

Minutes



Better Bills Guideline Working Group

Monday 30 March 2022

1:30–2:30pm (AEST) | 2:00–3:00pm (ACDT) | 2:30–3.30pm (AEDT)

Location: Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Organisation	Representative(s)	Role
Australian Energy Regulator	Kathie Standen	Chair
Australian Energy Regulator	Lois Shedd	Presenter
Australian Energy Regulator	Rachel Thomas	Presenter
Australian Energy Regulator	Mark Feather	Presenter
ActewAGL	Dylan Walsh	Member
Alinta Energy	David Calder	Member
Aurora Energy	Giles Whitehouse	Member
Australian Energy Council	Ben Barnes	Member
Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA)	Elle Marengo	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	Lynda Edwards	Member
Meridian Energy / Powershop	Lauren Kane	Member
Origin Energy	Carol McArdle	Member
Queensland Council of Social Service	Wendy Miller	Member
Tasmanian Council of Social Service	Stephen Durney	Member
Uniting Communities	Mark Henley	Member

Australian Energy Regulator	Elizabeth Tuckett	Observer
Australian Energy Regulator	Simone Tyson	Observer

Apologies

Ethnic Communities Council of NSW	Iain Maitland	Member
Financial Counselling Australia	Lynda Edwards	Member
Meridian Energy / Powershop	Lauren Kane	Member
Origin Energy	Carol McArdle	Member
Queensland Council of Social Service	Wendy Miller	Member
Tasmanian Council of Social Service	Stephen Durney	Member
Uniting Communities	Mark Henley	Member

Agenda items

1 Welcome

- Kathie welcomed members and opened the meeting.
- Kathie noted an embargoed copy of the Better Bills Guideline would be circulated with the group.

2 Update on Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) better offer research – Dr Lois Shedd

- Lois advised that the research would be published alongside the final Guideline.
- Lois described the objective of the better offer research as optimising better offer messages to maximise consumer comprehension of and trust in the message.
- The research design included qualitative interviews with 15 participants and online surveys with 1,716 participants.
- In the surveys, behavioural intention was measured as intention to take action based on the better offer message presented, and analysed as intention to take any action versus intention to do nothing
- The key findings were:
 - No clear differences between ‘pay less’ or ‘save money’ for those not on the best plan
 - A question heading appears to be slightly better for those on the best plan
 - A statement that the message is required by the AER is likely to increase trust
 - Consumers understand the better offer is calculated by their provider
 - Consumers want the Energy Made Easy link to stand out

Questions, comments and feedback

To what extent were respondents prompted throughout the research?

- Lois confirmed that BIT and the AER worked hard to limit priming, and in terms of the survey there was no specific prompting.

Did BIT consider real world use of better offer models and was there consideration of ACT model?

- Kathie indicated that there were cost mitigation benefits for retailers associated with implementing the Victorian model.
- Kathie confirmed that BIT does not provide policy recommendations. For clarity, BIT provides recommendations based solely on research findings.
- Kathie further confirmed that we have had conversations with the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission ACT and ACT government because we want a consistent approach across NECF.

3 Discussion of Final Better Bills Guideline – Mark Feather

- Mark described the key milestones for the project, noting that the Guideline was to be published 31 March 2022 and retailers are to achieve compliance by 31 March 2023.
- Mark noted the key elements of the final Guideline included:
 - Better offer
 - Design principles
 - Tiered approach (Tier 1, Tier 2 and ‘additional information’)
 - Plan summary
- Mark described the better offer approach adopted in the Guideline, stating that it was closely aligned with the Victorian requirements, grounded in BIT research and used standardised language.
- Mark noted that no changes were made to the Design Principles from the draft to the final Guideline.
- Mark noted that Tier 1 information now includes allowance for:
 - information as required by state/territory/Commonwealth laws
 - important messages, for example in relation to natural disasters
 - the AER, from time to time, to allow other messages, for example the QLD asset ownership dividend message.
- Mark noted that Tier 2 includes:
 - understand your bill section
 - plan summary information (plan name, benefits including expiry, and renewable energy inclusions)
 - tariff information (rates and charging windows), in either plan summary or understand your bill section
 - average daily usage and exports
 - usage comparison
 - helpful contacts
 - estimate / self-read information

- Mark noted that the AER proposes to commence a review of the Guideline 2 years after full implementation, with review to take no longer than 1 year

Questions, comments and feedback

Within the plan summary, what discount information are retailers required to provide?

- Staff confirmed that benefits embedded within a customers' plan was required to be listed in the plan summary and benefits may include discounts.

What is the metric for success of this Guideline?

- The AER will give further consideration to methods for evaluating the success of the guideline, now that it has been published.
- Staff confirmed that the Guideline would be reviewed two years after implementation, with the review to take no longer than 1 year
- Staff noted that the AER has considered different options around measuring success including:
 - a reduction in complaints about bills to retailers/ombudsman schemes
 - gathering information on cost to serve for retailers
 - bill comparisons to measure comprehension
 - uptake of better offer

Discussion

- Staff confirmed that providing “The Australian Energy Regulator requires us to include this information” with the better offer message promoted trust and also made a logical link to Energy Made Easy as the AER hosts the Energy Made Easy website.
- AER were asked whether a phone number for access to EME would be published as Tier 1 information to assist customers with limited access to technology. Staff noted that the service provided by the Energy Made Easy website is difficult to translate over the phone which is why there is not, currently, an Energy Made Easy phone number. Staff confirmed that there may be opportunity in the future to consider an Energy Made Easy phone number as an available service.

4 Conclusion

- Kathie closed the meeting and thanked members. The AER will continue to engage with stakeholders in relation to implementing and evaluating the Better Bills Guideline.

Action items

Agenda Item	Action	Owner
1	Provide embargoed copy of Guideline to Working Group members (complete)	AER