

PROACTIVELY RELEASING EXTENSIVE INDUSTRY DATA AND INFORMATION - THE ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY'S APPROACH

ABOUT THE ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY

The Electricity Authority (the Authority) is an independent Crown entity responsible for overseeing and regulating New Zealand's electricity markets.

The statutory objective of the Authority is to promote competition in, reliable supply by, and the efficient operation of, the electricity industry for the long-term benefit of consumers.

The Authority regulates the electricity markets by developing, setting, enforcing and administering market rules through the Electricity Industry Participation Code 2010 (the Code). The Code covers nearly every aspect of New Zealand's electricity industry, including: generation, transmission, system operation, security of supply, market arrangements, metering, distribution and retail.

The Authority currently employs about 70 staff.

ELECTRICITY MARKET INFORMATION (EMI) WEBSITE

To meet its statutory objective, the Authority monitors the performance of the markets and the electricity industry. This requires the Authority to collect, analyse and report on complex, detailed and diverse sets of data about the industry, generating large volumes of information that can be requested under the Official Information Act.

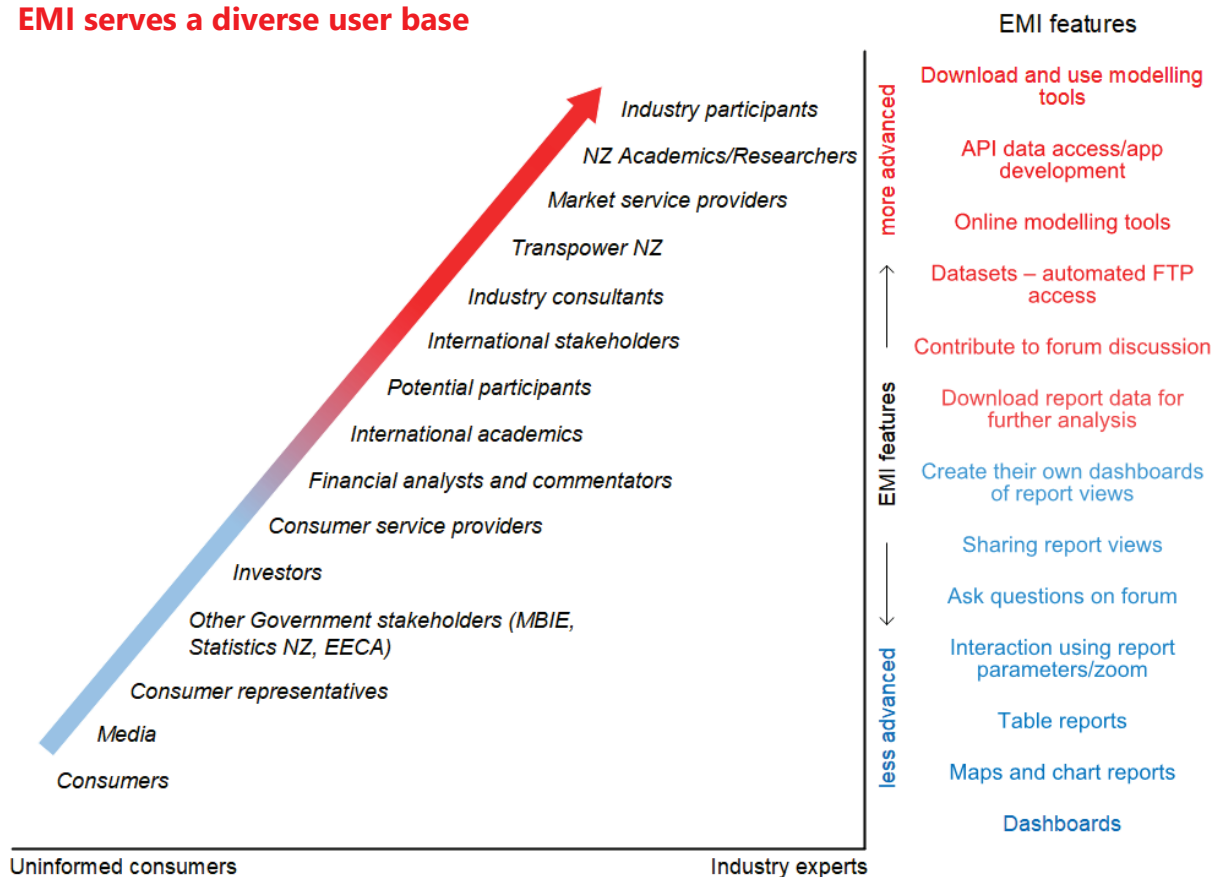
In 2011, the Authority began making this information more widely available. Two years later the Electricity Market Information (EMI) [website](#) was launched. Growing demand for more information has seen a wider range of data in different formats being provided through the website to meet the needs of different consumers.

The website not only facilitates operation of the electricity industry and development of the Code, it also enables the Authority to 'get ahead' of OIA requests by making timely data freely available.

EMI is recognised within the international electricity industry as being world leading. It attracts on average 1,000 unique visitors per week from 154 countries (with 64 percent of traffic being from New Zealand). Users range from individual consumers, academics and analysts, to consultants and industry participants.

The website provides a range of features from simple maps, graphs and charts, through data sets that can be downloaded for analysis, to sophisticated modelling tools. EMI is used to facilitate market participation and innovation, and informs decision making within the electricity industry.

EMI serves a diverse user base



OIA FUNCTION

In addition to the proactive release of information through EMI, the Authority handles approximately 45 Official Information requests each year, some of which are requests requiring reports and data from the information available on EMI.

The process for handling these requests has evolved over time since the Authority was first established in 2010. Initially, subject matter experts were individually responsible for responding to requests. This approach presented some challenges because individual staff handled so few requests that it hindered the development of widespread knowledge and expertise in applying the provisions of the Official Information Act. Following a period of increased support from the Legal team, the current model was adopted where the Legal team is responsible for managing the end to end process. Specifically, this team:

- ▶ Monitors the flow of requests through the Authority (aided by a simple spreadsheet)
- ▶ Provides weekly reports to the Chief Executive's office to ensure he is kept up-to-date on progress of requests currently in hand
- ▶ Identifies and engages subject matter experts to provide the information necessary to prepare responses
- ▶ Reviews the grounds for withholding information, if required
- ▶ Prepares responses in consultation with subject matter experts

- ▶ Provides the response with a recommendation for sign-off by the Chief Executive.

This approach ensures clear accountability for preparing responses and consistency in application of the provisions of the Act.

The Chief Executive is also required to report any breaches of legislation to the Board, including failure to respond to OIAs within the legislated timeframe. Strong leadership has encouraged a culture of planned and on-time responses to official information requests.

INSIGHTS

The Electricity Authority's experiences with proactive release of information and managing the OIA process in a relatively small organisation offer the following insights:

- ▶ Making official information publicly available not only facilitates stakeholder engagement, informs decision-making and improves market confidence, it also reduces demand for official information through OIA requests.
- ▶ Senior leadership commitment to, and support for, the process of responding to official information requests ensures compliance with the letter and spirit of the Act.
- ▶ Centralised management of OIA responses by a specialist team ensures that technical specialists with limited knowledge of the Act are adequately supported, improving both the quality and timeliness of responses to requests for official information.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Please contact the Electricity Authority's Senior Legal Counsel.

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