

AUSTRALIAN ENERGY MARKET COMMISSION STRONGER PROTECTIONS FOR CUSTOMERS IN HARDSHIP

Strengthening protections for customers in hardship final determination 15 November 2018

HELPING CUSTOMERS IN HARDSHIP PAY THEIR POWER BILLS

Under the final rule, retailers must comply with new guidelines to be developed by the Australian Energy Regulator to:



show how they will identify customers in hardship early, so they can be included on hardship programs before debts get out of control



use consistent, transparent and specific action statements in their hardship policies so customers know their rights

Retailers must also set out how they will help customers in hardship pay their bills by:



ensuring customers are on the best energy plan that meets their needs



offering programs to help customers manage their energy use, such as home energy audits



putting customers on a manageable payment plan

NEW CIVIL PENALTIES

Having clearer hardship policies will make it easier for the Australian Energy Regulator to monitor the performance of retailers and penalise any breaches.

The final determination includes a joint AEMC/AER recommendation for new civil penalties, such as fines, to protect customers if retailers fail to comply with the new obligations.

NEW RETAILERS

We are recommending a law change to stop new retailers starting their business until they have approved hardship policies in place.

NEXT STEPS

The AER must publish the hardship guidelines by no later than 1 April 2019.

Once the hardship guidelines are published:

- Retailers will have two months to submit their updated policies
- The AER must approve the updated policies within two months of receiving the policy
- Retailers must implement their policies two months after approval

