

# CHOICE

## ANNUAL REVIEW

## 2022–23

### Co-Chairs' report



Anita Tang, Co-Chair.



Nic Cola, Co-Chair.

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**T**his past financial year has continued the trend of uncertainty and insecurity, driven by a combination of international and domestic issues. Key in this has been the escalating cost-of-living crisis, which has had a significant impact on consumers and therefore CHOICE. Our advocacy and our information for consumers has been increasingly focused on assisting people struggling to manage their household budgets, and addressing the impact of predatory business practices on people in financial difficulty. Despite the challenging year, we have achieved some significant reforms that protect consumers, particularly in the area of financial services.

One of our key priorities has been to have buy now, pay later products regulated in the same way as other credit products. We were pleased to see the new federal government commit to this reform in response to a sustained campaign by consumer groups. The government also committed to consultations on introducing a ban on unfair trading practices, which would improve protection for vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers.

While work on these reforms was still underway at the end of 2022–23, Parliament voted in the final weeks of the year to establish a compensation scheme of last resort for the financial system, which will ensure that many victims of financial misconduct who might otherwise go uncompensated will have access to redress. This was an outcome of decades of campaigning by CHOICE and other consumer groups.

We also expanded our work on the impact of climate change on consumers, producing a growing range of information on sustainable products and services and commissioning a major report on the impact of extreme weather events on access to insurance, released shortly after the end of the financial year.

Financially, the cost-of-living crisis had an impact on CHOICE membership, with fewer people buying larger household appliances, which continues to be the main reason people initially join CHOICE. Our long-term members understand that

We at CHOICE acknowledge the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work, and pay our respects to the First Nations peoples of this country. CHOICE supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

For an accessible version of the CHOICE Annual Review 2022–23, visit [choice.com.au/annualreview](https://choice.com.au/annualreview)

CHOICE is about much more than appliance reviews and we were grateful for their continued support, but the reduced number of new people joining CHOICE saw total membership decline from 206,053 to 200,446 at the end of 2022–23. Total operating revenue declined by 1.5% as a result of the challenging economic environment, and operating expenses increased by 5%. A key cause of the increase in costs was a major technology project that was paused towards the end of the year while a broader technology review was underway, overseen by the newly formed Technology Committee. While these factors resulted in a deficit of \$0.56m, our cash and investments balance remained strong.

In May, the Board formally endorsed the idea of a Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution, as proposed in the upcoming Referendum. This was consistent with our formal support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart since 2019 and our broader

commitment to First Nations justice through our Reconciliation Action Plan and our campaigns and investigations on issues affecting First Nations consumers. The decision to support the Voice was firmly grounded in our purpose of working for fair, just and safe markets for all Australian consumers, on the basis that a Voice would encourage better action by government to ensure that First Nations consumers enjoy the rights envisaged in the Australian Consumer Law. While the referendum was not successful, our work on justice for First Nations consumers will continue.

Changes within the Board included our former Co-Chair Robert Southerton stepping down at the 2022 AGM after reaching his maximum term. Members elected Amanda Robbins to replace him. Amanda brings a wealth of economic and policy experience and has proven to be a valuable addition to the Board. After five years on the Board, Ben Naparstek resigned in January 2023. The Board appointed Jamie Pride, who

previously held an additional co-opted position on the Board, to replace Ben for the remainder of his term.

Shortly after the end of the financial year, our CEO Alan Kirkland announced his resignation after 11 years in the role, to take up an appointment as a Commissioner of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Alan has been a fierce advocate for Australian consumers. While we are sad to be losing Alan from CHOICE, we are thrilled that he is moving to another role where he will continue his commitment to consumer rights.

The Board’s key priority for the next financial year, besides appointing a new CEO, will be to develop a new strategy to ensure CHOICE’s long-term impact and financial sustainability. While these are challenging times for any organisation, we are confident that with a strong membership, passionate CHOICE team and committed Board, we can ensure that CHOICE continues to play an important role long into the future.

## CEO’s report



Alan Kirkland, CEO.

This was the second year of a three-year strategy that sets three key goals:

- We drive big changes and more people know us for it
- Our membership is larger and more engaged

- We are an organisation that people want to support and work for.

While the economic environment meant that we had to approach some of these goals in different ways, they continued to guide our work.

### We drive big changes and more people know us for it

A key priority for our work in this area was to investigate how some businesses are using consumers’ data in ways that harm them and identify where consumer protections need to be improved. Through 2022–23 CHOICE established itself as a powerful voice on these issues, with our investigation into the use of facial recognition technology by major retailers leading all of the businesses involved to halt the practice and the Privacy Commissioner to launch a formal investigation.

In April 2023, we launched a landmark report on the use of ‘RentTech’ – technology that many renters are forced to use to apply for properties or pay their rent. We highlighted the

disturbing range of personal information being collected in this way, with poor protection for renters. This played a key role in several states launching reform processes to consider how to rein in the use of this technology.



Work to ensure a fair financial system continued to be a major priority. We supported First Nations advocates in their campaign for justice for the victims of predatory funeral insurer Youpla, welcomed the federal government’s efforts to regulate buy now, pay later products and celebrated the establishment of a Compensation Scheme of Last Resort.

Members and supporters played a critical role in helping us to achieve all of these reforms, as highlighted on page 6.

**Our membership is larger and more engaged**

We set our goal of a larger membership before we knew Australian consumers would face a cost-of-living crisis, so during 2022–23 our focus shifted from growing membership to supporting members and other consumers in these challenging circumstances.

Our focus on producing more information to help people manage higher costs of living was embraced by members and the broader public, with over 800,000 people visiting articles on these topics on **choice.com.au** through the year.

