

Enhancing distribution network planning and data reporting

The Commission has made a more preferable rule to improve distribution network planning

The AEMC has made a more preferable rule that improves the transparency, consistency and coordination of distribution network planning and data reporting. The rule replaces the existing Distribution Annual Planning Report (DAPR) with a new long-term planning process and establishes a new framework for distribution network data reporting. The rule is in response to a rule change request submitted by Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) in January 2025.

The final rule is designed to ensure distribution planning and reporting remains fit for purpose as consumer energy resources (CER), including rooftop solar, batteries and electric vehicles, become an increasingly important part of Australia's energy system. It will provide consumers, CER investors and other stakeholders with better visibility of how distribution networks are expected to develop and improve access to distribution network data.

Our rule improves distribution network planning and reporting by introducing new planning and data reporting frameworks

The final rule improves distribution network planning and reporting by:

1. Establishing a new distribution network planning framework centred on the Distribution Network Development Plan (DNDP)

- **The new framework replaces the DAPR with a DNDP published every five years.** The DNDP will provide a long-term view of how distribution networks are expected to develop under a range of future scenarios. Distribution network service providers (DNSPs) will be required to:
 - plan across a 20-year planning horizon using a range of scenarios
 - adopt AEMO's Inputs, Assumptions and Scenarios Report as the baseline for their plans
 - identify future network needs, risks, opportunities and potential non-network options
 - explain how they have engaged with consumers and other relevant stakeholders.
- This will provide DNSPs' stakeholders, including consumers and non-network providers, with greater visibility of planned future network developments and investment opportunities.
- **The new framework requires DNSPs to publish an annual update between DNDPs to maintain near- and medium-term transparency.** The annual update will focus on material changes since the DNDP or previous annual update, including changes to network conditions, progress on regulatory investment test for distribution (RIT-D) projects, joint planning activities and engagement with non-network providers. This preserves regular planning transparency while reducing the reporting burden associated with the existing annual planning framework.

2. Establishing a new distribution network data reporting framework supported by AER guidelines

- **The new framework requires DNSPs to publish distribution network data in accordance with AER guidelines.** The framework is intended to improve visibility of the current, historical and expected future state of distribution networks, including information relevant to understanding network capacity and constraints. This will support greater access to distribution network information for stakeholders, including consumers and non-network providers.

- **The new framework requires the AER to develop data reporting guidelines and planning guidelines to support implementation of the framework.** The AER's guidelines will establish reporting requirements, forecasting approaches and other implementation details while being guided by principles including the net economic benefit of reporting requirements, protection of confidential and personal information, and consideration of publicly available data. This principles-based approach provides flexibility to adapt to changing technologies, stakeholder needs and future reforms while promoting consistency across distribution networks.

We considered stakeholder feedback in making the final rule

There was broad support from stakeholders for the proposed reforms to distribution network planning and reporting. Supportive stakeholders included market bodies, DNSPs, retailers, industry groups, consumer organisations and energy users. Stakeholders generally agreed that the reforms would improve transparency, support more informed investment decisions and better account for the challenges and opportunities created by increasing CER uptake.

However, stakeholders also proposed a number of refinements to the draft rule. Some stakeholders considered the proposed purpose of the DNDP did not sufficiently capture the role of the new planning framework or the broad range of stakeholders it is intended to inform. Several DNSPs and Energy Networks Australia raised concerns regarding the proposed timing of annual updates and suggested alternative publication dates that would better align with existing planning processes. Other stakeholders sought greater clarity regarding implementation of the data reporting framework, including how differences in DNSP capabilities would be accommodated and whether low-voltage network data would be included in the AER's guidelines.

Key changes between the draft and final rule in response to issues raised by stakeholders include:

- **Clarifying the purpose of the DNDP.** The final rule adopts an amended purpose that more clearly explains the role of the DNDP in providing long-term visibility of expected distribution services and supporting efficient decisions and investment opportunities.
- **Changing annual update publication arrangements.** The final rule requires annual updates to be published by 31 December, unless otherwise specified by the AER, and removes the requirement for DNSPs to publish an annual update immediately before a new DNDP is due. These changes respond to stakeholder concerns regarding implementation and resourcing impacts.
- **Clarifying expectations regarding implementation of the data reporting framework.** The Commission clarified its expectation that the AER's initial guidelines can account for differences in DNSP capabilities and may include transitional arrangements where appropriate.
- **Providing additional clarity on low-voltage network data.** While retaining the principles-based framework, the Commission clarified its expectation that the AER's guidelines will include low-voltage network data.

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