy hardship and health problems. This can lead to high rates of 'hidden energy hardship', as presented by [Dr. Sea Rotmann](#). [Recent evidence](#) has shown that those who can least afford to pay for electricity pay the most, both per unit and relative to their income, leading to negative health and wellbeing outcomes. On top of that, 2024–25 saw upward pressure from electricity market movements and forecasts of rising energy costs



in coming years, increasing the vulnerability of low-income and regionally-isolated households. Increasing extreme weather events, such as the recent floods and storms in Te Tauihu-o-te-Waka-a-Māui (Top of the South) and Murihiku (Southland), led to decreasing regional resilience and prolonged power outages.

Political and policy responses have shifted from investigation (2022–2023) toward targeted programmes and cross-agency delivery. Government funding streams and community programmes (see timeline on following page) have been emphasised or re-scope to deliver in-home advice, insulation and efficiency interventions. Administrative changes, such as transferring some Support for Energy Education in Communities (SEEC) responsibilities to EECA in 2025, reflect a move to embed delivery with the relevant agency and [to scale community-level responses](#) alongside monitoring. Regulators and the Electricity Authority (EA) have also been engaging stakeholders about consumer protections and market settings, including mandating the [Consumer Care Obligations, and wider projects aimed at delivering affordable access for consumers](#). But the main concern arising in all three conferences, that these efforts are siloed and amount to 'band aid solutions' rather than addressing the inherent energy injustice in the system, remains.

Timeline



2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

2024

2025

Healthy Homes Initiative, Ministry of Health

Warm Up New Zealand: Healthy Homes

Warmer Kiwi Homes Programme, Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority

Winter Energy Payment, Ministry of Social Development

**Electricity
Price Review**,
MBIE

Energy Mate, Electricity Retailers' and Generators' Association of New Zealand

**Energy Hardship Definition
and Measures**, MBIE

Support for Energy Education in Communities Fund, MBIE and EECA

**Energy Hardship Expert
Group and Reference
Panel**, MBIE

Energy Wellbeing Evaluation Consortium, various
Community Renewable Energy Fund,
MBIE and EECA

**Energy Wellbeing
Network**, various

The Energy System Is Still Unjust

The government programmes and policies described above improve some visibility and protections for consumers in energy hardship. They are supplemented by industry responses, such as dedicated customer care staff and energy hardship programmes, a **Power Credits scheme** to counteract the impact from phasing out the **Low User Fixed Charges**, and minimising disconnections. ERGANZ has also funded EnergyMate, a **new customer referral triaging pilot**, and the co-design of an **“Energy Wellbeing Network”**, which still remains to be funded. The community sector is crucial in supporting and delivering these programmes, helping to identify vulnerable whānau, providing trusted in-home energy advice, creating **social retailers for low-income** and (soon) **Pasifika whānau**, and developing energy communities and community resilience, like in the inspiring Papakāinga case study in Aotearoa’s most remote Māori community, told by keynote Tammy Tauroa.

However, structural drivers (such as poor housing quality, income / bill pressure, and regional supply / price vulnerabilities) and historical systemic injustices (from colonisation, market deregulation and privatisation, and housing inequity) keep harms concentrated among low-income households, renters, Māori and Pasifika, and remote communities. Unfortunately, our energy system in 2025 still remains largely unjust for a large number of Kiwi whānau.



“When I think of resilience and energy solutions, these are the three pillars that anchor our mahi in Ngāti Kuri. That’s community resilience, that’s shared prosperity, and that’s active citizenship.”

Tammy Tauroa, Co-Chair Ngati Kuri Trust Board (pictured above)

Energy Resilience and Sovereignty Need To Be At The Forefront

Over the past three years, many regions in Aotearoa have been devastated by increasing extreme weather events: The Auckland Anniversary Weekend flooding (January 2023), Cyclone Gabrielle which ravaged the Upper North Island (February 2023), Te Tai Tokerau suffered 29 extreme weather events in 2023, flooding causing yet more destruction in Tairāwhiti (June 2024), three “1 in 100 year” rainfall and flood events in Te Taiwhu-o-te-Waka-a-Māui (June-July 2025) and extreme wind and storms in Canterbury and Murihiku (October 2025) all led to widespread devastation of homes, farms, businesses, and large-scale power outages for many communities. Several conference attendees had to reschedule flights and deal with travel disruptions getting to and from the conference. These impacts are projected to worsen as the climate continues to warm.

This year's conference theme of regional resilience was thus very topical. Our ever-increasing extreme weather has caused widespread infrastructure damage, prolonged electricity outages, community displacement, loss of insurance, and highlighted uneven vulnerability across regions. Māori and remote communities have been disproportionately affected – both because of housing and infrastructure deficits, and because many communities are more exposed to supply interruptions and long restoration times. These events underline the urgent need for locally governed, islandable energy systems (for example microgrids, community renewables and virtual power plants), strong regional planning, and Māori-led solutions to build sovereignty and resilience. Tammy Tauroa's Te Tai Tokerau case study was one great example of remote Māori communities creating their own energy sovereignty and resilience:

“It’s about a \$7 million programme to have these kind of micro grids and solar farms in our papakāinga, but if I look at the impact that has on our whānau and generations and generations to come with changing behaviours and changing our relationship to power, I think that’s going to be a well-worth investment.”