We also continued to expand the range of information we produce to help consumers who want to make more sustainable and ethical choices. This included our partnership with the ACT Government on its Make Your Next Choice Electric tool, which provides people with practical advice on steps they can take to shift to electric appliances powered by renewable energy, which will also help

them save money over time. In June, we launched a prototype of our own Home Energy Saver tool, providing similar help to consumers across the country.

While the number of memberships declined by 2.8%, from 206,053 to 200,446, the relevance of our assistance for consumers was demonstrated by traffic to **choice.com.au**, which grew by 4.5% year-on-year.

**We are an organisation that people want to support and work for**

Consistent with the level of trust that consumers place in CHOICE, we continued to focus on ensuring that we adhere to high standards in the way that we operate.

This included implementing our first Reconciliation Action Plan, which was warmly embraced by CHOICE staff and a growing range of partners in First Nations-led organisations. While much of the work under this plan focused on reviewing

our internal processes, it was reflected externally in an increased range of articles and investigations on issues affecting First Nations consumers.

We continued to review and evolve our employment practices, expanding support for parents, people experiencing domestic or family violence, and people with mental health issues. We also continued our commitment to carbon neutrality, with our major priority being a shift to renewable electricity, through an expansion of the solar panel array on the roof of the CHOICE building and a sourcing GreenPower for our remaining electricity needs.

In closing, I am sad to acknowledge that this is my final report as CEO, as my resignation will take effect shortly before the Annual General Meeting. It has been an absolute pleasure to help lead this organisation for the past 11 years. I have been supported by a highly skilled and motivated Board and team of staff at CHOICE, but most of all, I’ve enjoyed the support of a large and passionate membership base. I look forward to cheering on CHOICE from the sidelines for many years to come.



**CHOICE**

## Can you save on energy?

Start making savings for the planet and your pocket

- ✓ Easy way to find energy savings
- ✓ Reduce carbon emissions and put money in your pocket
- ✓ Find the most efficient appliances, energy plans and more

**Take the quiz to get started**

Time: 5 minutes

**CHOICE**

You deserve better, safer and fairer products and services. We're the people working to make that happen.

Privacy policy | Terms and conditions | © CHOICE 2022

The prototype of our Home Energy Saver tool.

# Campaigns and investigations

**T**hanks to the continued support of our members we've been able to continue to make markets fairer, safer and more just for all consumers.

## Lifting the lid on facial recognition technology

This was the second year of operation of a new team focused on stopping consumers' data being used in harmful ways. We had a big win early in the year when major retailers paused the use of facial recognition technology. Our exclusive investigation in June 2022 had found that Bunnings, Kmart and The Good Guys were using facial recognition technology in their stores and were collecting sensitive biometric information without the knowledge or consent of customers.

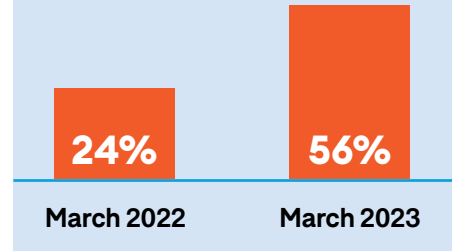
In July 2022, 17 major retailers confirmed that they were not using facial recognition in their stores and had no plans to introduce it. This included the major supermarkets Woolworths, Coles and Aldi. We published this information in a scorecard, prompting Bunnings and Kmart to announce a pause on the controversial technology on the same day. The Good Guys had already dropped the technology.

Following a complaint from CHOICE, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner launched an investigation into whether Bunnings and Kmart had breached Australia's Privacy Act.

In September 2022, we supported the launch of the UTS Human Technology Institute report detailing a model law to regulate facial recognition. The proposed law would take a human rights, risk-based approach with different tiers of regulation for the different uses of the technology. The use of facial recognition technology by retail stores would be considered "high-risk" and would be prohibited unless specific exemptions were sought from the regulator.

Awareness of facial recognition technology use by retailers has more than doubled since our investigation. Our nationally representative Consumer Pulse survey noted an increase in awareness from 24% in March 2022 to 56% in March 2023. As awareness grew, so did support for strong regulation that protects consumers. More than 25,000 CHOICE supporters have signed a petition supporting the model law but the battle is not yet won, with CHOICE continuing the fight for better laws.

## Awareness of facial recognition technology use by retailers



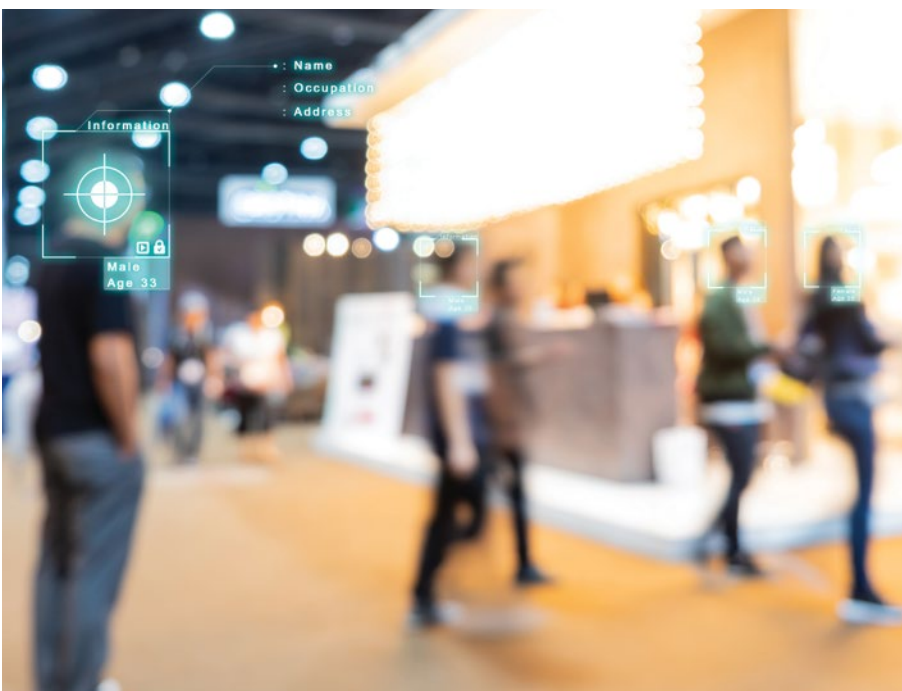
## At long last: A compensation scheme of last resort

