



Your Rights as an Energy Customer

Factsheet 3

Energy is an essential service and it is important that everyone can access it. To protect you there are laws that provide consistent protections and safeguards for the sale of energy to customers.

Energy Contracts

1. What is a retail energy contract?

In order to get energy (electricity or gas) to your house or premises, you need to enter into an agreement with a retailer. This is called a retail energy contract. A retail energy contract can be made in person, over the phone, or electronically.

If you enter into a contract verbally (such as over the phone) or electronically, the retailer must provide you with a written copy of the following required information:

- all applicable prices, charges, early termination payments and penalties
- date and duration of the contract
- billing and payment information.

Your retailer must give you this information as soon as possible after you agree to the contract. To avoid any unpleasant surprises down the track, make sure you are aware of the terms and conditions of the contract before you agree to it.

2. Questions to ask when considering a contract

Before agreeing to a new contract you may want to ask your retailer:

- What is the duration of the contract?
- How and when will I be notified when prices change?
- What fees and charges are there? For example, late payment fees, exit fees and credit card fees.
- When do discounts or benefit periods end?
- Are there any special conditions? For example, what conditions are in place for my solar power at home?

3. What if I enter into a contract, but change my mind?

You have a 10 business day 'cooling off period' after you enter into a contract. If you change your mind you should contact the retailer immediately.

If you want to exit a contract after the 10 business day cooling off period has expired, there may be exit fees depending on the terms and conditions in your contract. Some retailers may charge an exit fee if you exit a contract prior to the agreed end date. If you are not sure, you should contact your retailer and ask them to provide you with a copy of your contract.

4. I am a solar PV customer, is there anything specific I should look for when entering a contract?

As a solar PV customer you may be on a market retail contract and you need to understand all terms and conditions as other customers on market retail contracts are required to do.

The National Energy Customer Framework (NECF)

The National Energy Customer Framework (NECF) was developed cooperatively by the Australian Government with state and territory governments. State and territory governments have responsibility for energy legislation and the NECF is currently being rolled out across participating jurisdictions.

If you live in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, or the Australian Capital Territory, you are covered by the NECF. Victoria, Northern Territory and Western Australia energy consumers' protections are provided through local legislation.

Energy Bills and Usage

5. I don't think my meter is working. Who do I call?

Under the NECF you have the right to arrange for your meter to be tested if you believe it is faulty. You should contact your retailer to make arrangements for a meter test. However, if the meter is found to be working correctly, you can be charged for the cost of the meter test. This cost may vary, so you should confirm the amount you may be charged before asking for a meter test.

6. My bill is based on an estimate. Is this allowed?

Often an energy bill will be estimated because a meter reader could not access the meter. As a customer, it is your responsibility to make sure your meter is accessible. You should know where your meter is located at your premises. You might not be there when the meter is scheduled to be read, so it is important that there is an accessible and clear path.

Under the NECF, your retailer must issue you with a bill at least once every three months. If your bill is an estimate, it will be based on your previous consumption usage for a similar time period. Once the retailer has obtained an actual meter read, it is their responsibility to adjust the next bill accordingly – this may involve a credit to your account if the bill was over-estimated or a further payment request if the bill was under-estimated. In premises where smart meters are used this will reduce the need for estimated readings. However, there may be some limited circumstances in which an estimate is used.

7. I think my bill is incorrect. What can I do?

Contact your retailer as soon as possible. When requested, your retailer must review your bill. If you are still not happy, you can talk to the energy ombudsman in your state or territory.

The ombudsman provides a free and independent dispute resolution service. **For details see question 11.**

8. The price of my energy has increased since my last bill. Is this allowed?

Depending on the type of contract you are on, a retailer can increase the price (tariff rate) of your energy. Your retailer must tell you by no later than your next bill.¹

If you are unhappy with the new tariff rates you can shop around for a different contract that is more suitable to your needs and usage. However, some retailers may charge a fee for exiting a contract early, so make sure you know the details of your existing contract before you make arrangements to switch to a new contract or retailer.

