

Waikato Affordable Energy Webinar Series

June-November 2026



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Knowledge.
Storytelling.

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Presenter: Rachel Afeaki, Chair, WEL Energy Trust



Reflections: Ernie Newman, Independent
Competition Expert and Commentator



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Wellbeing Waikato



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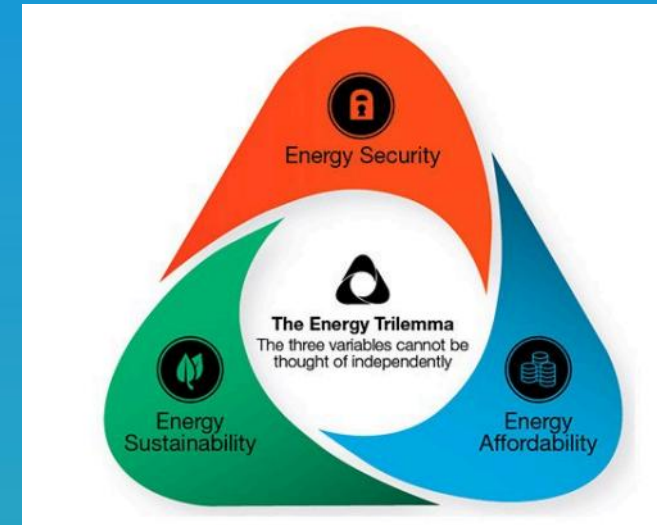
Independent Charitable Trust focused on:

- Regional intelligence about what's most important to households and whanau
- Identifying emerging risks early
- Surfacing underlying drivers, not just symptoms
- Convening government, iwi, councils, community organisations and the private sector around decision-useful insights.



Electricity systems need to be:

- Affordable
- Reliable
- Sustainable



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4 Big Questions

1. How does the electricity system actually work—and why is it designed this way?
2. What drives power prices, and how could they be made more affordable?
3. How does energy affordability affect household and community wellbeing?
4. What would a better system look like—and how do we get there?



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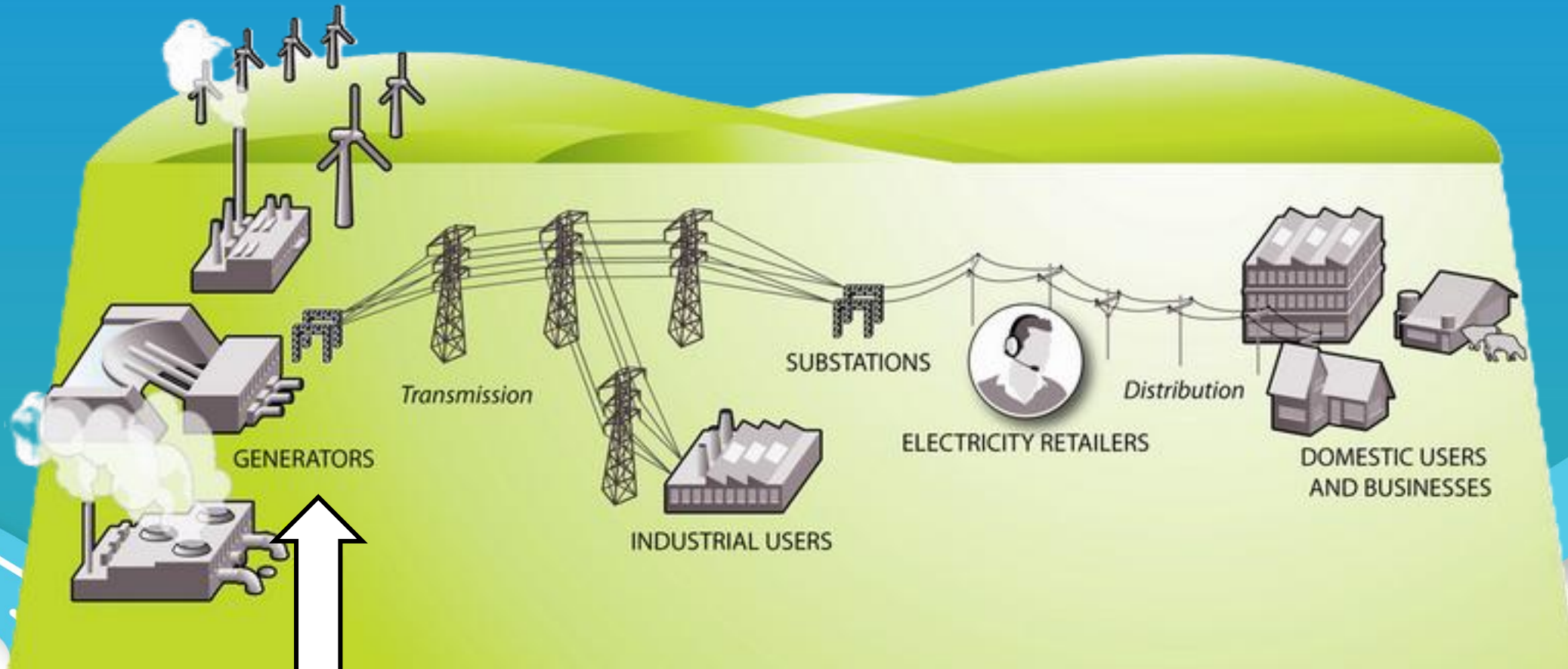
Geoff Bertram, Visiting Scholar, Victoria University
10 June 2026