After decades of advocacy by consumer groups, in June 2023 the federal Parliament passed legislation to establish a compensation scheme for many forgotten victims of financial misconduct. The scheme was a landmark recommendation of the banking royal commission. It will step in where the Australian Financial Complaints Authority has ordered payment of compensation but the firm that should pay it has gone out of business.

CHOICE had been a leading voice in the campaign for this scheme, working with victims to ensure their stories were heard by Parliament. CHOICE supporters and members also played a crucial role, writing emails to parliamentarians, sharing personal stories of harm, and applying pressure for decision-makers to act.

CHOICE staff appeared as witnesses before two Senate parliamentary committees, wrote a number of policy submissions and appeared in the national media to advocate for change. When it was finally legislated in June 2023, we described it as "a historic moment for consumer financial protection in Australia".

The campaign for fairer financial services is not over. CHOICE is fighting for the passage of the Financial Accountability Regime, which will hold senior financial leaders accountable for misconduct that occurs under their watch.



**Closing the buy now, pay later loopholes**

CHOICE, along with other consumer groups, continued to advocate for the government to regulate buy now, pay later products as credit. In November 2022, the government took the first steps towards regulation by opening a consultation that presented three options for reform. CHOICE joined other consumer advocates to write a joint submission calling for the strongest option, backed by nationally representative data and case studies from supporters and financial counsellors.

**#Close Lending Loopholes**

CHOICE’s national surveys have shown:

- over 1 in 4 people who took out a buy now, pay later loan struggled to pay associated fees or debts, with 26% cutting back on essentials to cover these costs
- 1 in 7 people with buy now, pay later loans had over 20 accounts.

CHOICE also helped launch the Close Lending Loopholes alliance of organisations advocating for buy now, pay later reform, which collaborated on a coordinated social, media and supporter campaign.

In May 2023, Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones confirmed the government’s intention to proceed with regulating buy now, pay later companies under the Credit Act. The Close Lending Loopholes alliance continues to advocate for these products to be regulated in the strongest possible manner.



We investigated the issue of lemon cars being sold to First Nations people in remote areas.

**First Nations work**  
**LEMON CARS**

CHOICE investigative reporter Jarni Blakkarly travelled to Far North Queensland to report on the experience of First Nations consumers with lemon cars. With the support of the Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network, he reported on the harms that First Nations peoples face from second-hand dealers selling faulty cars. This work has been used by advocates across Australia to push for change, and our footage was used by National Indigenous TV in its reporting. The issue is now on the agenda of state and territory consumer protection agencies.

**YOUPLA**

CHOICE is a founding member of the Save Sorry Business coalition, a First-Nations-led campaign calling for justice for people affected by the collapse

of the funeral insurer known as the Aboriginal Community Benefit Fund or Youpla. Through the year, we supported First Nations consumer advocates in calling for redress for people affected by the collapse. We helped to plan advocacy trips to Canberra, wrote investigative stories on the collapse, engaged CHOICE supporters, and provided ongoing campaign advice.

In July 2022, the federal government committed to an interim scheme to provide compensation to active policyholders who pass away before 30 November 2023.

We continue to work with advocates to ensure all remaining policyholders receive redress. The federal government has committed to introducing an enduring resolution for remaining policyholders before the interim scheme ends in November 2023.





CHOICE managing editor Margaret Rafferty and CEO Alan Kirkland announced the 17th Annual Shonky Awards in 2022.

**Shonky Awards**

Each year we name and shame the companies, products and services we believe deserve particular attention for failing Australian consumers. There was no shortage of contenders for 2022 but a few brands really stood out for the frustration and pain they caused.

Number one on the list was Qantas, which received a Shonky in response to the hundreds of travellers who contacted us detailing the ways in which Qantas failed to deliver. Many encountered problems with long call-wait times, poor rates for on-time arrivals and poor baggage handling, but it was the issue of flight credits that caused the most grief. In March 2023, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

revealed it received more complaints about Qantas in the 2022 financial year than any other company. A week later, Qantas announced they had extended the date by which credits need to be redeemed – welcome news for many affected.

Bloomex, an online florist, was also called out for their poor performance. We received a number of complaints from Bloomex customers whose flowers were received late or in poor condition, or who found the product delivered was disappointingly different to the bouquet advertised online. In December 2022, the ACCC commenced action against Bloomex for allegedly publishing misleading online star ratings and price representations. And in May 2023, NSW Fair Trading issued a warning to consumers not to deal with Bloomex, adding that there had been a rise in complaints about the problems we highlighted in our investigation.