Tammy Tauroa

Russell Shaw, CEO of TOP Energy, which serves Te Tai Tokerau a region where 65% of customers are in the highest deprivation brackets (9–10), but where solar penetration ranks second nationally – underscored the difficulty of maintaining reliable service across such a large, remote area with many dispersed and vulnerable communities:



“Regulators don’t measure or incentivise resilience at the edges of the network. As a result, networks mostly focus on investments that impact the largest number of customers rather than the very small communities at the end of the grid who are often our worst served customers.”

Russell Shaw, Chief Executive, TOP Energy (pictured above)



The first panel on Day 1, comprised of Tammy, Russell and Dr. Amanda Cahill, highlighted the barriers and possible solutions to improve regional resilience and sovereignty:

Barriers:

- An electricity grid that was designed over 100 years ago, and which cannot deal with increasing extreme events anymore.
- Cost, especially for the infrastructure required to service remote communities, like upgrading transformers and 100s of kilometres of cabling.
- Affordability challenges, where the highest deprivation index and lowest incomes collide with high costs of servicing low-density and widely dispersed customers (who already under consume electricity, reducing their wellbeing).
- Easements and whenua titles and Māori land rights need to be understood and accommodated.
- Lack of energy system and technology literacy, when behaviour changes are needed to fulfil technology potential.
- Regulatory barriers, some EDBs aren't ready for increased decentralisation.

Solutions:

- Local, self-governed microgrids and energy communities, peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing and training.
- Solar, batteries, and Virtual Power Plants (VPPs), satellite internet access for remote and rural communities
- Strong relationships and partnerships with local lines companies.
- Improved islandable civil defence centres, participatory planning with communities, stronger evacuation plans during danger, and loans of backup supply until the power comes back.
- Developing an interactive energy map, with opportunities and pathways specific to regions.
- Enabling regulations to ease approval.
- Handing power over to communities and incorporating local knowledge – putting whānau and whenua over profit-making.
- Energy education and behaviour change to explain the best use of new technologies.
- Investing in research, education and training – especially of young innovators and tradespeople within communities.
- Mana motuhake (self-determination and sovereignty) for all communities.
- More funding specific to improving regional resilience (e.g., [Regional Infrastructure Fund](#)).

Funding Is Still A Dominant Issue

Funding to address energy hardship in Aotearoa has improved under the last Labour-Green Government but remains a critical constraint to combat ever-rising affordability and resilience concerns. With \$2m having been set aside in the 2025/26 budget for “Assisting Households in Energy Hardship”, the **New Zealand Green Building Council** argues that this is *“not the growth we need”*. On the positive side, government programmes, such as described earlier, still represent meaningful investments aimed at reducing energy bills, improving housing efficiency, and supporting vulnerable whānau. However, many funding-related issues persist:

- The scale of funding still falls short of the need given the number of households in (hidden) energy hardship, and the depth of underlying structural drivers and systemic injustices.
- Funding rounds and programme contracts are often short-term and competitive, which undermines long-term planning and continuity of services at the community level.
- Community groups are still under-valued, under-resourced, and under-funded, with restrictive administrative and reporting requirements causing significant strains on capacity.
- Some high-need groups (e.g., renters, remote and Māori / Pasifika communities) remain underserved by these funding schemes – their needs for targeted investment are greater, but they are often harder to reach, and need higher priority and better-resourced interventions.
- Funding is often siloed by agency (housing and energy efficiency, consumer advice, electricity regulation) rather than fully integrated with income support, housing upgrades, and regional resilience interventions, which limits its effectiveness in tackling the root causes of hardship.
- The uncertainty of future energy costs, extreme weather impacts, supply challenges, and infrastructure vulnerabilities mean that funding needs will increase – yet budgets and programme commitments are not clearly matched to that growing challenge.



“We’ve got to do things differently. So it is about investment rather than just cost. I think we need to think about financing and resourcing differently. What are the things that are reasonable to recover costs on, and what are the things as a society we actually just need to invest in?”

Dr. Amanda Cahill, Founder and CEO, The Next Economy (pictured above)



“Yes it is about supply and demand. We’ve got the demand of very sick people in our community. And the supply is the funding that we need to carry these programmes out to help them.”

Paul Scouller, former General Manager, WISE Charitable Trust (pictured above)

In short, even though the funding architecture is improving and shows some continued government commitment, to fully meet the scale, complexity and equity concerns of energy hardship in Aotearoa, funding needs to be larger, more strategic, longer-term, less competitive, and better integrated across energy, housing, income, health, and regional resilience agencies. It also needs to be more sensitive to different cultures and experiences, and let communities decide how to best spend it.

