Tariff reform: Making households less energy vulnerable?

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Project Overview
We carried out a mixed methods research project aimed at gaining a better understanding of the experience of energy vulnerable households under changes to electricity tariff structures. The research is a collaboration between Curtin University, WACOSS and Horizon Power and draws on a rich dataset resulting from a pilot project in regional WA to be conducted by Horizon Power over the 2016/2017 summer. The pilot allows Horizon Power to test key features of a ‘power plan’ pricing concept based on a model similar to the mobile phone plans now familiar to most households.

This study examined the effect on consumption behaviour as well as gathering data on first-hand consumer experiences. The resulting data and associated analysis is unique in Australia given the regional location of the study, access to smart meters at every household in the location (allowing both the study participants and control group to be monitored) and nature of tariff being tested. We interviewed 12 participants and other vulnerable customers in Port Hedland and studied results from a post pilot survey and actual usage data.

Outcomes
- Provided client with a clearer picture of the impacts of tariff changes on vulnerable customers which would assist them in making provisions for these customers
- Findings used in evidence presented to the Government of Western Australia which is seeking to make modifications to the electricity market