**People power**

This year, over 60,000 CHOICE supporters took action – signing petitions across a number of

campaigns, nominating businesses for Shonky Awards, emailing politicians, sharing their stories to be used as case studies and signing open letters. Supporters continue to be a crucial part of CHOICE campaigns:

- Over 900 people nominated a business for a Shonky Award
- 7900 people shared their thoughts on retail bank deposits
- Over 21,000 people signed the petition for privacy reform, and 9000 shared their thoughts to inform CHOICE’s submission
- Over 1000 people emailed Senators asking them to Save Sorry Business
- 5600 people shared their experiences with scams
- Over 11,000 joined the campaign to Close Lending Loopholes, and over 6000 people shared their views on BNPL loans
- Over 13,000 people shared their views on electric vehicles
- Over 23,000 signed the petition to regulate facial recognition technology
- Over 19,000 people signed the petition calling for stronger penalties for companies that breach consumer laws.



# Value for members

**O**ur strategy commits us to develop new ways to help our members. In 2022-23 we rolled out a host of new content, products and changes to our website in response to the issues that consumers care about the most.

## Cost of living

With people across Australia facing cost-of-living pressures, we tasked our journalists and testers with exploring new ways to help people manage their household budgets. We published around 80 articles on a variety of topics related to saving money, including general tips on reducing the cost of living, advice on how to shop smart and save at the supermarket, how to choose the best value appliances, and how to save money on essentials such as utilities and insurance.

The results show that our consumers valued this work, with over 800,000 people visiting these types of articles. The most popular articles covered topics

such as the cheapest way to heat your home, the lowest priced health insurance policies and cheap everyday goods like cast-iron pots that had performed well in our tests.

All this content was promoted via mainstream and social media, and collated on our new Saving Money topic page on [choice.com.au](https://www.choice.com.au).

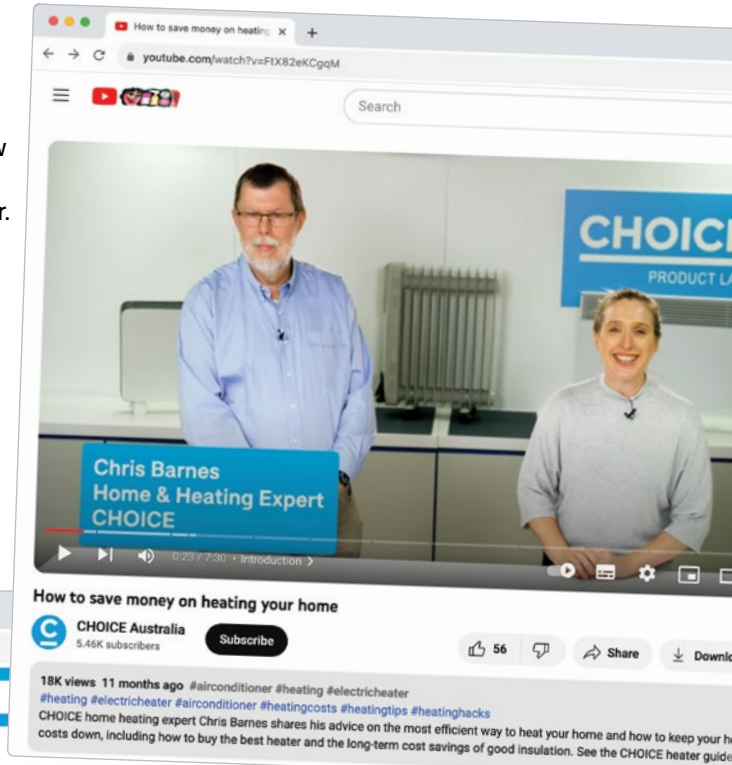
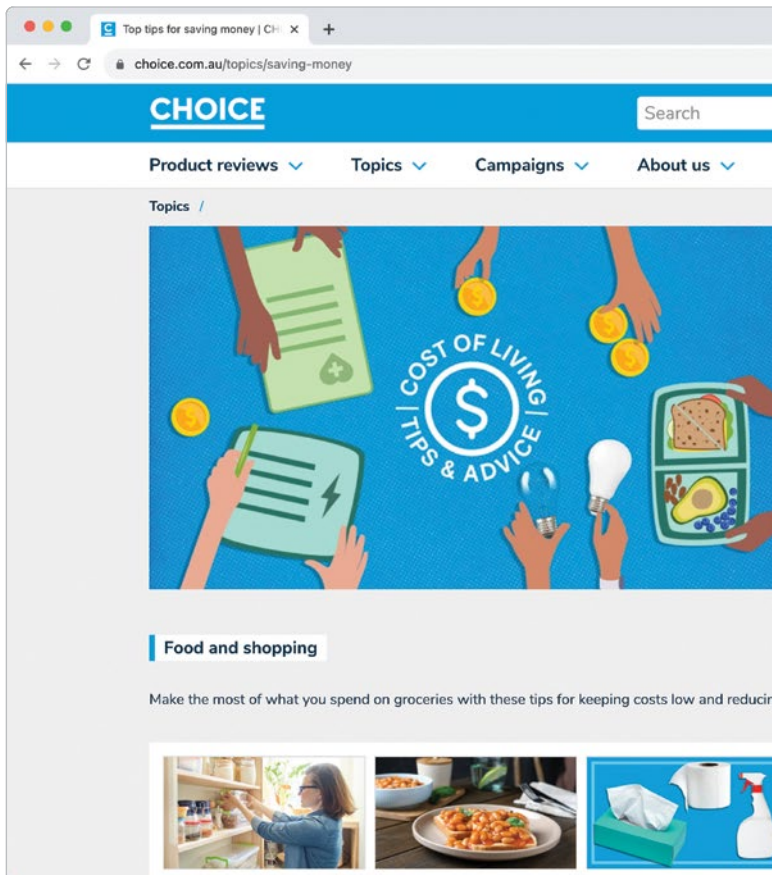
Videos created for our YouTube channel also focused on saving money, with a video by CHOICE expert Chris Barnes on how to save money on heating proving particularly popular.