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The Current Model

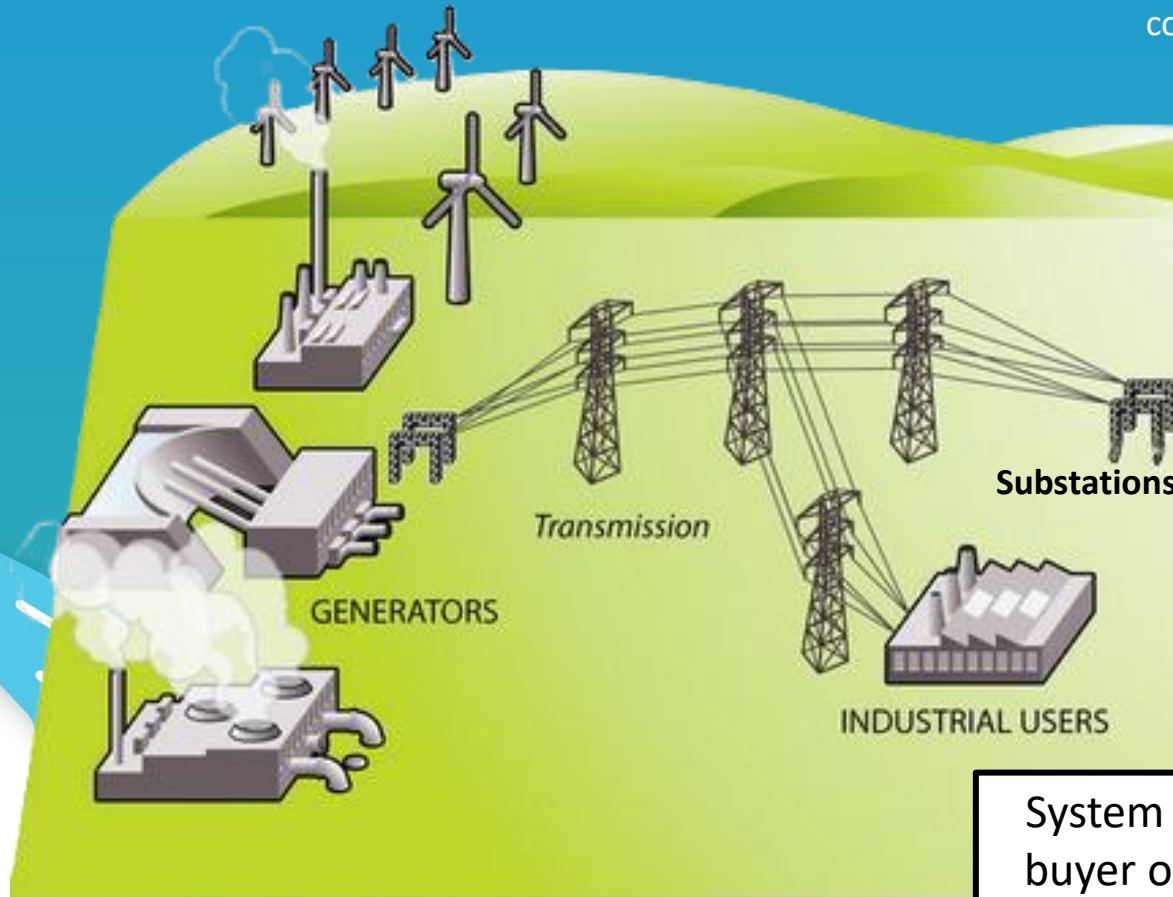


The system operator is here



Bertram's Proposed Model

Central/Remote Generation and Transmission



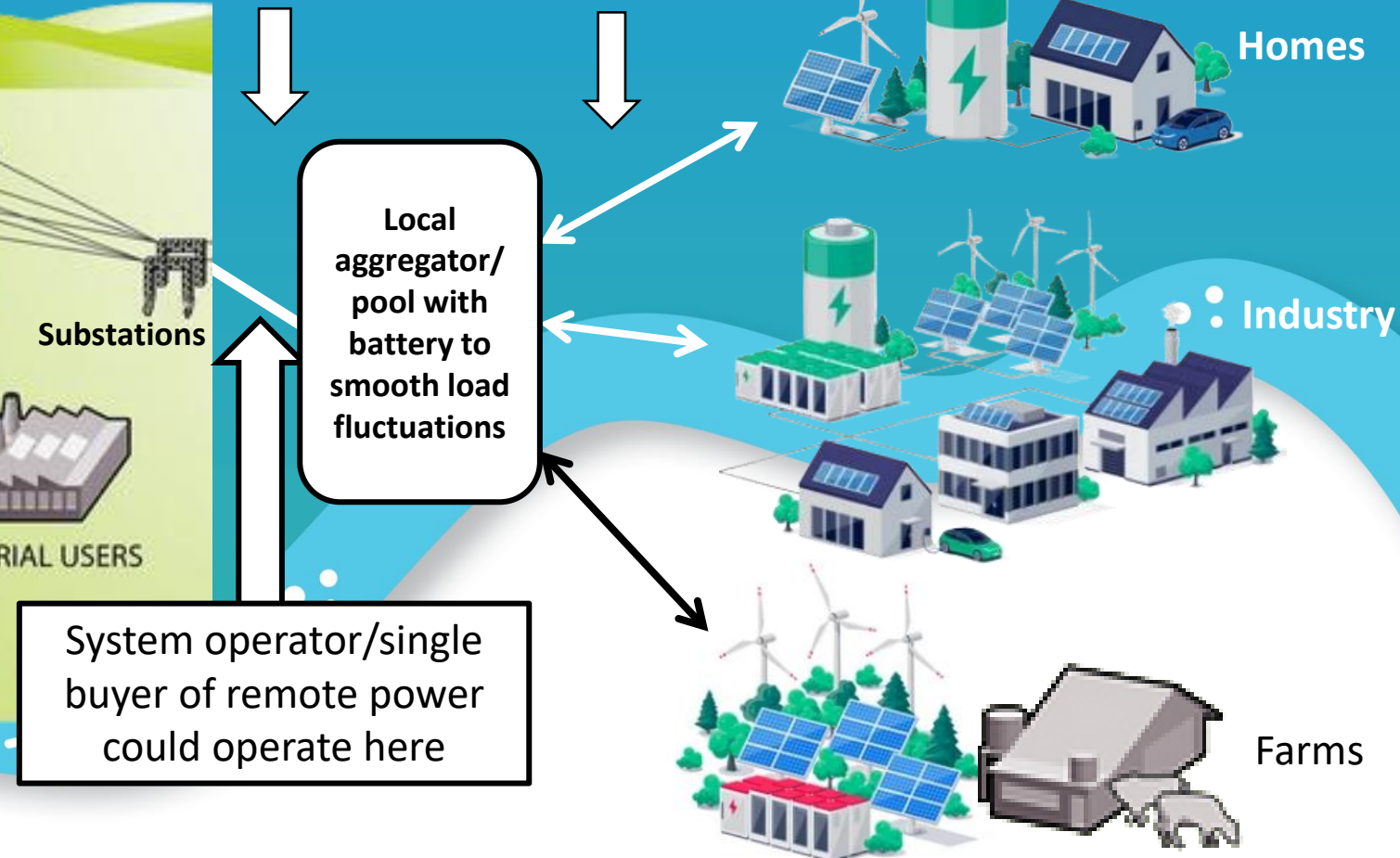
Energy Community

Wholesale
traders
compete here

Local distribution
