

80 turn out for forum to discuss proposed drop in default electricity price

08 October 2020

Electricity and gas

More than 80 representatives from the energy industry, consumer groups and others met in a virtual public forum today to hear more about a proposed reduction to the state's electricity default price for 2021.

The forum, led by Essential Services Commission chair Kate Symons heard from project manager Jonathan Roberts as well as Ben Barnes from the Australian Energy Council representing the energy industry and Patrick Sloyan from the Consumer Action Law Centre.

Under the draft decision, around 160,000 Victorian customers on the default offer would see annual bills fall, by nine per cent or around \$575 a year on average for small business customers, and seven per cent or \$105 per year for households.

Feedback on the draft decision can be submitted through [Engage Victoria](#) until 5pm on 20 October, 2020.

Chair's introductory notes

Please note this is a summary not a full transcript

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's public forum.

My name is Kate Symons and I am the chairperson of the Essential Services Commission.

Acknowledgement of country

To start, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners on all of the lands wherever you are today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging who may be here today.

I would like to acknowledge the connection that Indigenous Australians hold to country and culture, particularly at this time of great uncertainty.

I would like to welcome you all to today's public forum to discuss our draft decision on the 2021 Victorian default offer.

I would also like to introduce my fellow commissioners and senior leaders from the commission here today. My fellow commissioners: Sitesh Bhojani - Simon Corden - Rebecca Billings.

I'd also like to introduce our director of price monitoring and regulation – Marcus Crudden, senior regulator manager in our pricing division – Dean Wickenton and the Victorian default offer project team led by Jonathan Roberts.

I would also like to make a special thank you and welcome to Ben Barnes from the Australian Energy Council and Patrick Sloyan from Consumer Action Law Centre, who will also be presenting today.

I understand we have around 80 attendees at the forum today, including representatives from retailers and embedded network operators, from government, including the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Dept of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Australian Energy Regulator, the Australian Energy Council and consumer advocate representatives from Consumer Action Law Centre, VCOSS and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

I would like to warmly welcome all of you today and, as we can all attest to, we are living in extraordinary times and I hope you are all well, and holding up under the special challenges we are facing right now.

Today's forum is about having a conversation.

We're keen to hear from you about any issues you would like to explore further – so please post questions to make the most of our question and answer session.

At this time, I would also like to acknowledge the work being done by the energy sector to support consumers during this challenging and uncertain time. Particularly as people experience new forms of vulnerability and existing vulnerabilities are exacerbated.

Over the past six months we've held a series of community and industry roundtables to ensure we understand the immediate impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

And I'm pleased to say there has been an openness to dialogue –a willingness to seek solutions to better protect consumers that is to be commended.

These are uncertain and difficult times but working together I believe we can face this challenge head on.

I'd like to also take a moment to thank the retailers who are here today for providing the data we requested as part of our Victorian default offer review, which I acknowledge takes time and effort.

Today, you will hear from our project manager Jonathan Roberts who will take you through our role in setting the Victorian default offer and our draft decision.

He will outline key issues and remind you where you can provide further feedback after today.

Then you will hear from Ben Barnes, from the Australian Energy Council, representing its members followed by Patrick Slovan from the Consumer Action Law Centre.

Presentations from the commission, Australian Energy Council and Consumer Action Law Centre were followed by questions from the floor. A video of the forum will be made available on this site as soon as possible.

Closing remarks

Thank you for your questions and comments. I have found it very valuable to hear firsthand the issues and questions that have been raised today.

Again, we encourage you to make comments or a formal submission to our draft decision via Engage Victoria – submissions close 20 October.

You can also email us at vdo@esc.vic.gov.au

The commission will make a final decision and determination by 25 November, with the 2021 VDO taking effect from 1 January 2021.

Some excellent conversation today everyone and thank you for taking the time to contribute to the conversation.

Thank you all and be well.

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