In August, we launched a new *Cost of Living* newsletter, which provided regular updates on these topics to interested members and consumers. To date, over 1000 people have signed up to receive it.

We also greatly expanded our program

of email newsletters for consumers. As well as the regular fortnightly *Insider* email, we now produce a range of regular emails on topics of particular interest to some consumers, including:

- scams, recalls and rip-offs
- energy saving tips
- travel insurance.



# Sustainable and ethical choices

**W**e continued to work on the commitment in our strategy to do more to help people who want to make sustainable and ethical choices.


We extended our partnership with Shop Ethical, an Australian organisation that researches a range of international

**Shop Ethical!**

brands and scores them based on their social and environmental credentials. Where applicable, we now add Shop Ethical ratings to our product reviews.

We also invested in improving the information we provide to members on how long their products will last.

Not only is this one of the types of information our members most often request, it helps us to deliver to CHOICE's purpose by holding manufacturers to account for driving improvement in the lifespan of their products. Members also play an important role in providing this data – in 2022–23 over 5019 members responded to surveys on the lifespan of their products. We were able to use this data to help other consumers and this information is now available in eight of our most popular product categories.



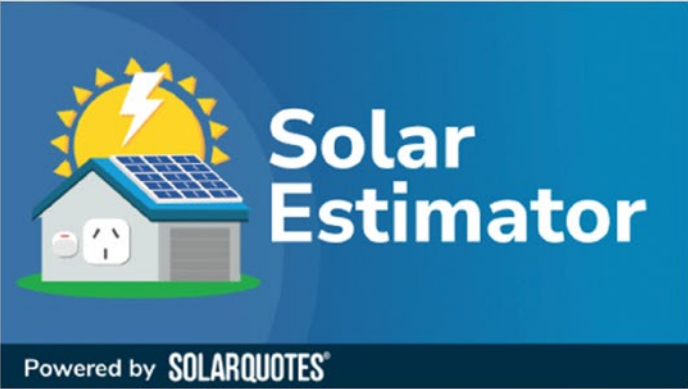
**5019**  
members responded to surveys on the lifespan of their products

Our specialist prototyping team rolled out two updates to our popular SolarEstimator tool, in partnership with SolarQuotes:

- We added the ability to obtain estimates of the costs and savings of adding battery storage to home solar systems
- We updated the tool to incorporate energy price rises rolled out in each state and territory from 1 July 2023.

The team also built a prototype of a Home Energy Saver tool to help people reduce their home energy use. The intention of this tool was to

**Solar estimator**



**Get started with solar**

We've made getting started with solar easy.

Estimate your solar and find a trusted installer:

1. Find out if solar is worth it for you with CHOICE's solar estimator.
2. Get 3 quotes from trusted installers with SolarQuotes.

[Get a quick estimate](#)

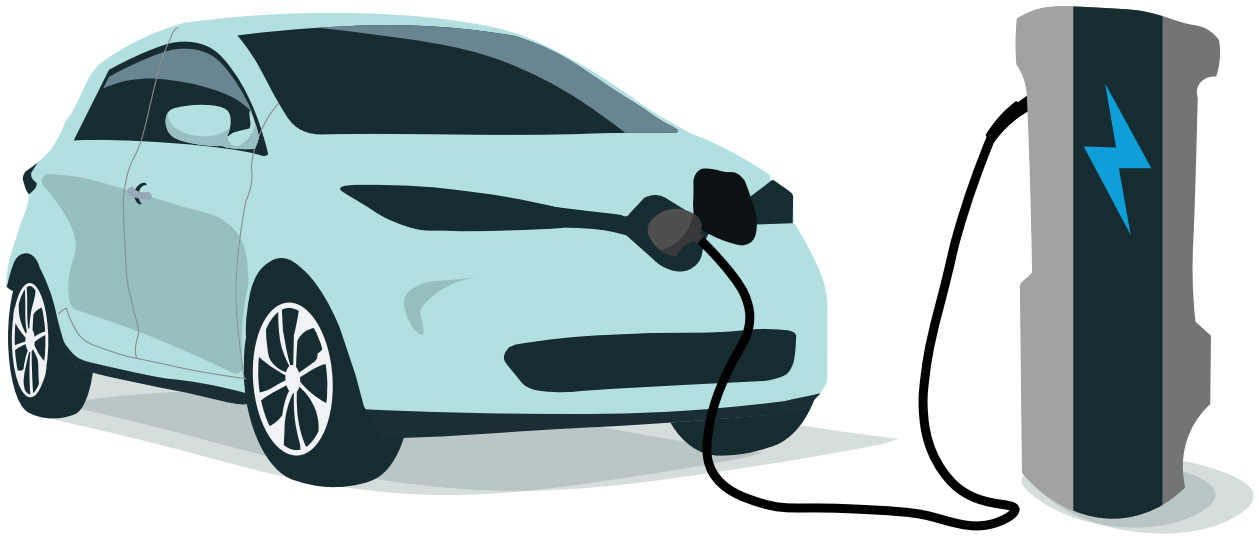




provide a simplified home energy audit and identify the biggest opportunities for savings. It provides a simple, personalised plan to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions. Actions that consumers could take, depending on their circumstances, included:

- upgrading to more efficient appliances
- installing home solar
- switching away from gas appliances
- using appliances efficiently
- installing ceiling insulation.

Recognising growing interest in electric vehicles, we published reviews incorporating crowd-sourced data from EV owners and launched an EV Quick Start guide, which offers advice on running costs, driving range or ‘range anxiety’, and charging station availability.