network &
independent
retailers

Distributed Generation

Domestic Users & Businesses
With Net Meters



From

Remote generation

Retail Market

Distributed Generation

Transmission

To

Remote Generation
& Transmission

Retail Market

Distributed Generation



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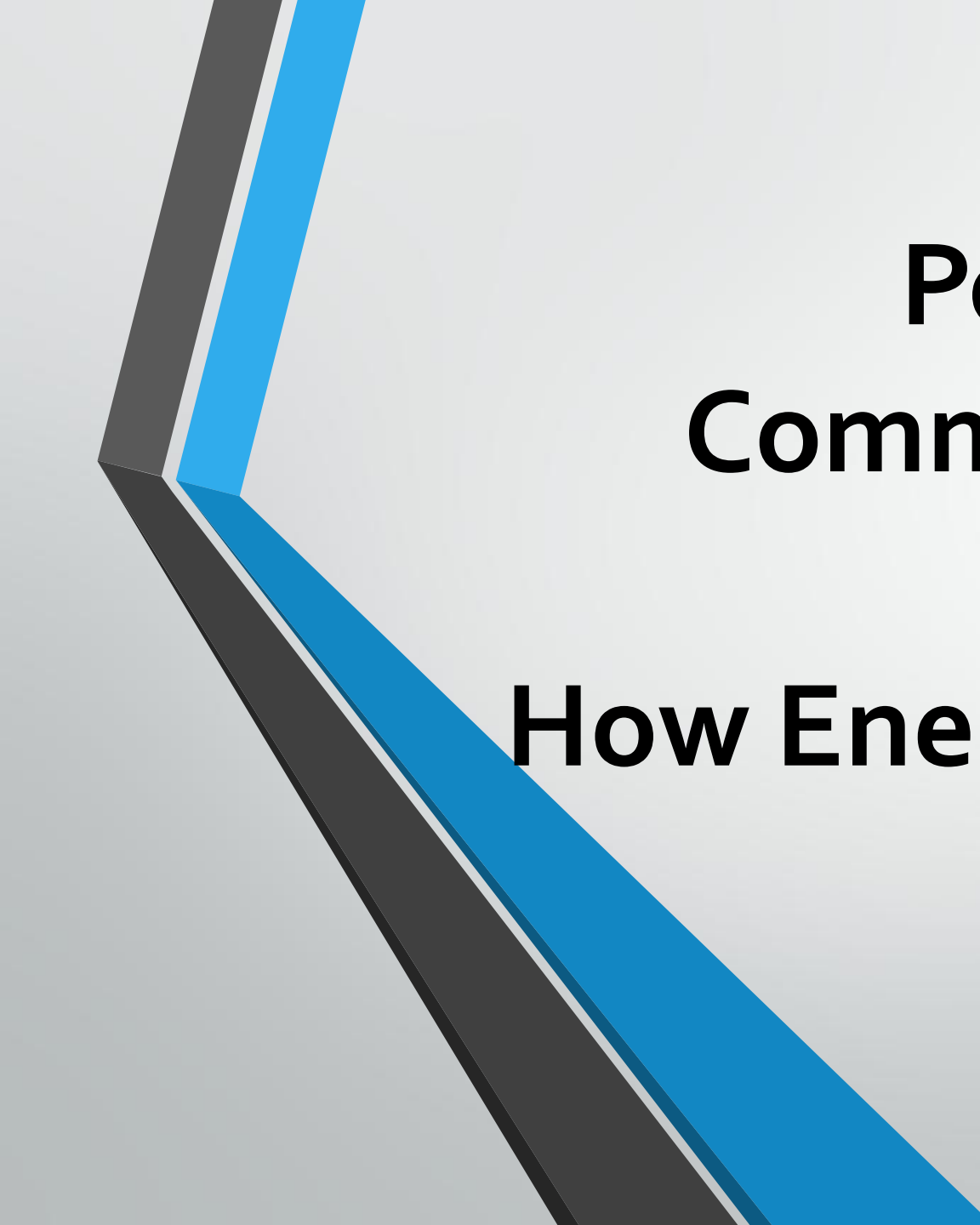
