

# Energy retailers and networks must protect Australian households and small businesses that have gone into hibernation

**Joint media release with  
The Hon Angus Taylor MP  
Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction**

The Australian Government has set reasonable expectations of energy companies to protect householders and small business customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, outlined today by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).

The AER's Statement of Expectations sets out a range measures, including:

- Waiving any disconnection, re-connection and/or contract break fees for small businesses which have gone into hibernation, along with daily supply charges to retailers, during any period of disconnection until at least 31 July 2020;
- Offering all households and small businesses who indicate they may be in financial stress a payment plan or hardship arrangement;
- Not disconnecting customers who may be in financial stress, without their agreement before 31 July 2020 and potentially beyond;
- Deferring referral of any customer to a debt collection agency for recovery actions, or credit default listing until at least 31 July 2020 and potentially beyond; and
- Minimising the frequency and duration of planned outages for critical works, and providing as much notice as possible to assist households and businesses to manage during any outage.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction Angus Taylor said the Australian Government will be closely monitoring retailer and network compliance with these measures.

"The electricity and gas sector, as an essential service, has an obligation to support customers through these difficult times," Treasurer Frydenberg said.

"The Government is focussed on working to slow the spread of the virus, while putting in place actions to limit the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives, jobs and businesses – and industry must play their role."

Minister Taylor said it was imperative for energy companies to help customers who are experiencing difficulty.

"It is vitally important that we all pull together to help those who are being impacted by COVID19," Minister Taylor said.

"While several energy companies have taken some steps to assist their customers in financial stress, during these difficult times we expect more action."

"We expect energy companies to look after their customers, keep them connected and waive additional fees and charges for those doing it tough.

"We expect them to do more to help small businesses who have gone into hibernation to avoid any energy costs, and we expect them to pass on the huge price drops we are seeing in the wholesale market."

The Government believes it is important customers who can pay their bills continue to do so, while the energy companies do more to help those in need, beyond the business-as usual hardship arrangements.

The Government welcomes the AER's announcement that it is also amending its performance reporting framework to allow more timely access to data on payment plans, hardship, disconnections and credit collection.

This enhanced reporting will allow the AER and the Government to quickly identify where energy customers are experiencing difficulty and to act accordingly.

These are extremely challenging times. It is essential that the energy sector works with government to provide the support that the Australian people need.