



Consultation on proposal to strengthen protections for customers requiring life support equipment

Rule change request from the Australian Energy Regulator

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) is seeking to strengthen and formalise the processes for registering and deregistering customers requiring life support equipment.

The life support rules

Part 7 of the National Electricity Retail Rules (life support rules) limit when electricity distributors are able to interrupt supply to life support customers, for example to undertake planned maintenance. In these limited circumstances, customers must be given at least four business days written notice. To receive these protections, a customer advising a retailer or distributor it requires life support equipment at their premises must also provide confirmation from a registered medical practitioner that life support equipment is required. The AER acknowledges retailers and distributors register customers when they are advised by the customer, whether or not a medical certificate is provided. However, the AER is seeking to clarify and formalise the existing protections.

The AER has proposed changes to the life support rules

The rule change request proposes changes to:

- the registration process
- introduce a medical confirmation process
- the deregistration process.

The proposed changes to the registration process

The AER acknowledges that retailers and distributors are already placing customers on their life support registers when customers advise them of the need for life support equipment at their premises. The rule change would clarify that a customer would receive the protections of the life support rules from the time they inform their retailer or distributor until they are deregistered.

Also, the business (retailer or distributor) first contacted by the customer would be required to send a medical confirmation form to the customer and information about the implications of not completing and returning the form. A medical confirmation form would prompt the customer for information required to meet the requirement to provide confirmation from a registered medical practitioner that someone at the customer's premises requires life support equipment. The retailer or distributor would also provide advice about planned interruptions and unplanned interruptions, information to assist the customer prepare a plan of action in case of an unplanned interruption, and an emergency contact number.

The proposed medical confirmation process

The AER is proposing a process for confirming the need for life support equipment at a premises be prescribed in the life support rules. Customers would be given a minimum of 65 calendar days to complete and return the medical confirmation form. During this period, if they do not receive medical confirmation from the customer, the registration process owner must send at least two confirmation reminder notices. They would also be required to provide a customer at least one extension of a minimum of 30 calendar days to return the medical confirmation form, if the customer requests it.

The proposed changes to the deregistration process

When a customer no longer needs life support equipment or has failed to provide a medical certificate, the AER proposes that the business (retailer or distributor) first contacted by the customer (registration process owner) is in charge of deregistering the customer.

Submissions are invited by 18 July 2017.

If a customer has failed to provide medical confirmation, the registration process owner would be required to follow reasonable steps to contact the customer and provide the customer with a deregistration notice. They could only deregister the customer if the customer does not provide a medical certificate before the date for deregistration specified in the deregistration notice.

After receiving a deregistration request from the customer, the registration process owner would be required to first take steps to verify the deregistration request with the customer for up to three days from the date of the notification. After this three day period they could deregister the customer.

We seek stakeholder feedback on the issues raised in the consultation paper

The consultation paper seeks stakeholder feedback including on the costs the new obligations might impose and the appropriateness of the new arrangements.

For information, contact:

Project leader: **Greg Williams** (02) 8296 0615

Project sponsor, **Owen Pascoe** (02) 8296 7856

Media Communications Director, **Prudence Anderson** 0404 821 935 or (02) 8296 7817