¹ Under the Queensland NECF, your retailer must inform you at least 10 business days before any price increase applies to your tariff.

9. I have received a disconnection notice. What should I do?

You can receive a disconnection notice for a range of reasons, but most commonly it will be caused by a failure to pay your bill on time.

Under the NECF there are restrictions on when disconnections can occur. For example, you cannot be disconnected during a protected period, such as on a weekend or public holiday. There are also additional provisions that limit disconnections for customers experiencing hardship and those premises registered as having life support equipment.

If you receive a disconnection notice, you should contact your retailer immediately to discuss your options. The contact details will be available on the disconnection notice.

10. What do I do if I am having difficulty paying my bill?

Some customers may be eligible for support from their retailer if they are experiencing financial hardship. Under the NECF, all retailers must have a hardship policy. If you think you might not be able to pay your bill on time or you have had difficulty paying a bill in the past, you should contact your retailer as early as possible to discuss how they can help you. You can request a copy of your retailer's hardship policy which they must provide to you upon request.

11. Am I eligible for assistance in paying my bill or an energy rebate?

Rebates for energy usage are the responsibility of state and territory governments. Often rebates are provided to customers with specific medical needs (medical cooling customers) or those on a pension or other benefits. If you are experiencing payment difficulties it is worth checking if you qualify for a rebate on your bill.

To find out more information on what assistance you can receive, please contact your state or territory government department responsible for energy. You can also use the rebate searcher on www.yourenergysavings.gov.au. This has up-to-date summaries of all energy and sustainability rebates offered by state, territory and the Australian governments.

Further Information

12. I do not understand or I disagree with something my retailer has done – what can I do?

If you believe your retailer may have made an error or you are unsure of anything related to your bill or contract, you should first contact them directly to try to resolve the matter. The contact details for your retailer will be on your bill.

All energy customers have the right to contact the ombudsman responsible for energy matters in each state or territory. If you are unable to resolve an issue with your retailer directly, or you are unhappy with the outcome, the ombudsman may be able to assist you.

The **Energy Made Easy** website has information to assist customers if they have a complaint or are experiencing difficulties. They can be accessed at www.energymadeeasy.gov.au or by phoning 1300 585 165.

Please see the list below for your ombudsman and contact details:

ACT

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal

(02) 6207 1740 www.acat.act.gov.au

NSW

Energy and Water Ombudsman New South Wales

1800 246 545 www.ewon.com.au

NT

Ombudsman NT

1800 806 380 www.ombudsman.nt.gov.au

QLD

Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland

1800 662 837 www.ewoq.com.au

SA

Energy and Water Ombudsman South Australia

1800 665 565 www.ewosa.com.au

TAS

Energy Ombudsman Tasmania

1800 001 170 www.energyombudsman.tas.gov.au

VIC

Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria

1800 500 509 www.ewov.com.au

WA

Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia

1800 754 004 www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au

Other Contacts

In the first instance it is best to speak with your ombudsman if you have a concern, but the regulator can also assist if you have a complaint or concern.

NATIONAL

Australian Energy Regulator

1300 585 165 www.AER.gov.au

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

1300 302 502 (ACCC Infocentre for complaints concerning marketing including door to door sales) www.ACCC.gov.au

STATE AND TERRITORY REGULATORS

ACT

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission

(02) 6205 0799 www.icrc.act.gov.au/energy

NSW

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

(02) 9290 8400 www.ipart.nsw.gov.au

NT

Utilities Commission

(08) 8999 5480 www.utilicom.nt.gov.au

QLD

Queensland Competition Authority

(07) 3222 0555 www.qca.org.au/electricity

TAS

Office of the Tasmanian Economic Regulator

(03) 6166 4422 www.energyregulator.tas.gov.au

SA

Essential Services Commission of South Australia

(08) 8463 4444 www.escosa.sa.gov.au

VIC

Essential Services Commission

1300 664 969 www.esc.vic.gov.au/energy

WA

Economic Regulation Authority

(08) 6557 7900 www.erawa.com.au