**CHOICE** EV quick start guide
Running costs   Driving range   Charging

Quick start guide

## Electric vehicles: make the switch

**Running costs**
>

What you might save in the long term


**Driving range**
>

Compare your car with an EV


**Charging**
>

Transitioning from petrol to electricity


### Types of EV



Hybrids



Plug-in hybrids



Full electric vehicles

# Reviews and testing

**A**s the east coast of Australia lived through the final stages of a La Niña cycle, including the after-effects of major flooding in eastern Australia in early 2022, we aimed to help people by continuing our comparisons of home and content insurance policies and testing dehumidifiers.

We also moved back into our regular testing of clothes dryers, washing machines and other products that had been temporarily paused during the pandemic.

The momentum building around the electrification of residential households led to a partnership with the ACT Government to provide data from our testing to help people considering the move from gas to electric appliances. Consistent with the broader move to electric appliances, we boosted the number of induction cooktops we tested, including free-standing ovens with induction cooktops and portable induction cooktops.

Where we lacked the facilities to test products, such as with heat pump hot



We increased our testing of induction cooktops as more people consider switching from gas.

water heaters, we gathered data from independent sources and conducted market surveys to provide information to consumers about what is available in Australia.

As Australians began to travel again domestically and internationally, we continued testing of luggage for people taking longer trips.

We also surveyed our members for the first time in several years on how they use their washing machines, which will guide changes to our methodology to ensure it is relevant.

Over the next year, we plan to continue to extend our testing program to cover more products that consumers are considering as they seek to reduce their environmental impact, such as e-bikes. We're also exploring further partnerships with state and territory governments as they support the transition from gas to electric appliances.



CHOICE tester Antonio Bonacruz in our labs.



# Our Reconciliation Action Plan






We at CHOICE acknowledge the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of this land on which we work, and pay our respects to the First Nations people of this country. CHOICE supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

**Above and left:** The launch of our Reconciliation Action Plan. **Below:** A printed resource supports staff to include an Acknowledgement of Country wherever appropriate.

Over the past year we have implemented our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), officially launched in October 2022. Following the framework established by Reconciliation Australia, we have spent the first 12 months in what is called the Reflect stage. As part of this process, we have been working on:

- identifying partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- formalising how we acknowledge and show respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- reviewing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities and researching procurement opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations
- formalising principles for how CHOICE can best learn from, listen to and support Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. We've provided online cultural awareness training for staff and embedded this in our induction program for new employees. We also provided training on the importance of Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country, and distributed cards that encourage and support the inclusion of an Acknowledgement of Country in any relevant situation.

In alignment with our RAP, we added a new workplace donations charity partner, AbSec – the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, which is based close to our office in Marrickville. We also assisted AbSec with its annual NAIDOC Family Fun Day, a popular community event.

This work provided an important foundation for our work with First Nations advocates on issues like compensation for victims of the funeral insurer Youpla and sales of poor-quality used cars to people living in remote communities.





# Social impact and diversity

## Diversity

CHOICE is committed to a diverse workforce that reflects Australia’s population because we believe that equips us to work in the interests of all Australian consumers. This year, we revised a range of policies to support inclusion, including launching a new framework to support staff experiencing domestic violence and developing a new parental leave policy to expand access to leave.

We provided mental health first aid training to more staff, with an emphasis on creating psychological safety for our staff, and supported a private network for neuro-diverse employees to share their experiences and resources.

In accordance with the requirements of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, in June 2023 CHOICE lodged its annual public report with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

The report adds to national data on gender equality in the workplace, the aim of which is to achieve broadly equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men.

- Some key findings from the 2022–23 report were:
- the gender composition of CHOICE’s non-management workforce was 50% female and 50% male
  - 42.5% of our management was female

- CHOICE provides staff with most of the key flexible work practices suggested by the WGEA to support gender equality, highlighting our support for employees.

## Social Impact Committee

During a year of rising living costs, our staff-led Social Impact Committee provided valuable support to our

partner charities and welfare groups. Staff used paid volunteer leave to help pack boxes at Addi Road Food Pantry and the Fair Trade Emporium, regenerate our local Bushcare site on the Cooks River, and make blood donations to the Red Cross that saved over 150 lives.

CHOICE also continued to donate appliances from our testing program



CHOICE staff Elaine Chang and Isabel Lam volunteer at Addi Road Food Pantry.

to the Women’s and Girls’ Emergency Centre (WAGEC), with over \$75,000 in products provided to help women and children in need.

We put on our trainers to join in the Walk for WAGEC and Fred’s Big Run events, raising over \$8000 and \$5000 respectively, while staff raised over \$2500 for Loaves and Fishes Restaurant at the Exodus Foundation, WAGEC and AbSec through our end-of-year lunch.



**\$75,000+**  
worth of test goods donated to support women and children in need

**Carbon emissions**

We continued our multi-year program of work to reduce carbon emissions and maintain carbon neutrality. We have now eliminated electricity and gas emissions through the purchase of GreenPower and an extra 100kW of solar panels installed in November 2022 to make a total of roughly 200kW solar generated on the CHOICE roof.

We also installed two electric vehicle (EV) chargers to allow staff to charge at work, and we replaced our petrol-fuelled vehicle with an EV.

We will continue to look at shifting procurement to purchase carbon-neutral goods and services where possible, through reviewing procurement across information technology, telecommunications, office products and professional services. Our continued support for hybrid flexible

working arrangements continues to reduce emissions that would otherwise be generated by commuting.

As at 30 June we were no longer accredited as carbon neutral under the federal government’s Climate Active program due to a delay in reporting, but we are working to reinstate this early in the new financial year.



