

Minutes



Better Bills Guideline Working Group

Date: Wednesday 14 July 2021, 3:30–5 pm

Location: Microsoft Teams

Present

Organisation	Representative(s)	Role
Australian Energy Regulator	Kathie Standen	Chair
Australian Energy Regulator	Simone Tyson	Speaker
Australian Energy Regulator	Bronwen Jennings	Speaker
ActewAGL	Dylan Walsh	Member
Alinta Energy	Shaun Ruddy	Member
Aurora Energy	Giles Whitehouse	Member
Australian Energy Council	Ben Barnes	Member
Council on the Ageing	Robyn Robinson	Member
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW	Rory Campbell	Member
Ethnic Communities Council of NSW	Iain Maitland	Member
Financial Counselling Australia	Julie Barrow	Member
Meridian Energy / Powershop	Peter Silvey on behalf of Lauren Kane	Member
Origin Energy	Daisy Scarborough	Member
Queensland Council of Social Service	Wendy Miller	Member
Uniting Communities	Mark Henley	Member

Apologies

Tasmanian Council of Social Service	Dr Charlie Burton	Member
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Agenda items

1 Welcome and introductions

- Kathie Standen moderated individual introductions of working group members.

2 Guideline background, scope and objectives

Presentation by Bronwen Jennings

- The AER's priority is to improve consumer outcomes while reducing cost to serve by boosting consumer and behavioural insights and applying them across AER initiatives.
- An AEMC determination on 18 March 2021 requires AER to make a Bill Contents and Billing Requirements (Better Bills) Guideline by 1 April 2022.
- The Guideline's purpose is to make them easy to understand.
- A key focus for the AER is simplification of energy bills.
- Under the rule, the scope of the Guideline includes a tiered approach to billing information, standardised terminology and format. The AER is also considering whether including 'best offer' information on bills would be helpful.
- The AER anticipates early consultation during July/August.

Questions, comments and feedback

Who is the audience for this Guideline?

- The AER advised the audience for the Guideline is authorised retailers.

Will the Guideline cover embedded networks?

- **Action:** The AER will confirm.
- The AER advised that while the Guideline will cover the scope of the AEMC rule change, the AER can also comment on issues beyond the direct scope of the rule change, and further work that may need to be done as we are taking a broader view of where improvements can be made.

Is best offer information in the scope of the Guideline?

- The AER confirmed best offer information is in scope.

What is the objective and the measure of success, keeping in mind that the bill is just part of a suite of tools that retailers use to interact and engage with their customers?

- The AER noted the point, and will also be considering the cost to serve as a key part of the Guideline development given the potential benefits to consumers and energy businesses.

3 Research progress

Presentation by Simone Tyson

- Research will fill evidence gaps identified through review of existing literature and prior research, including BETA's previous *Electricity information to fit the bill* report.
- Approach combines qualitative and quantitative consumer testing and research, with multiple studies currently in field.
- Focus is on how to prioritise content, avoid information overload and maximise comprehension.

Questions, comments and feedback

When will the research be published?

- The AER advised interim results will be provided to the AER in late July, and is working with BETA to confirm a publication date.

Does the research include older customers?

- The AER advised that the online BETA research will include a sample representative of the Australian energy customer base, including older consumers. There are also focus groups being used to target customers who may not want or be able to engage in online research, including customers 65 years of age and older, as well as customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who speak a language other than English at home.

Will it be possible to analyse quantitative results by those in an embedded network?

- **Action:** The AER will confirm.

Will it be possible to analyse quantitative results by those who speak languages other than English at home?

- The AER confirmed this data has been collected and results will be analysed where there is sufficient sample size.

Will it be possible to analyse quantitative results based on meter type?

- The AER advised this will not be possible, based on advice from BETA that responses to this question are consistently unreliable, as many consumers do not know what type of meter they have.

Does the quantitative research ask respondents if they have solar PV?

- The AER confirmed this data has been collected.

Will the working group be provided with a workshop or presentation of the findings?

- The AER confirmed the working group will be presented with the findings.

Will the raw data be made public?

- **Action:** The AER will confirm.

4 Guideline development process

Presentation by Bronwen Jennings

- Anticipated next steps include an issues paper with consultation period (July–September 2021), draft Guideline and Notice of draft instrument with consultation period (November–December 2021), and publication of the final Guideline (April 2022).
- The process includes a number of opportunities for feedback and input, in addition to the prior feedback provided on the proposed BETA research and feedback to be provided through the working group.

Questions, comments and feedback

Origin Energy has undertaken a major project on bill simplification and shared the results with BETA; they offered to share the results with the working group as well.

- **Action:** The AER will include on future meeting agenda.

What are the key touchpoints with the working group through the Guideline development process?

- The AER confirmed that the key touchpoints with the working group are at critical stages in the project, including after high level results were released, when the Issues Paper is being released, and in development of the draft Guideline.
- Consumer stakeholders suggested that the AER check in with the working group after each round of public consultation to allow the working group to test the critical the issues raised in the consultation.
- Consumer stakeholders also suggested that it would be helpful for the working group to discuss issues prior to the release of the BETA results, in order to identify areas of agreement and disagreement which could subsequently guide the focus of the working group.

Would the AER consider standardising bills and terminology as part of the Guideline, noting this could reduce confusion amongst consumers?

- An industry stakeholder cautioned against following the same approach as used in the RPIG 2018 process, and suggested that any move to standardise language should be based on consumer testing.
- The AER noted that standardisation as a general principle is an issue being considered as part of the Guideline development. However, regarding terminology, the research is not testing specific words and terms but rather the use of plain English and the inclusion of definitions for technical terms.

5 Future meeting dates and agenda topics

Presentation by Kathie Standen

- Summary of draft meeting dates and agenda topics as outlined in the draft Terms of Reference.

Questions, comments and feedback

- It was agreed the next meeting should consider key issues being presented in public consultation, with the aim of identifying areas of agreement and disagreement.
- It was agreed the next meeting should be held at a later date to be confirmed (noting that multiple stakeholders would be unable to attend in the first week of August due to clashes with other forums).
- The AER advised that an updated forward agenda, final Terms of Reference, meeting minutes, and the meeting slide pack would be distributed as soon as possible following the meeting.

Action items

Agenda Item	Action	Owner
2.2	Confirm whether the Guideline will cover embedded networks	AER
3.2	Confirm whether it will be possible to analyse online survey/RCT results by those in an embedded network	AER
3.2	Confirm whether the raw data will be made public	AER
4.2	Include Origin Energy presentation on next meeting agenda	Origin/AER
5.2	Distribute updated working group documentation and meeting materials to members	AER