Rachel Afeaki, Chair, WEL Energy Trust

Powering Regional Community Wellbeing: How Energy Value Creates Lasting Impact



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**Powering Regional
Community Wellbeing:**

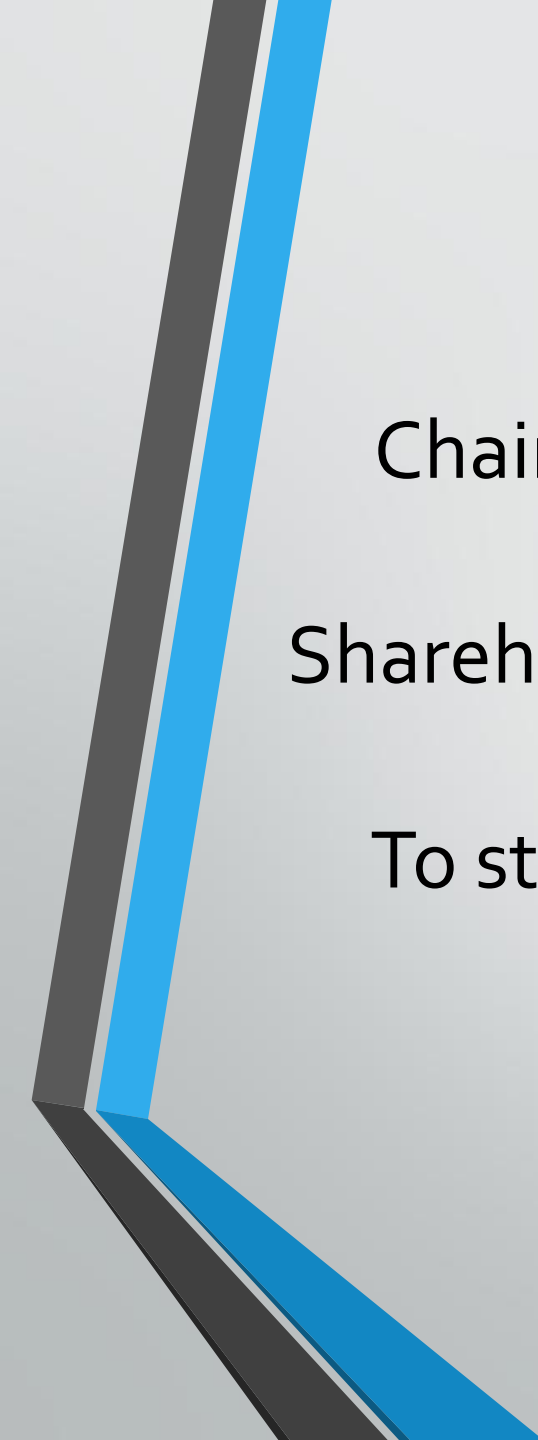
**How Energy Value Creates
Lasting Impact**

