

MEDIA RELEASE
Friday 27 March 2015

**COMMISSION INVITES PUBLIC COMMENT ON FINANCIAL HARDHIPS
ARRANGEMENTS AVAILABLE TO ENERGY CUSTOMERS**

Victoria's independent economic regulator, the Essential Services Commission, today released an issues paper titled, *Inquiry into the financial hardship arrangements of energy retailers: Our approach* and called for submissions from interested parties.

As part of the Inquiry, the Commission will

- review the financial hardship arrangements of energy retailers to assess whether they reflect best practice,
- review the design and efficacy of the relevant regulatory obligations imposed on energy retailers operating in Victoria, and
- develop a benchmarking framework to assess the effectiveness of retailers' policies, practices and procedures.

Commission Chairperson, Dr Ben-David said, "The Inquiry's primary goal is to provide the community with confidence that energy customers who cannot pay their bills in full and on time are given a 'fair go' by their energy retailer."

The Inquiry is wide-ranging and the Commission is keen to hear from, and will be consulting with, a broad cross-section of interested parties, including energy retailers, energy customers, consumer groups, financial counsellors, and the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria).

"We are particularly interested in hearing from customers who have had personal experience in dealing with their energy retailer when they have had trouble paying their bills," Dr Ben-David said.

The Commission will release a Draft Report (including draft recommendations) by the end of August 2015.

Following the Draft Report, the Commission will invite further public submissions and hold public meetings in metropolitan and regional centres, prior to the providing its Final Report in late 2015.

How to contribute to this Inquiry

Interested parties can comment on any topic discussed in the Paper and within the scope of the Terms of Reference* by providing a written submission.

A copy of the Paper and details on how to provide a submission are available on the Commission's website: www.esc.vic.gov.au

Submissions are due by 1 May 2015.

If you want to be kept up to date about this Inquiry register your interest at energyhardshipreview@esc.vic.gov.au

For further information contact: Amanda Clark on 0411 117 297.

* Available on ESC website.