CHOICE staff can now charge their EVs at work.



CHOICE staff once again joined the Walk for WAGEC and raised over \$8000.

# Financial results

This was a challenging year for CHOICE financially, given that consumers were facing extraordinary cost-of-living pressures. When the Board approved the budget for 2022–23 in early 2022, inflation was expected to peak earlier and at a lower rate than eventuated. The financial result was also impacted by the Board decision to recognise all of the costs of the content management system (CMS) project to date.

As inflation grew and remained high through the year, this had an impact on two key sources of revenue – membership and the CHOICE Recommended licensing scheme. As consumers were buying fewer major household appliances, this meant that fewer new members joined CHOICE and that demand for CHOICE’s recommendations was constrained. Understanding the cost-of-living pressures facing members, we did not increase membership fees, despite increases in our costs.

Total revenue increased by 2.2% to \$24.5m in 2022–23 as against \$24m in FY22. The increase is predominantly attributed to non-operating sources – interest income rose by \$0.2m, and there was a \$0.5m increase in Super Consumers Australia revenue. Total operating revenue was \$22.5m, down by \$0.25m (\$22.8m in FY22) or 1.5% year on year. Membership revenue experienced a slight decrease at \$19.08m compared to \$19.11m the previous year. CHOICE Recommended licensing revenue of \$2.32m was down by 9.3% (\$2.56m in FY22). Operating revenue declined as a result of extraordinary economic circumstances that worsened during the year.

## Our revenue increased by 2.2% to \$24.5m

As the revenue picture became clear during the year, we sought to offset this with savings in discretionary expenditure. We did, however, provide a 3.6% increase in salaries – our major area of expenditure. We were also undertaking our largest technology



project in recent years, a replacement of the CMS that supports our website. After delays and challenges delivering the project, we commissioned an independent review and paused the project in May 2023. The review made a number of recommendations about how to improve our management of the project. While the review indicated that some of the work that had been completed could be re-used, we decided to recognise all of the costs of the project to date as expenses.

Total operating expenses increased by \$1m to \$22.4m or 5% year on year.

This includes the recognised CMS expense of \$1.4m. The decision not to capitalise any CMS costs transformed what would have otherwise been a surplus into a deficit.

This combination of factors resulted in a deficit of \$0.56m for the year. Our cash and investments balance at 30 June 2023 was \$11.8m, which provides a significant margin over the cash reserves floor set by the Board. This allows us to support further planned deficits if required while we continue to invest in a technology strategy that supports our operations and strategic direction.

|                         | YEAR ENDED<br>30 JUNE 2023 | YEAR ENDED<br>30 JUNE 2022 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Revenue                 | \$23,776,097               | \$23,553,765               |
| Other income            | \$760,406                  | \$451,276                  |
| Less: Direct costs      | (\$1,448,299)              | (\$1,593,261)              |
| Less: Operating costs   | (\$23,649,676)             | (\$22,022,246)             |
| Net surplus/(deficit)   | (\$561,472)                | \$389,534                  |
| Current assets          | \$13,867,875               | \$14,775,491               |
| Non-current assets      | \$7,798,027                | \$7,829,920                |
| Current liabilities     | (\$8,881,127)              | (\$9,748,220)              |
| Non-current liabilities | (\$995,790)                | (\$506,734)                |
| Net equity              | \$11,788,985               | \$12,350,457               |

# Meet our Board



## Anita Tang – Co-Chair

Anita has a strong background in public policy reform and community organising across a range of social justice and community service areas. She is currently community organising director at the Centre for Australian Progress, building

the capacity of civil society for systems change, following five years running her own advocacy and campaigning consultancy. Her other experience includes more than a decade at Cancer Council NSW, where she led the transformation of its advocacy work, and senior roles in the statutory bodies and parliamentary committees. Anita has completed nonprofit leadership

programs at Harvard and Stanford, and served on the Boards of numerous nonprofits that focus on rights and justice, particularly in the disability and racial justice areas. She is a longstanding member of CHOICE and, while at the Cancer Council, led a number of collaborative projects with CHOICE, including campaigns against junk food advertising to children and the regulation and eventual ban of commercial solariums. Anita joined the Board in March 2017 and was appointed Chair in 2020, and in 2021, became part of an inaugural new leadership model of Co-Chairing. She is also Chair of the Impact Committee and a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.



## Nic Cola – Co-Chair

Nic is currently the CEO of RMIT Online and also acts as Chair of Picaluna, a disruptor in the funeral industry. Nic has over 25 years of CEO experience in high-growth sales and marketing-led organisations, with expertise in delivering

revenue and share growth across a diverse range of business models in traditional and digital media, education, and e-commerce. His key strengths are strategy, mergers and acquisitions, operations, digital transformation and change management. His previous roles have included General Manager of Retail and Digital at Helloworld Ltd, CEO of Open Colleges

and CEO of Marketplaces at Fairfax Media where he was one of the founding executives of Fairfax Digital. Nic was active in building the digital industry in Australia having been on the board of the Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA) as well as serving as Chairman of the Australian Internet Advertising Bureau. He has a Bachelor of Business from UTS and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. Nic joined the CHOICE Board in November 2019 and from November 2022 stepped into the Co-Chair role, alongside Anita. Nic is also Chair of the Membership Growth & Engagement Committee and a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.