Disclaimer

- Avoid making this a technical energy presentation
- My views are my own, as a governor /leader in the energy space
- My experience as the Chair of the local Community owned Energy Trust

Reality Check

- We often talk about electricity in terms of megawatts, markets, and infrastructure.
- But ultimately the purpose of an energy system is not electricity.
- The purpose is it's relationship with our communities: families, businesses, families, generations
- The test of a successful energy system is its capability to uplift and measure wellbeing outcomes and economic participation
- What does this look like locally for the Waikato region?



Local Community owned Energy Trust

Chair with collaborative leadership around the table

Shareholder of the electricity distribution business (EDB)

To steward the region's EDB to perform successfully

Electricity Distribution Business

Through community ownership of essential network infrastructure (EDB), the community trust ensures that the economic benefits of the electricity network remain

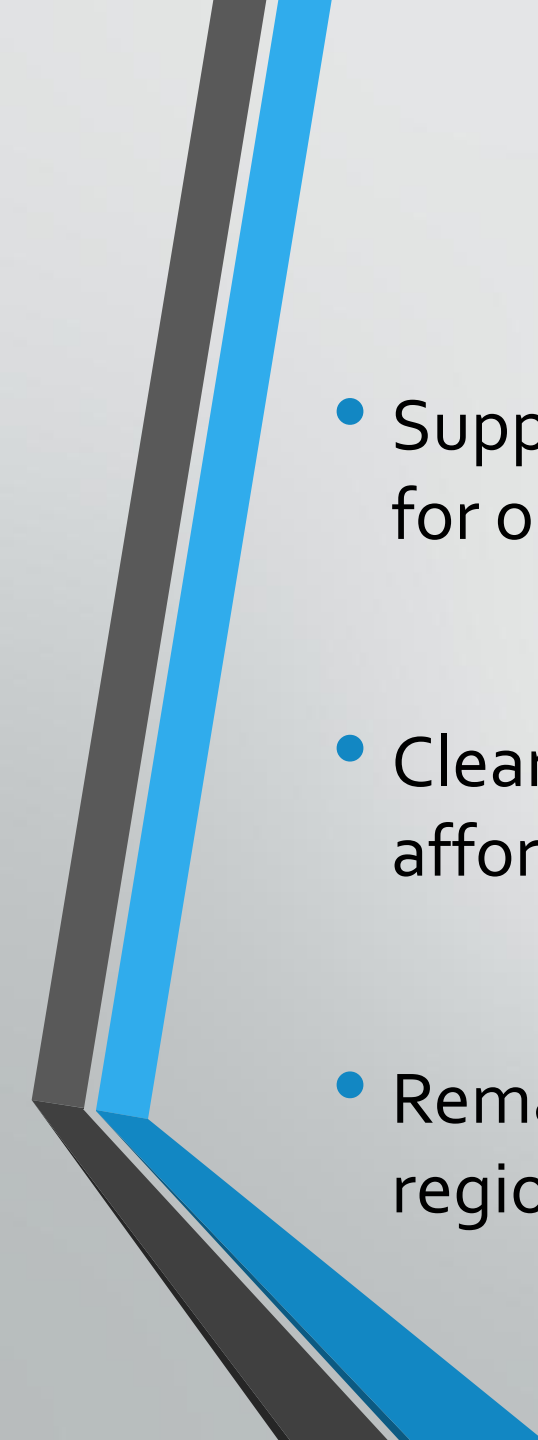
103,000+ households, businesses

- **Electricity Distribution Business**

Deliver efficient, reliable, energy services and solutions to meet the needs of a fast growing region.

