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Thursday, 4 September 2025

Energy Reform
Essential Services Commission
Level 8, 570 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Energy Reform team,

Re: Better Protections for Life Support Customers in Victoria – Consultation paper

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Essential Services Commission of Victoria (ESCV) consultation paper on Better Protections for Life Support Customers in Victoria.

Life support obligations are a crucial consumer protection. Ensuring compliance with life support protections in the National Energy Customer Framework is an enduring [Compliance and Enforcement Priority](#) for the AER. In July 2025, we [wrote to industry](#) to inform them of a recent enforcement outcome concerning contraventions of life support obligations and to outline our ongoing expectations of retailers and distributors. We also encouraged businesses to ensure their staff understand the serious consequences that failures to appropriately apply life support protections can have for the safety and wellbeing of their customers.

We note that the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) is [considering similar reforms](#) in response to a rule change proposal. We have referred to this rule change proposal in our feedback below. Regulatory harmonisation would support customer awareness through greater consistency and reduce costs for energy businesses operating across frameworks.

There are benefits to better targeting life support customers and ensuring life support registers are up to date

We acknowledge the benefits of proposed changes to better reflect the broad range of medical equipment that requires a supply of energy, including by:

- updating definitions and medical confirmation processes to distinguish between critical and assistive life support equipment, which would enable businesses to better target life support customers and better support those customers who are most at risk of harm
- allowing customers with permanent conditions to be registered permanently, reducing the administrative burden for both customers and energy businesses.

We also acknowledge the importance of ensuring that life support registers are up to date and support updating and clarifying registration and deregistration processes to achieve this.

We support changes to ensure life support users are better informed and prepared

We support changes that will ensure life support customers are better informed and prepared for outages, including by:

- allowing customers to nominate a second person to be contacted about outages, which is particularly important where a carer may need to be notified
- asking customers to provide a phone number and email address for both the customer and the nominated contact person
- requiring retailers and distributors to update life support registers when a customer notifies them of changes to these details
- requiring medical practitioners to advise customers and life support users of the protections they are entitled to, discuss and document a backup plan for power interruptions, and discuss available rebates and concessions.

However, we recognise there may be implementation challenges associated with some of these changes, which are outside our area of expertise (particularly where they rely on medical practitioners). For example, it may be difficult for a medical practitioner to provide information about specific rebates and concessions. The effectiveness of these proposed changes will depend on whether these implementation challenges can be overcome.

We also note the rule change proposal suggests clarifying that retailers and distributors can collect and use electronic communication channels to provide written notifications of planned outages where a mobile number and/or email address is available. It may be more appropriate to require planned outage notifications to be provided in a customer's preferred communication channel where known (similar to existing obligations for customers affected by family violence). This would better ensure customers are informed of and prepared for planned outages.

In developing any standardised templates, we will consider what expertise is required and the benefits of consistency across regulatory frameworks

We acknowledge the potential benefits of a consistent medical confirmation form for life support equipment, as well as a household life support equipment backup plan template. We note that medical expertise or resources may be required to develop such a template. We understand that the ESCV is considering the publication of a standard medical confirmation form template for use by all energy businesses. We recognise that consistency across frameworks would have benefits for the sector and for consumers. We will engage closely with the ESCV as you consult on your template and consider its utility across the NECF.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on this consultation paper. We look forward to continuing our engagement with ESCV staff on these proposed reforms.

If you would like to discuss any of the feedback in this submission further, please contact

Yours sincerely,

Sara Stark
Acting General Manager, Policy
Consumers, Policy & Markets

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