## Samantha Challinor

Samantha is a non-executive director, with more than 20 years' experience in senior accounting, leadership and management roles. She is adept at bringing financial, information technology and risk management oversight and governance to organisations through

expertise gained in government, non-government, and multinational corporate sectors. Samantha is a non-executive director and audit risk committee chair with RSL LifeCare, and a non-executive director and finance audit and risk committee chair with Sydney North Health

Network. She holds a Bachelor of Business (Accountancy) from QUT, is a CPA Fellow and Australian Institute of Company Directors Fellow. Samantha's executive career included interim CEO at Arthritis NSW, director corporate services at Agency for Clinical Innovation (NSW Health), deputy CEO at Sydney North Shore and Beaches Medicare Local, and chief accountant at Lexmark International (Australia). Her areas of interest are in healthcare, aged care, community housing and consumer advocacy. Samantha joined the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is Chair of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.



## Katherine George

Kat has extensive experience in consumer advocacy and policy, and is currently Associate Director, Research, at Energy Consumers Australia. She has worked across the government, private and nonprofit sectors, driving significant policy reform

projects to promote economic and social inclusion and system reform, especially in relation to delivering equitable, human-focused outcomes in essential services markets. Currently, Kat is Co-Chair on the Board of Hope Street Youth and Family Services, a youth homelessness service operating in the northern and western regions of Melbourne. Kat's previous experience

includes nearly a decade as a consultant in global media and communications and stakeholder engagement. She has also managed humanitarian aid projects and fundraising through field work in Greece at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis. Kat holds a Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Arts (Media & Communications) and Master of Laws. Through her Masters research, Kat explored human rights-based approaches to regulation of essential services, data, competition and new technology, including artificial intelligence and the implications of the Consumer Data Right. Kat was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is a member of the Impact Committee and Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.



### Fiona Guthrie AM

Fiona has over 30 years' experience in consumer advocacy, including a number of years on the executive of the Consumers' Federation of Australia. Her main interest has been in advocating for people on low incomes or in vulnerable circumstances to get a fair

go, particularly in the financial services marketplace. Fiona has been the CEO of Financial Counselling Australia, the peak body for financial counsellors since 2009. She has held directorships on Energex Retail Pty Ltd, the Insurance Ombudsman Service

and the Financial Ombudsman Service, and was previously chair of ASIC's Consumer Advisory Panel. Fiona is currently a member of the ACCC's Consumer Consultative Committee and a member of the boards of Way Forward Debt Solutions and the Queensland Competition Authority. She holds a BA, LLB and MBA. Fiona was made a member of the Order of Australia in 2017 for her work in social welfare and financial counselling. She joined the Board in November 2015 and is a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee and Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.



### Fiona Jolly

Fiona is an experienced senior executive and non-executive director who works with boards and businesses undergoing change and growth and operating in highly regulated areas. She brings government experience along with expertise in communications,

traditional and digital media advertising and marketing, stakeholder engagement and international trade. Fiona is the Director of the Classification Board, the Australian Government body responsible for classifying films, computer games and some publications for Australia. Her focus is on improving information about content for consumers of

media. Fiona is also a director of Goodwin Aged Care, Rural Financial Counselling Service (NSW), the ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority, GNS Wholesale Stationers, Australian Institute of Building Surveyors and is an elected Councillor for HCF. Fiona has previously served as president of the YWCA of Australia and the chair of Australian Business Volunteers. Fiona's executive career spans significant work on regulation reform with both the government and private sector. Fiona was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee; Technology Committee; and the Membership Growth & Engagement Committee.



### Alexandra Kelly

Alexandra is director of casework at the Financial Rights Legal Centre, which operates the National Debt Helpline in NSW, Mob Strong Debt Help and the Insurance Law Service. She is a member of the Law Council's Australian Consumer Law Committee and is

the consumer representative on the Life Insurance Code Compliance Committee. She served on the Board of the Financial Counsellors of NSW from 2009 to 2012. Alexandra has considerable experience

developing consumer rights in the financial services sector through lobbying, working with regulators and government, and raising awareness of issues in the media and through online financial literacy campaigns. She brings to the CHOICE Board high-level legal expertise, extensive sectoral knowledge, and understanding of social enterprises. She holds a Bachelor of Laws (Hons)/Bachelor of Psychology and Master of Laws. Alexandra was appointed to the Board in 2017 and is Chair of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee and a member of the Impact Committee.



### Jamie Pride

Jamie is a Partner at Humanly Agile, an organisational design and change management consultancy that helps clients discover better ways of working and harness the power of their people. In addition, Jamie serves as the Chief Entrepreneur in

Residence at Western Sydney University. Jamie has more than

27 years' experience working in senior leadership positions for global consulting, advisory and technology organisations. His corporate history has included being the Australian CEO of realestate.com.au and as a Partner at Deloitte. Jamie was appointed to the CHOICE Board in November 2021 and is a member of the Technology Committee and Finance, Risk and Audit Committee.



### Amanda Robbins

Amanda has extensive expertise in economic and social policy, having worked at the most senior levels of the Australian Government and across the community and nonprofit sectors for over 20 years, domestically and internationally. Amanda founded

Equity Economics in 2013 and has since delivered original economic policy analysis and advice for governments, think tanks, corporates and the community sector. Amanda is committed to supporting and strengthening the role of the non-government sector in Australia. Amanda combines skills in economic analysis with an ability to formulate policy and

communicate complex reform. Amanda's experience internationally includes roles as senior adviser in the Treasury of Papua New Guinea from 2006 to 2008; deputy director of Australia's flagship economic governance program in Indonesia; and most recently working as a consultant for the World Bank in Washington DC. Amanda holds a Global Executive MBA and Bachelor of Economics (Social Sciences) from the University of Sydney, a Diploma of Law from the NSW College of Law, and a Master of Laws (Legal Practice) from the ANU. Amanda was appointed to the CHOICE Board in November 2022 and is a member of the Impact Committee and Membership Growth & Engagement Committee.