Create return directly to consumers through annual dividends, improving household affordability and to alleviate energy-related financial pressures

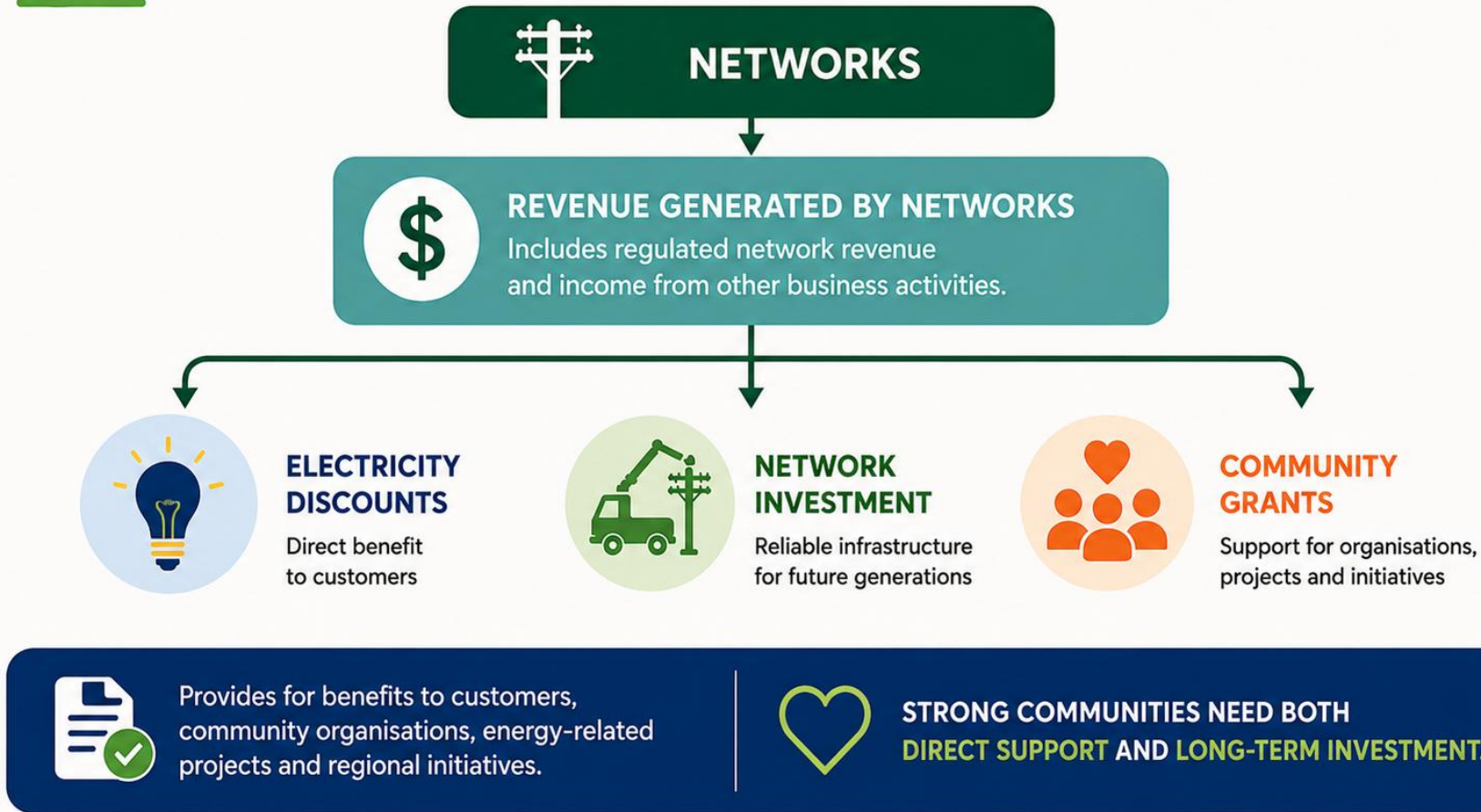
Boundaries to include Hamilton Kirikiriroa, Waikato District and part of Waipā.