“We don’t just want to be the statistics that justify funding. We want to be at the tables where policies, pricing and futures are decided – because the wellbeing of our families depend on it. It’s about moving from energy poverty to energy prosperity, from surviving to thriving, from being recipients of help to becoming leaders of our own solutions.”

Naomi Saluni Tavau

The “Energy Wellbeing Network” (EWN), co-designed by community, industry, and research partners with funding from ERGANZ, is now poised to scale into a national hub. EECA’s strong commitment at the conference for this initiative was a welcome sign, but securing actual funding from government, industry, philanthropic, and research partners will be key to realising its potential and sustainability.

“It’s about communities being involved at the forefront of this. It’s not just about us being part of the solution. It’s us leading the solution. What we’re advocating for is a true partnership where we have finances, policy, development, governance, support of government and the industry, and the delivery power and experience of our community-based organisations.”

Phil Squire, Fair Energy Manager, Sustainability Trust

Energy Literacy and Training Needs to Improve

Many presenters commented on the low baseline energy system literacy of New Zealanders. This topic was raised at every conference, and led to two pre-conference workshops tackling the issue:

1. Dr. Stephen Batstone, joined by Daniel Griffiths from the Electricity Authority, delivered an “Energy Sector Overview” – a kind of ‘Energy 101’ – unpacking the complexities of Aotearoa’s electricity market.
2. Vicki Cowan and Jo Wills, co-managers of the **Home Performance Advisor** (HPA) training programme talked about their kaupapa to build capacity within Aotearoa for the provision of advice that is high quality, independent advice so whānau can improve how their home works for them.

“I found this Energy Sector 101 very informative, and it made day 1 of the conference easier to connect to, as we had a deeper understanding and a bit of history behind the energy sector.”

Workshop attendee

“HPA Workshop – Fantastic content, very relevant to the issues we are seeing out in the community – great opportunity to ask questions, and hear questions I haven’t thought about asking. I would love to do more of these.”

Workshop attendee

While Aotearoa New Zealand has developed a strong foundation of **community-led energy education and advice**, such as that funded by SEEC and supported by the **HPA training programme**, the system remains under-resourced, fragmented, and unevenly distributed. Energy education in schools and tertiary settings remains limited – although WISE presented a successful school pilot using **HEAT kits**. Even though vocational and workforce training for electricians, retrofitters, and energy assessors has expanded modestly under the WKH programme and industry-led micro-credentialing initiatives, the demand for skilled practitioners continues to exceed supply, especially in regional areas. Public-facing education campaigns (e.g., EECA's **Gen Less**) aim to increase consumer awareness of efficient energy use, though their reach remains inconsistent across demographics.

There are several challenges and gaps that need to be addressed more holistically and strategically:

- **Low baseline energy literacy:** Many households – particularly those facing energy hardship – have limited understanding of the opportunities and challenges linked to increasing electrification, various tariffs and bill components, and inefficient housing impacts on health, making it difficult for them to make informed decisions or access relevant support.
- **Fragmented delivery:** Energy advice and training programmes operate through multiple agencies and short-term funding rounds, leading to uneven regional coverage and frequent turnover in trained advisors.
- **Lack of cultural and contextual tailoring:** Standardised advice materials often fail to reflect Māori, Pasifika, or rural contexts. This reduces engagement and effectiveness in communities where local trust and tikanga-aligned delivery are essential.
- **Underfunded coordination and workforce development:** Despite growing demand for household energy education and retrofit guidance, there is no national framework for certification, career pathways, or ongoing professional support for energy advisors.

- **Limited integration with health, housing, and social services:** Energy education often sits separately from housing retrofits, income support, or health interventions – missing opportunities for joined-up impact.

“If we expect meaningful, lasting change, we need to understand that change moves at the pace of trust. If we give community organisations time and trust, it allows us to further build the trust with whānau in purpose-driven organisations. We do what we do because we’re passionate. A lot of the work that we do here is unpaid. Our market extends further than just the one visit. It’s about the ongoing relationship and education required to create a technical difference.”

Lee Siegle

One great example for improving regional community energy literacy was presented by Hinerangi Pere from Orion. The **Community Energy Activator** in Canterbury was a 12-week pilot programme delivered last year in September. Its purpose was to support communities across Canterbury to explore, learn and connect around local energy projects, and to provide a structured pathway for future energy communities. Another aspect of improving consumer energy literacy was presented by **Jodi Gardner**, the Brian Coote Chair in Private Law from Auckland University, who talked about the importance of education and research-based advocacy to help electricity consumers enforce their legal rights, and ensure they receive the minimum protections to which they are currently entitled.

Building nationwide energy literacy – and the skilled workforce to support it – will require sustained funding, coordination through entities like CEN or EECA, and culturally grounded, community-based delivery models that reflect our country's diverse needs.



