

I am writing regarding the proposed introduction of a fee for manually reading electricity meters.

I have been paying for this service all my life via a hidden fee within the electricity consumption rate. The SEC and its various replacements did not provide this service at expense to themselves. I paid for it as part of having electricity supplied to the home. My power distributor, Powercor, never told me that they had removed this meter reading fee from my bill with the introduction of remotely read meters. In fact, my bill, and that of those who have a smart meter, has only increased since the rollout of smart meters commenced.

The government thinks it would be unfair to make those with smart meters pay for the manual meter reading of those without smart meters. So then why does the government not think it is unfair for me to pay for the smart meters that others have, but I do not have? Currently I am paying \$115.27 (ex GST) per annum for a smart meter which has been hidden in the 'home supply charge' line item of my bill. My electricity bill has increased to cover the cost of a smart meter that I do not have. How can I be expected to pay for having a smart meter and also to pay for not having a smart meter? The power distributors need to make up their minds which of these two fees I should be paying. If it is the manual meter reading fee, then they need to reimburse me for the years I have been paying for a smart meter that I do not have.

Also, the manual meter reading fee that Powercor proposes to charge me is far in excess of what other power distributors propose to charge for manual meter reading. (Jemena \$10.83, United Energy \$11.05, CitiPower's sister company \$19.44 and Powercor, a whopping \$31.07 [all figures are ex-GST].) Why do Powercor customers get slugged so much for the same service? Why does it cost more for CitiPower/Powercor to send Joe Bloggs, their meter reader, to Geelong, than it does to send Joe to suburban Melbourne? Could it be that I am subsidising the meter reading of other Powercor customers in remote rural areas? But I am in an urban area. If, as the state government claims, it is not fair for customers with smart meters to pay for the meter reading of those without smart meters, then how is it fair for customers in urban areas to subsidise the meter reading fees of those in rural areas?

I have been on Centrelink payments since smart meters were installed in my area and destroyed my health and ability to work. I no longer have the capacity to earn income to meet all these charges being hurled at us for daring to think we have a right to exist in this society. I cannot afford to prop up gold-plating electricity providers so that they can pay dividends to investors who have the spare cash to purchase shares. If power distribution in Victoria has been privatised, then why are individual consumers being forced to chip in to keep private companies profitable?

Why am I being punished via a manual meter reading fee for daring to attempt to protect my health from further damage from smart meters? I do not see that I have a choice regarding permitting a smart meter to be installed in the centre of my house. If I agree to such a thing, the likelihood is that my health will be damaged to such an extent that I will become an even greater burden upon society and the health system.