Strong Working Relationship

- Supporting a long-term approach delivering enduring benefits for our communities
- Clear focus on balancing the energy trilemma of security, affordability and sustainability
- Remains resilient and capable of supporting future growth in the region Partnership

HOW VALUE FLOWS BACK TO THE COMMUNITY



Electricity Discounts

- The discounts come from the rebate programme, from the regulated earnings of the Electricity Distribution Business.
- 18-month lead in period to determine an agreed amount
- Help ease cost-of-living pressures and contribute to greater financial wellbeing

Community Grants

- Grants are funded separately for community purposes, so it's not an either/or situation.
- Grants support projects like the solar installation at the Waikato Cancer Lodge, , energy initiatives and helping community organisations direct more resources where they're needed most.
- Most of us will benefit from community-funded projects at some point in our lives, whether directly or indirectly



Balance Approach

- Goal is not to reduce one benefit to fund another
- Strong communities need both direct support and long-term investment.
- Overall value is returned in ways that enhance affordability, resilience, and overall communities wellbeing for today and future generations



COMMUNITY BENEFIT HAPPENS IN DIFFERENT WAYS



ELECTRICITY DISCOUNTS

Helping customers
directly



COMMUNITY
GRANTS



ENERGY
PROJECTS



CHARITABLE
ORGANISATIONS



REGIONAL
INITIATIVES

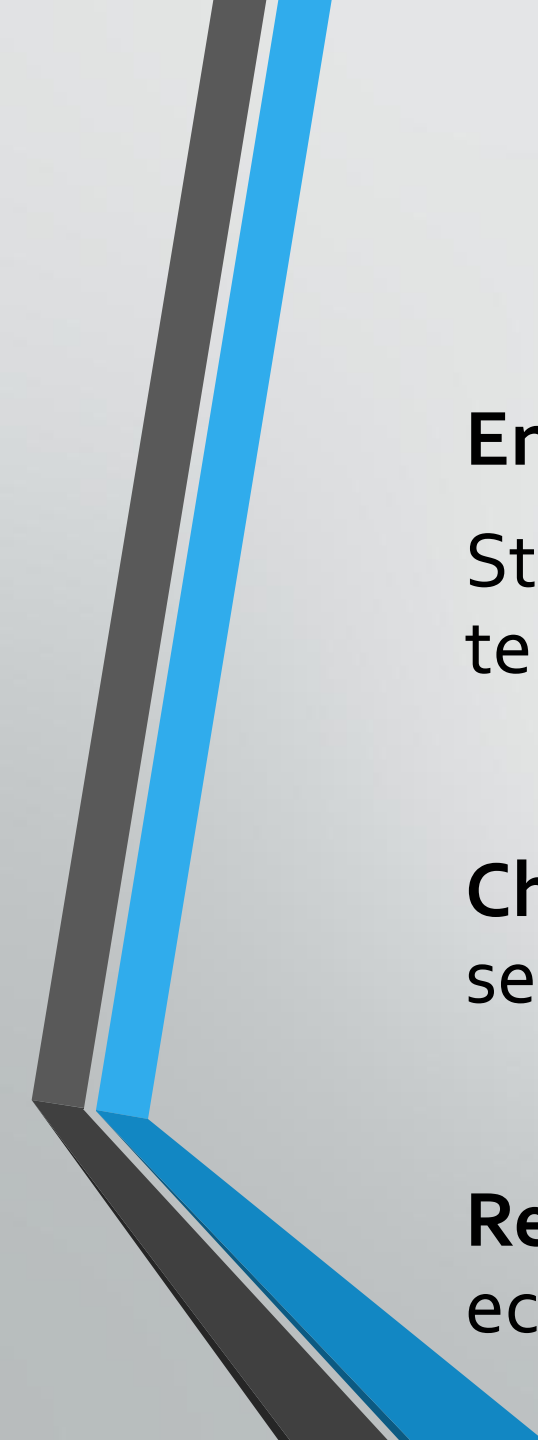


allows benefits to be delivered
through both **customer discounts** and **wider
community investment**.



Community Benefit

- Delivered through complementary pathways
- Together, these approaches help improve household wellbeing while building stronger, more resilient communities over the long term."



Community Benefit

Energy projects, which can improve energy efficiency

Strong communities need both direct support and long-term investment.

Charitable organisations helps strengthen the social services sector

Regional initiatives contribute to the wider social, economic, cultural, and environmental development

Whare Ora programme

- An initiative aimed at helping whanau create warmer, drier, and healthier homes.
- It provides free support including thermal curtains, heating, blankets and safety equipment
- Provides an opportunity for anecdotal evidence, this is important regionally and nationally
- 10-15 providers across our region, increase of \$1-mil to support outreach



Beyond the Bill

- Community-owned energy creates value that supports affordability today and wellbeing for generations to come
- The impact of community-owned energy extends far beyond keeping the lights on.
- Distinctive model balances immediate benefits with long-term outcomes
- Affordable energy. Strong communities. Shared prosperity.

What's next?