This is what our future workforce looks like: young, bilingual, smart, tech-savvy and caring – young collective action. They're a strength in working together towards a common goal and reciprocity, ensuring civic voices are not just heard, but heeded at decision making tables.

Naomi Saluni Tavau, Co-founder/CEO, Faioa Famili Trust (pictured above)

The Need for Cross-Sector Collaboration Is Stronger Than Ever, But Some Bright Sparks Are Emerging

Even though the current government coalition has decreased both focus and funding to address rising energy hardship and injustice, there are several promising regulatory and policy changes, such as **electricity market sector reform**; the EA mandating council-controlled organisations and time-varying pricing, simplifying bills, reducing network connection barriers, and supporting innovation; EECA taking over rollout of community programmes like SEEC and CREF, as well as continuing successful national insulation and healthy housing initiatives, together with other government partners.

Industry has also been taking significant action to support its vulnerable customers: from dedicated energy hardship programmes of the big gentailers, including collaboration with CEN and community providers; to ERGANZ' Power Credits Scheme, and funding of the initial co-design of an energy wellbeing network, which led to a triaging pilot currently underway in the Bay of Plenty; to electricity distribution businesses such as TOP and Orion undertaking great work within their communities, and the Electricity Network Association setting up a dedicated energy hardship group; to social retailers such as Nau Mai Rā and Toast Electric emerging with dedicated support for the most vulnerable customers.

Clean technology and innovation projects also continue in large strides. Māori-led innovation (especially represented in the National Māori Energy Summit) abounds; renewable energy communities and more resilient papakāinga projects emerge; and smart technology innovation supports the clean energy transition.

Luke Blincoe, from Supa talked about “socialising the benefits of distributed energy” by partnering with host sites such as schools or businesses where they install solar and battery systems double the size of their consumption.

Matt Strik, from Blackcurrent presented flexible energy opportunities in rural areas, via a dedicated energy management platform combining technology integration, data aggregation and market interaction.



“You can drive that generational benefit from distributed energy and grow that over time. It can grow with you, and it can grow with your community as well.”

Matt Strik, COO, Blackcurrent (pictured above)

Rewiring Aotearoa presented its significant achievements in electrifying Aotearoa, including farming and rural communities, and three key equity policy proposals: A Ratepayer Assistance Scheme (RAS), expansion of Warmer Kiwi Homes, and solar for renters. Dave Karl, policy director of Rewiring asked the audience to participate in kōrero about the idea of a Council-backed RAS to pay off the loan for installing solar and batteries over time, using low-interest, long-term loans with flexible repayments and simple enrolment. One audience concern was that existing targeted rates schemes are now being wound up due to low uptake; several questions concerned high initial costs and return on investment; and another again about the low energy literacy in our communities; as well as lack of accredited training and qualifications for installers and tradespeople. One question also asked if Councils should invest in their own solar and batteries first, using their balance sheets; and there was a general concern about equity issues for renters.



“A solar panel does not discriminate against the owner. What discriminates is our society that stops them ultimately being able to adopt this new technology. So we need to fix the system, and we need to fix the finance, so everybody has access to this technology moving forward.”

Mike Casey, CEO, Rewiring Aotearoa (pictured above)

Bright sparks notwithstanding, our research community continues to raise red flags about the state of energy hardship and injustice: **Vicki White**, when presenting the updated **Household Energy End-Use Project** (HEEP 2), showed that, notwithstanding that indoor temperatures improved from the initial HEEP study, almost 50% of households (despite being over-represented by higher-income and older people and homeowners) said their homes were too cold in winter and 70% said they were too warm in summer, with 48% having significant mould and condensation issues.

Prof. Nevil Pierse and Bronwyn Petrie told the inspirational story and impact of the **Healthy Homes Initiative** (HHI), highlighting the serious health risks and consequences from our low quality housing stock. The reason why this programme is so effective is due to its well-established cross-agency and -sector collaborations, and its ‘tight–

loose – tight' approach to flexible community sector delivery. It also highlights the significant health issues that continue to plague especially renters, Māori and Pasifika communities, as told by this heartbreakingly similar story:

“Our second home in Waikanae was also cold... so cold, we all slept on the floor of the living room with the heater on until one morning we woke up to find the heater on fire. Socks and school uniforms we tried to dry overnight had caught fire. By the grace of God, we all survived. Throughout my childhood, sickness was all too familiar. My brothers were often in the hospital suffering from asthma. One nearly died at the age of 10, and I spent three months in hospital, paralysed with rheumatic fever. Our third home was cold, but bigger, and the same cycle continued – unpaid power bills, delayed renovations, and chronic illnesses caused by homes unfit for New Zealand. We still see these conditions today in 2025, 50 years later. The story remains heartbreakingly similar.”

Naomi Saluni Tavau

Dr Sea Rotmann spoke about the issue of 'hidden energy hardship', which means that our most vulnerable communities remain deprioritised, underserved, and distrustful of government and industry interventions.

