



Introduction of metering coordinator planned interruptions

The AEMC has made a more preferable final rule to provide customers with shared fusing at their premises greater certainty on when their electricity meter will be installed.

Customers with shared fusing cannot have their meter installation completed without affecting supply to one or more other customers as there is only a single point of isolation. These customers may experience delays when they want a new electricity meter installed or a faulty electricity meter needs to be replaced.

The final rule

The final rule introduces timeframes for the installation of meters to be completed in cases where there is shared fusing at a premises. Under the final rule, where it is discovered the installation of an electricity meter, or the rectification of a malfunctioning meter, will require interrupting the supply to other customers the following timeframes would apply:

- retailers are required to agree an installation date with the customer, or if no date is agreed, complete the meter installation within 30 business days of discovering the shared fusing
- metering coordinators are required to rectify meter malfunctions within 30 business days of discovering the shared fusing
- distributors are required to carry out a distributor planned interruption within 25 business days following a request by a retailer in order to allow for the retailer or metering coordinator to meet their timeframes.

The final rule also:

- clarifies that a retailer is able to interrupt supply to any of its own customers for the purpose of installing, maintaining, repairing or replacing metering equipment, not just the customer receiving the new meter, subject to meeting existing notice or consent requirements
- amends the requirements to be covered within the Metrology Procedures for retailers and metering coordinators to inform distributors when shared fusing is discovered, with distributors to then record the shared fusing information as soon as practicable.

Benefits of the final rule

The final rule provides certainty of installation timeframes for customers with shared fusing. Requiring retailer to carry out meter installation where there is shared fusing within a specified time, along with a requirement for distributors to carry out planned interruptions, where requested within a specific timeframe should assist in reduce meter installation delays for these customers. This would allow customers who have requested a new meter to access new services to manage their use and cost in a more efficient timeframe than under the current rules.

The final rule also addresses issues relating to contractual relationships with the impacted customers and recourse is available to customers should the retailer or distributor not comply with its obligations in the NER and NERR. Consumer outcomes should improve over time by the requirement for AEMO to include in its metrology procedures obligations on retailer and metering coordinators to inform distributors of shared fusing that they become aware of, and on distributors to record the shared fusing information as soon as practicable.

The final rule provides certainty to customers with shared fusing arrangements through new metering timeframes and obligations on market participants — improving metering delays without impacting consumer protections

The rule change request and alternative solution

The rule change request

The Chair of the Competitive Metering Industry Group (CMIG) submitted a rule change request proposed resolving delays in meter installation for customers where the is shared fusing by allowing metering coordinators to carry out planned supply interruptions of any customers for the purposes of installing, maintaining, repairing or replacing an electricity meter. Under the proposed rule, metering coordinators would be able to interrupt supply of the customer who has requested metering work, as well as interrupting supply to any other electricity customers as required to enable the planned metering work to be completed.

The Commission considers that the rule proposed by the CMIG introduces a number of risks for customers, particular in the area of consumer protections. For example, the lack of a contractual relationship between the metering coordinator and both the customer whose meter is being installed and other customers whose supply will be interrupted provides inadequate consumer protections and limited recourse if obligations in the national electricity rules (NER) and national energy retail rules (NERR) are not met. This includes a lack of access to independent dispute resolution via energy ombudsman schemes should they not be able to resolve an issue directly with the metering coordinator.

Proposed alternative solution

An alternative solution that distribution businesses be required to install separate isolation devices for each of the premises with shared fusing at the first supply interruption to install a new meter was proposed by a cohort of stakeholders in submissions to the draft determination.

The Commission considered the proposed alternative solution, including consulting on the proposal at a stakeholder workshop held on 20 April 2020. The proposed alternative solution was not adopted in the final rule. The responsibilities and accountabilities for meter panels, isolation devices and similar assets should be considered under a holistic process to determine the most appropriate safe and efficient management of issues associated with the devices.

Context

Under the NER, retailers are responsible for arranging metering services for small customers. Retailers must appoint a metering coordinator for each of their small customers' connection points. In general, the retailer provides instructions to the metering coordinator for any metering work needed by the customer. The metering coordinator has overall responsibility for all issues related to the metering installations for which it has been appointed, and in turn appoints a metering provider for each connection point to provide, install and maintain the meter installation.

There are timeframes in the NER under which a metering coordinator must arrange for a small customer's faulty meter to be repaired or replaced, as well as metering installation timeframes for retailers to install meters for new connections and meter exchanges. For customer initiated meter replacements there are currently a number of exceptions from meeting the metering installation timeframes. One of these exceptions relates to where the installation of a new meter cannot occur without interrupting the supply to another customer. Therefore, there are currently no timeframes for customers with shared fusing.

In order for the metering coordinator to carry out a meter replacement, a planned interruption to the electricity supply must occur. Under the NERR there are retailer planned interruptions and distributor planned interruptions. Retailers are able to arrange for an interruption to their customer's electricity supply without the involvement of the distributor (a 'retailer planned interruption') where the interruption:

- is for the purposes of installing, maintaining, repairing or replacing an electricity meter; and
- does not involve either the distributor effecting the supply interruption or interrupting the supply of electricity to a customer that is not the customer of the retailer arranging the interruption.

In other circumstances a distributor planned interruption must currently be arranged.

Implementation of final determination

The provisions in the final rule relating to meter installation timeframes for retailers and MCs, and the timeframe for DNSPs to carry out planned interruptions to enable the meter installation will commence on 21 July 2020.

Changes to retailer's and DNSP's customer contracts required by changes to the model terms and conditions in the NERR will commence on 21 August 2020.

AEMO will be required to have implemented the changes relating to the requirement to record shared fusing information by a date no later than 30 March 2022.

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