

Department of Justice

Consumer Affairs Victoria

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Australian Energy Regulator
Att: Ms Dianne McGrath
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CANBERRA ACT 2601

Our ref: CD/11/404357

Email: AERinquiry@AER.gov.au

Dear Ms McGrath

PRICE COMPARATOR WEBSITE

Thank you for giving Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Australian Energy Regulator's (AER's) price comparator website.

Consumers and small businesses must be able to make informed decisions when entering into energy contracts and to easily compare offers from energy retailers.

CAV believes the AER website should have at least the same functionality as the *Your Choice* website currently providing advice for Victorian consumers. It should consider energy market differences between jurisdictions, ensuring information specific to Victorian consumers is not compromised.

The AER website's home page should include explanations – in plain English – of how energy markets work; terminology such as time-of-use tariffs; and the difference between 'standing offers' and 'market offers'. This will help consumers engage with the website confidently and feel well-informed about their choices.

A clear statement that the AER website is not an energy switching site – rather, a comparison service only – should be included on the home page. This could be in the context of a brief explanation about commercial energy switching sites, further clarifying this distinction.

Items included and not included in offers – such as GST, price components, incentives and penalties – should be clearly explained.

Consumers should be encouraged to make their own enquiries about specific offers and their obligations in starting and ending energy contracts (for example, any associated fees or charges).

In terms of functionality, CAV believes the site should allow users to analyse bills monthly, quarterly or annually, and to select their energy distributor from a map displaying them by postcode.

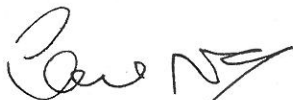
We support the establishment of helplines and translator services for consumers with special access requirements or without computer access.

CAV believes the AER should consider the following ways to make residential and small business customers aware of the price comparator website:

- pay per click and online banner advertising
- promotion through social media networks – Facebook, Twitter, blogs
- information provided to community groups
- working with partner organisations, encouraging them to distribute information to their stakeholders via online content, forums and newsletters. In Victoria, these could include:
 - Victorian Employer Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI)
 - Small Business Victoria
 - Small Business Commissioner
 - Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
 - Plumbing Industry Commission
 - Department of Primary Industries
 - Department of Planning and Community Development
 - Building Commission, and
 - Registered Training Organisations.

I hope this information is helpful in providing guidance for the development of the AER site.

Yours sincerely



Dr Claire Noone
Director
Consumer Affairs Victoria