“There are many different motivations and factors causing hidden energy hardship. That's why you need different engagement strategies and tailor different interventions that work for them, and that means you need a lot more resources going into it than a one-size-fits-all when we're focusing on just low-income as a metric.”

Dr. Sea Rotmann, CE, Sustainable Energy Advice (pictured above right)

Sea invited the audience to tell some stories about hidden hardship, and there were many great (and sad) examples. There also was general agreement that this issue was serious, and one of broader energy injustice in the country. The biggest barrier to overcome was distrust, and the best way to overcome it was partnering with community and frontline organisations better.



“We find hidden hardship in all corners of our job. We find that people are embarrassed, so they pay us before they buy food or take their kids to the doctor. We find that people can pay their bill because they never turn their heater on. We find that people are in awful situations. We realised that – as many conversations as we have – until we get someone from that community into the home to build trust with them, we cannot help our customers. I just don't know what's going on in the home. And a lot of the times they don't trust us as a retailer, because they have had those multi-generational traumas.”

Audience feedback from a gentailer customer wellbeing specialist

Carl Billington and Dr. Jono Barnard from the Electricity Authority closed out Day 1 by asking for feedback on the [Power Innovation Pathway](#), and how hard-to-reach and hidden community voices could be heard better by those in power – who may actually be the ones who are truly hard-to-reach.

“When the Electricity Industry Participation Code was published in 2010, it was written for a centralised system where electricity flows in one direction. We’ve now got electricity flowing in different directions, and customers are participating in the sector. So how do we actually provide clarity around some of the barriers which were introduced because of how the regulations were written in the first place, and if those barriers are actually real barriers, or if they’re just simply perceived?”

Dr. Jono Barnard, Power Innovation Pathway Manager, EA

Cross-Sector Collaboration

Another panel on Day 1, composed of economist Cameron Bagrie, Dr. Marcos Pelenur, CEO of EECA, Sarah Gillies, CEO of the EA, and Paige Crahan, GM of Tapestry/Google X, discussed the importance of energy sector collaboration. Cameron Bagrie had earlier described the economic challenges of the energy market, highlighting the shift from the ‘Great Moderation’ to a period of increased global volatility and resource scarcity. He emphasised the need for political leadership and risk management, and to reduce divisiveness. Paige from Google X shared insights on leveraging technology and partnerships to optimise energy systems, stressing the importance of flexibility and networked solutions. The panel discussion emphasised the risk aversion in the public sector, and short-termism driving profits in the private sector. It also discussed the transformative potential of AI in managing complexity and improving network efficiency by reducing the time required for simulations from hours to minutes, enhancing risk management and solution delivery. Sarah and Marcos both extolled the need to engage with communities and community sector organisations, to ensure all voices in the energy system get heard and can have a say.



“Demographics are no longer a tailwind. Demographics are starting to be a headwind. Welcome to the world where abundance has been replaced by scarcity, sustainability and climate change. We cannot run away from that stuff any longer.”

Cameron Bagrie, Economist (pictured above, far left)



“I absolutely recognise the commitment and the burden that [our ongoing requests for consultation and submissions] can place, and the fact that some of you have to choose where you put your effort and which submissions you want to make. I just want to thank you for that. That’s really important. We can’t do our work in a vacuum from an office in Wellington. We absolutely need your ideas. What we do want to do is make it easier. So online surveys, but also verbal submissions are very welcome.”

Sarah Gillies, CE, EA (pictured above)

“The more we give back to communities, the more we will see engagement, and the more power we’ll see from what those communities can do. I’m completely committed to establishing a National Energy Wellbeing Framework or scaffolding that will allow community groups to share resources, share lessons, and leverage off as much as they can support each other.”

Dr. Marcos Pelenur, CE, EECA

From all the discussions at this conference, it was clear that the community sector is doing the hard (heart) work on the frontline. That includes **telling the right stories** to the right people who need to hear them and heed them. Their motto is “by the community, for the community”. It is important to understand that communities are all different, and need different solutions, which is why it makes sense to have a national hub supporting regional centres of excellence that do the delivery in their communities in the ways that best serve their needs.

“We see success in our flexibility, which allows us to hear the needs of each whānau and work with them, rather than just doing things to them. It’s a hand-up, not a handout. Of course, we need to stay within the lens of home performance and partner with those who can address some of the other issues that we cannot solve. This is where the importance of cross-sector collaboration comes in.”

Lee Siegle, Lead Team, Sustainability Options

“People are at the heart of community energy, and the benefits will trickle down into their wider community. Energy also empowers local decision making. It promotes resilience. It also strengthens connections between people and place, ensuring that energy solutions are both culturally and socially appropriate. But communities need support to navigate a very complex system and in order to execute their community aspirations and their projects and initiatives.”

