



Australian Government



Australian
**Small Business and
Family Enterprise**
Ombudsman

4 December 2018

General Manager, Consumers and Markets
Australian Energy Regulator
APO Box 520
Melbourne Vic 3001

By email: AERConsumerandPolicy@aer.gov.au

Dear Ms Proudfoot,

Standardised statements for use in customer hardship policies

We welcome the idea of standardising customer hardship policies. We would want to reiterate that customer hardship policies must be extended to Small Businesses (SME's). Ensuring SME's are included will be of benefit to those with unmanageable energy costs.

While our preferred position is for providers to supply at a lower cost, hardship policies allow businesses to manage payments to enable continuation of operation. Having a standardised process across the market enables everyone to know what they are able to access if needed but also prevents SMEs from having to compare an extra policy when deciding which deal and provider is best for each individual.

We would also want to see a hardship policy in plain English. Having the policy provided in a number of different languages would also be of benefit for the SME community. Currently customer hardship policies are difficult to find on providers websites, are often confusing and do not detail what is included.

While we don't necessarily want an automated process for entering into a hardship policy, we would want the policy to be widely advertised and entry into the policy to be easy and to take effect within days.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Jill Lawrence on 02 6263 1558 or at jill.lawrence@asbfeo.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Kate Carnell AO

Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman

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