

## Improving life support processes

### **We are seeking feedback on a draft rule to improve outcomes for life support users and customers**

The Commission's draft rule recognises life support protections are critical for supporting customers who use energy-dependent equipment at home, and access to those protections should be broad and fair. It also recognises an accurate register is important to ensure life support protections are applied consistently.

In summary, the draft rule seeks to clarify and improve roles, responsibilities, and processes of retailers and distributors in registering and serving energy customers with life support equipment at their premises. The proposed changes do not reduce existing protections for any life support customer.

The draft determination is in response to a rule change request from Essential Energy and SA Power Networks (SAPN) to improve the existing processes of retailers and distributors in registering and serving customers with life support equipment at their premises. The rule change stemmed from the Energy Charter's #BetterTogether Life Support Customer initiative and consultation.

While the draft rule is a more preferable rule, it incorporates many of the elements proposed in the rule change request, which considered that:

- Distributors and retailers cannot readily identify life support customers with critical equipment needs compared to those using life support equipment to improve the quality of life.
- Life support registers are inaccurate because of unclear processes and responsibilities.
- Communications with life support customers often do not happen according to customer preferences.

The draft determination covers the numerous issues raised in the rule change request under three broad themes. We cover each of the proposed changes for the draft rule under each of these three themes below.

### **We are seeking feedback on our draft determination and draft rule by 16 April 2026.**

There are a variety of ways to provide feedback, including participating in workshops or bilateral meetings to providing formal submissions. Submissions must be lodged via the Commission's website, [www.aemc.gov.au](http://www.aemc.gov.au).

### **The draft rule updates definitions and does not reduce important penalties (Theme 1)**

The draft rule adds definitions to improve protections for life support customers. It enables life support customers who rely on life support equipment to avoid death or permanent injury to be identified, assisting retailers and distributors to more effectively respond to outages. Finally, it recognises the key importance of penalties in ensuring life support protections are delivered to consumers.

The draft rule would do this by:

- Allowing medical practitioners to identify customers with a life-threatening condition through the medical confirmation form. The Commission expects this information will be used by retailers and distributors to improve their response to outages.
  - retailers would report on the number of these customers to the AER. The AER would report this information in their retail market performance reports.
  - distributors would publish information on their websites on how they use life support

information, including for those with life-threatening needs.

- Adding the definition “life support user” to improve communications between industry and life support customers - identifying who is using the life support equipment in the customer’s premises.

The draft rule does not reduce penalties or reporting requirements for breaches relating to any life support customers, reflecting the serious potential consequences of breaches of these protections.

While emergency response and planning are the responsibility of jurisdictions, the Commission considers the capture of this information will assist energy providers, specifically distributors, to plan and respond to outages, and has the potential to enrich jurisdictional responses in emergency response situations, where information sharing is enabled.

The Commission also notes that communication on back-up planning is important and supports the Energy Charter’s Power Outage Plan campaign, which promotes awareness of the need for a backup plan and a backup plan template is available.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission also recommends ongoing consideration of a central register (or priority services register) by governments to further improve the life support customer experience and application of protections.

### **The draft rule seeks to improve the processes for registering and deregistering a life support customer (Theme 2)**

The draft rule improves processes around registering and deregistering life support customers to support the accuracy of the register, while minimising costs and risks to life support customers who may be experiencing vulnerability.

The draft rule:

- Makes retailers responsible for life support registrations and deregistrations, in line with their primary market role, streamlining customer interactions. Customers will still be able to reach out to either their retailer or distributor to sign up for life support protections.
- Improves the registration process by:
  - requiring retailers to ask all new customers if they require life support protections when they sign up
  - placing time limits around information sharing to ensure protections are applied to customers as quickly as possible
  - standardising medical confirmation forms to ensure they are easy for medical practitioners to fill out, and to make sure businesses are capturing and sharing consistent information
  - requiring retailers to inform embedded network operators about life support customer registrations and updates (an issue raised through consultation).
- Requires retailers to annually check to confirm the life support customer’s registration details remain accurate, and if they still require protections at their premises.
- Strengthens the deregistration process by ensuring retailers deregister life support customers where the customer asks, removing the frustration and distress of repeated requests and improving the accuracy of the register. The draft rule will also allow deregistration to be expedited where the customer consents, removing delays.
- Life support protections will also continue to apply to gas connections. To reduce registrations in error, medical confirmation forms will identify if customers require protections for equipment powered by gas or electricity.

The draft rule does not mandate deregistration where a customer does not provide medical confirmation, nor require customers to re-register after a given period. It also does not limit the number of registration attempts a customer can make.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the Check Plan Do Power Outage campaign is available [here](#).

### **The draft rule seeks to improve communications with life support customers (Theme 3)**

The draft rule recognises it is critical that life support customers can be contacted and provided with key information in the case of planned and unplanned outages, and are supported in responding to such communication. The proposed changes and draft rule allows the:

- details of a second person to be captured on the medical confirmation form. This person would also receive life support notifications to assist the life support customer in responding to outage notifications, and also in responding to the annual check conducted by retailers
- customer and secondary contact's electronic contact details (mobile phone numbers and email addresses) to be captured during medical confirmation, and clarifying that electronic communication methods can be used for outage notifications, according to the customer's preferences.

### **The draft rule would promote the National Energy Retail Objective (NERO)**

The draft rule contributes to our vision for [A consumer-focused net zero energy system](#), specifically our consumer priority that seeks to inform, empower and protect consumers individually and as a collective. The draft rule seeks to maintain low barriers for life support customers to access life support protections and improve definitions, processes and communications to ensure they are applied as consistently as possible for all life support customers.<sup>2</sup>

In making our draft rule, we have considered the NERO by applying the assessment criteria outlined in the consultation paper.<sup>3</sup> For this draft determination, we also had regard to promoting equitable energy outcomes for households that may require life-support protections. This complements the AEMC's guidance to ensure issues of equity are consistently and transparently addressed in a structured way when we are making rule changes and delivering recommendations – that is putting a consistent focus on accounting for the diversity of consumer needs, experiences and preferences, removing structural barriers to participation, avoiding creating or exacerbating vulnerability.

### **The rule would come into effect in December 2027**

The draft determination proposes a commencement date of 1 December 2027. The draft rule includes transitional arrangements to enable the implementation of the rule. This implementation date allows time for the AER to update its life support registration guide and retail performance reporting requirements, and develop the medical confirmation form. It also allows time for updates to information sharing (Business to Business) and internal business systems to accommodate the rule.

### **The ESC Vic is considering the same issues in their life support review**

The Essential Services Commission of Victoria (ESC Vic) is considering the changes proposed in the rule change as part of its [review of life support protections in Victoria](#). We have sought to align our proposed changes with ESC Vic, including by holding joint stakeholder briefings. Through these interactions, we have aligned life support roles and processes to the extent possible. We have also aligned the timing of the rule change/review, including publication dates and consultation periods.

### **For information contact:**

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<sup>2</sup> See the AEMC's A consumer-focused net-zero energy system [here](#) .

<sup>3</sup> Section 13 of the NERL.