Hinerangi Pere, Head of Community Energy Services, Orion

Conclusions And Our Collective Call To (More) Action

Our last panel on Day 2, comprised of Dr. Will Edwards from Ara Ake, Gareth Cartwright from CEN, Sam Elder of Climate Navigator, and Maria Owens of Impact Lab, perfectly summed up the problems we are dealing with when trying to create the right policy settings to solve energy hardship.

A big issue, repeated at this and the other energy hardship conferences, is that of siloed institutional responses and programmes, not enough multi-sector collaboration that co-designs interventions based on whānau and community needs, and simple translation issues between the funders and doers involved in helping to solve these problems:

“Turning our policy intent around things like reducing energy hardship into actual improvements in people’s lives is hard. You’ve got to actually understand what the needs are in a community, identify who it is that needs support. Then you’ve got to engage them. And as we just heard again and again, that can take multiple years to build up enough trust to get meaningful engagement. You then got to understand really what the aspirations of whānau are, and what are the outcomes that matter to them? What are the outcomes that are realistic to expect? How do you kind of make that work within the KPIs in your contract? Then you’ve got to develop effective models of actually supporting and empowering whānau to change their lives. And by the way, you’ve got to do it all with extreme funding constraints, and you’ve got to do it in a political environment that’s constantly changing. And it’s the frontline community providers and the communities they serve that are often best placed to figure all that stuff out, not necessarily policymakers in central government.”

Maria Owens, CE, ImpactLab

A crucial aspect of solving energy hardship that clearly reverberated through the conference discussions throughout the years, is the need for trusted community and frontline navigators. Their mahi is not only imperative to identify (hidden) energy hardship in our underserved communities and regions, but their entire approach is also based on building relationships:

“When you’ve got navigators that know auntie and uncle and their parents and their mokopuna, you’ve got trust. So having navigators there, that’s where the interface should be with this thing called the government machine – social services via trusted people on the front lines. The relationships between agencies are usually formalised in contracts or MOUs or other forms of documents, but I’m more interested in relationships between the people in those agencies now.”

Dr. Will Edwards, Head of Māori Partnerships, Ara Ake

This concludes another highly successful, well-attended, and inspirational conference. It put forward ideas for an “Energy Wellbeing Network” that would unite government, industry, research, philanthropy, and community sectors to tackle energy injustice and hardship at their root causes. Lee Siegle closed out with this inspiring call to action:

“I urge all of us in the room today to start bringing back similar new approaches that are about solving the root causes of hardship. We need to weave each of our expertise and solutions together in partnership, not in competition, and trust each other to work in synergy. We need to have some of these difficult conversations and remind ourselves of the realities of some of our most vulnerable whānau. We cannot keep providing Band Aid solutions. We need to disrupt the system. Partnership is essential to solve energy hardship to improve affordability, resilience and wellbeing.”

Lee Siegle

Learnings Over The Past 3 Years

This was the third Ara Ake conference on the topics of energy hardship, affordability and resilience. In addition to a continued focus on hearing stories from the frontline from the community sector, this year's conference also explored how regional projects, partnerships and innovations can unlock sustainable, community-led energy solutions, and promote energy equity across the motu.

Beginning in 2023 with a strong government focus on energy hardship (under MBIE's policy leadership), moving through a 2024 period of reduced policy attention, and reaching 2025 with a renewed emphasis on multi-sector collaboration, the conference has evolved in step with Aotearoa's changing political and socio-technical context. However, challenges around energy hardship – and the growing need for greater regional resilience and improved affordability – have only intensified.

In 2025, there were significantly more energy industry providers and researchers (including consultants and innovators) represented than in 2023, although community / NGO representation remained in the majority, around 43% of attendees (Figures 1

and 2). Conference feedback collected over the years has clearly fed into this year's conference agenda and make-up of presenters: for example, a call to provide an "Energy Sector 101" system overview was heeded by the pre-conference session headed by Dr. Stephen Batstone. Repeated calls to hear more from the industry and regulators' perspectives led to several presentations by the EA, EDBs and smaller tech innovators.

Interviews with **conference participants** support the view that the conference is growing in maturity, seniority, multi-sectoral perspectives, and continues to provide great opportunities to network and catch-up with known and new potential collaborators around the motu. However, some issues raised in earlier conference feedback remain. Some examples include:

- The lack of a cohesive clean and just energy transition framework for Aotearoa.
- The need for more stringent energy hardship monitoring and reporting across the sector.
- More research is needed from the frontline, including hearing from industry customer care staff, community energy assessors, and stories of whānau experiencing energy hardship.
- The connection between energy hardship, buildings and health, as well as broader hardship due to cost-of-living increases, needs to be supported by more cohesive policies, programmes and strategies across the sector.
- We need to continue to centre te ao māori and mātauranga māori perspectives, including around energy and data sovereignty, and how to honour Te Tiriti in the energy transition.