- **Affordability**

What role should community-owned assets play in addressing cost-of-living pressures and energy affordability in the future?

- **Community Wellbeing**

How do we measure the true impact of energy-related investments on community wellbeing, beyond financial returns?

- **Equity and Inclusion**

What additional support might be needed to address energy hardship across our region?

- **Community Investment**

How can community grants and regional initiatives be targeted to create the greatest long-term impact?

- **Future Energy Systems**

What opportunities exist for community-owned energy organisations to play a greater role in New Zealand's energy transition?

- **Strategic Reflection**

How can we ensure that future generations continue to share in the value created by today's infrastructure investments?

Energy Trusts New Zealand (ETNZ)

- National organisation of consumer-owned power distribution.
- Represents and advocates on behalf of regional energy trusts located throughout New Zealand.
- These trusts are owners of companies operating electricity distribution networks on behalf of local consumers and communities
- Meet annually – national updates, government engagement, submissions



Back to the Future

If community-owned energy is about more than electricity, what should success look like for our region, our communities in 2073?

What decisions do we as leaders need to make today to achieve it?



Ngaa mihi nui, thank you

Q&A



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The Affordable Energy Webinar Series

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Next Speaker- Mike Casey, CEO Rewired Aotearoa
8 July, 11am

Use same link as this webinar to join back in.



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Upcoming Speakers:

• Jonathan Kay	Waipa Networks	22 July
• Manu Barrett	Solar Sense	5 August
• Quilae Wong	The Opportunity Party	19 August
• Simon Bridges	Ak Chamber of Commerce	2 September
• Rob Johnson, Ezra Hirawani	Nau Mai Ra	16 September
• John Campbell	Our Energy	23 September
• Kelli Pike	GoEco	30 September
• Gareth Cartwright	Community Energy	14 October
• Blair Dickie	Waikato Regional Council	4 November

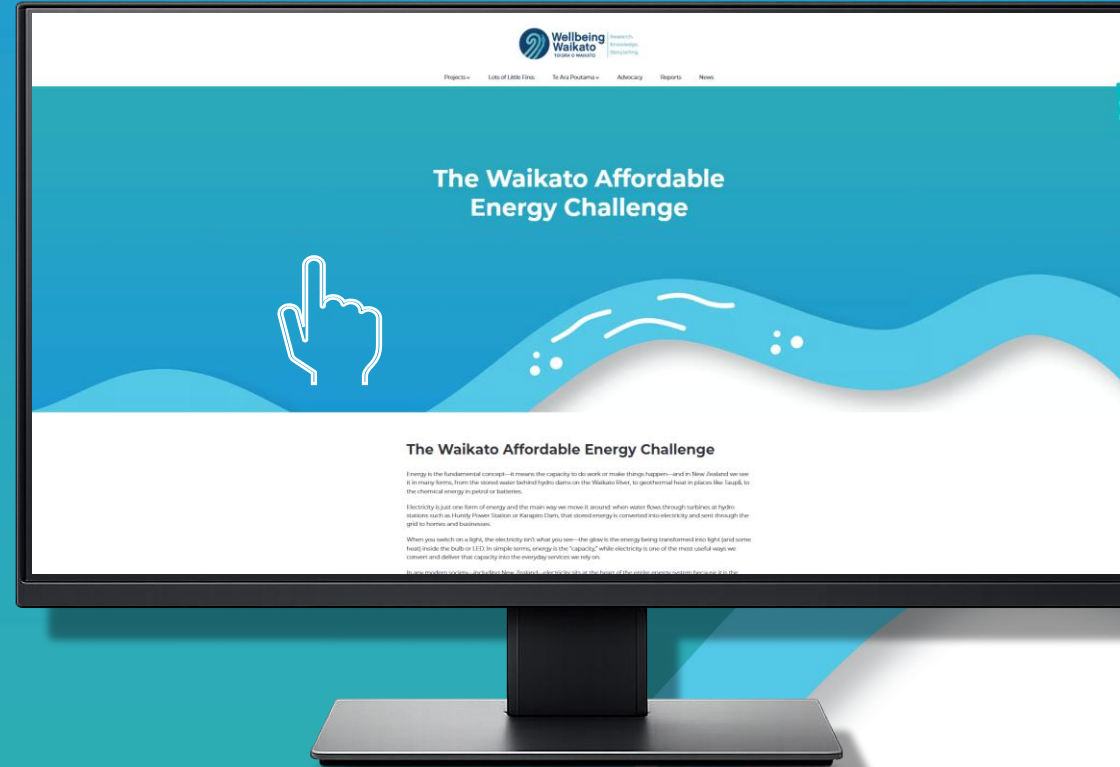
...and more



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Thank you!

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