On the last point, there was a reduction in Māori attendees (from 28% in 2023-24 to only 11% in 2025, based on survey data) at this year's conference – but this could have been due to the **Māori Future Energy Summit** taking place the following week. Māori and Pasifika presenters continued to bring strong insights into challenges facing their whānau, highlighted innovative solutions on how to improve local and regional energy resilience in communities, and address the current living affordability crisis.



Speakers at the 2023 conference.

Attendance Feedback and Demographics

A lot of great feedback was received from conference attendees, with the vast majority continuing to support Ara Ake holding these annual conferences. The average scores for both presenters and the conference were 4.5/5.

Figure 1: 2025 attendees by sector (in percentage)

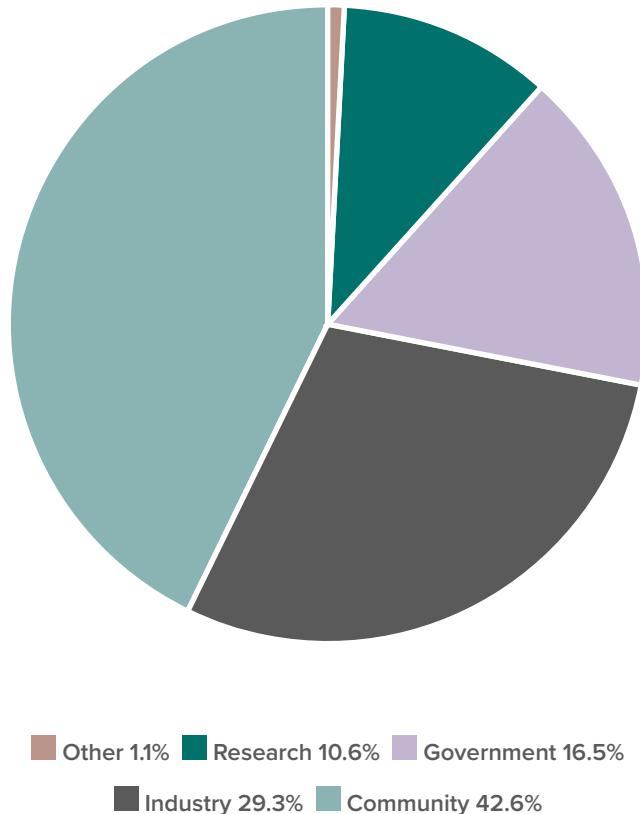
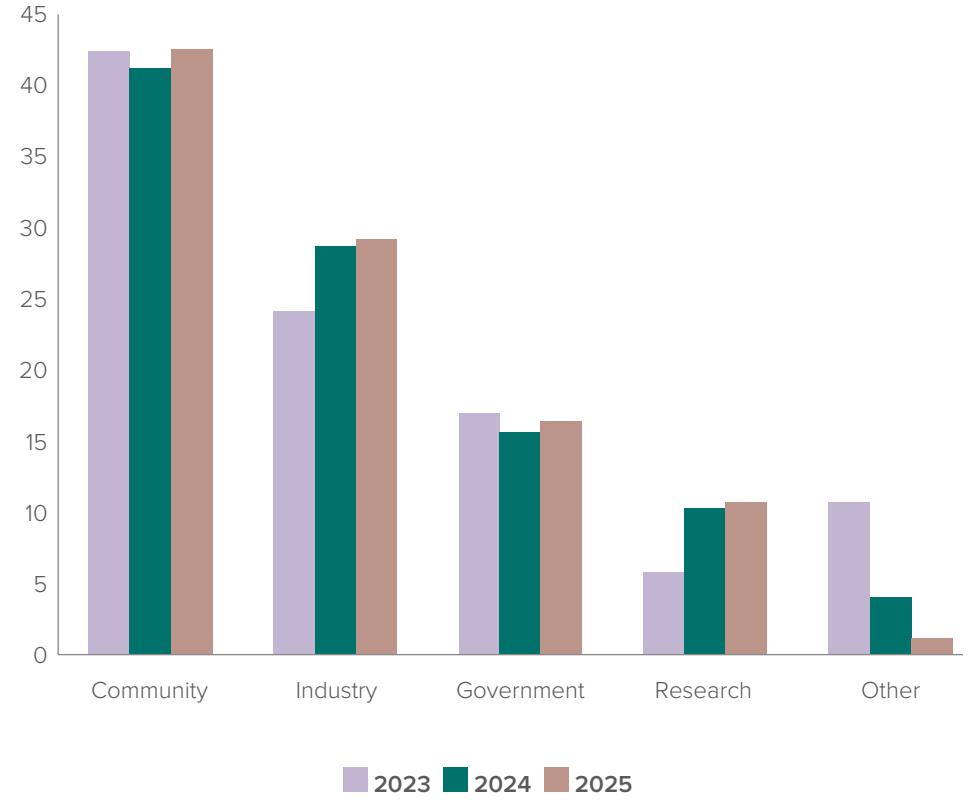


Figure 2: Percentage sector representation over the last three conferences

% Sector representation over the last 3 years





Conference attendees enjoyed the ability to network, and to hear from so many different perspectives. However, there were some concerns raised that Day 1 was overly technical, and Day 2 more focused on community stories and impact – which several CEOs and technical experts from Day 1 subsequently missed. Interspersing those stories from the heartland throughout the conference, and/or ensuring that audience stories and feedback are incorporated better (than via Slido), could be an improvement for future conferences.

The table discussions were positively embraced as good opportunities for match-making and networking. But having nine tables, and only time to visit two at the end of the conference, meant that people missed out on opportunities to hear and discuss the many different topics of interest. Although the panel discussions were appreciated (and called for by previous conference surveys), more audience Q&A and live feedback (if using Slido) was requested.

Two main topics resonated in attendee feedback throughout all three years of the conference:

1. Hearing more stories from the frontline, including those experiencing energy hardship.
2. Delving more deeply into root causes for energy injustice, including how to incorporate te ao Māori and learn from mātauranga Māori.

Appendix

What is Energy Justice Anyway?

There are four main energy justice principles: **distributive, procedural, recognition and restorative justice**. To summarise what they mean, and what their current status in Aotearoa looks like:

Distributive justice is the principle of ensuring that the benefits and burdens of energy systems are shared equitably among different communities and populations.

Example: Warmer Kiwi Homes has delivered 500,000 energy efficiency retrofits and improvements across the motu, but the coverage is uneven: retrofit and in-home services don't yet reach all high-risk households (for example renters, hidden and remote communities), and programmes can leave behind households who can't access or co-fund interventions.

Possible solution: A distributive just transition requires scaling targeted investment (e.g., ring-fenced for renters, Māori land trusts, remote regions) and pairing efficiency upgrades with means-tested income support or bill relief to address both demand and affordability.

Procedural justice is the principle that decision-making processes for energy projects and policies must be fair, transparent, and inclusive of all affected parties, particularly marginalised communities.

Example: Cross-agency work has focused on identifying, measuring and improving energy hardship, but participation remains uneven. Short funding rounds, fragmented programmes, and siloed agency responsibilities limit sustained, community-led programme design, with large energy users benefiting from this structure.

Possible solution: Procedural justice needs longer funding horizons, resourcing for community / iwi participation, and formal mechanisms for co-design and co-governance in programme delivery.

Recognition justice is about recognising (and adequately valuing) different bodies of knowledge and understandings, and including or representing all relevant voices in decision-making.

Example: MBIE's measures and energy hardship programmes like SEEC and CREF are focusing on Māori and Pasifika, but still struggle to fully capture the lived experiences

of Māori / Pasifika communities, and policy design does not yet consistently embed tikanga / Te Tiriti approaches across all energy-policy decisions.

Possible solution: Recognition justice requires institutionalising Treaty-consistent engagement, disaggregated monitoring, and funding pathways that support Māori-led solutions (on-hapū, whenua Māori, Māori housing providers). Academic and policy literature increasingly call for centring te ao māori and recognising whenua / whānau impacts in adaptation and transition planning.

Restorative justice seeks to more precisely account for harms and obligations that arise from wrongdoing, and to widen the circle of participation in repairing those harms.

Example: Some restorative elements exist already, including retrofit programmes that reduce harm and regulatory measures that prevent harmful outcomes. These act as partial remediation for past neglect and recent policy aims to limit **unintended consequences** rather than mask systematic issues. But there is limited evidence of systematic compensation (outside of Treaty reparations) or legally-mandated redress for communities historically disadvantaged by energy system decisions. Most restorative efforts remain service- or programme-based rather than formal reparations or structural investments addressing legacy harms.

Possible solutions: A stronger restorative approach would combine retrofits and consumer protections with dedicated funding to repair historic inequities (e.g., more grants for Māori housing rebuilds / retrofits, tenancy-focused retrofit standards, and community energy ownership models).

“Sometimes in government we talk a lot about the risk of unintended consequences of taking an action, but there are also unintended consequences of not doing something as well.”

Sarah Gillies

It is also important to track and publish justice outcomes (disaggregated indicators tied to MBIE's energy hardship measures) so progress on the four energy justice principles is visible and accountable. Co-creating a clean and just energy transition framework with a clear vision, main principles, key priority areas for actions, and how to track progress needs to guide a cohesive national approach for Aotearoa. Keynote speaker

Amanda Cahill contrasted public, private, and cooperative energy models, noting the challenges and benefits of each. She stressed the importance of diverse economic models for resilience and justice, urging the design of energy systems that prioritise community needs and environmental protection.

“Like in any ecosystem, I think having more diversity leads to much greater resilience over the long term, even if it makes things more complicated. Regardless of the economic model, just and equitable outcomes can be built in if we treat this as a design principle that’s just as important as any other technical factor.”

Dr. Amanda Cahill

