

AEMC  
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## Proposed rule change: Real-time data for consumers (ERC0399)

National Seniors Australia (NSA) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the proposed rule change to provide real-time data for consumers. NSA is the leading advocacy organisation for older Australians, and through our research and advocacy activities, we work to improve the wellbeing of all older Australians.

**NSA would like to express our strong support for the rule change proposed by Energy Consumers Australia (ECA). This is especially important, given the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) has proposed an accelerated rollout of smart meters.**

This rule change implements the recommendation from the final report of the Review of the Regulatory Framework for Metering Services:

*“To allow customers to get access to more of their data, we recommend implementing a framework that provides customers access to their smart meter data in real-time free of direct charge, where they request it.”<sup>1</sup>*

NSA reiterates the recommendations made in our submissions to the AEMC, that demand tariffs have no place in the consumer market, that flat tariffs must remain an ongoing option for consumers and that customers should never be defaulted into cost-reflective tariffs without their consent.<sup>2,3</sup>

We are not opposed to smart meter technology. Smart meters can benefit the electricity network and consumers where there are adequate consumer protections. NSA is concerned the accelerated rollout of smart meters is being used to push complicated and expensive tariffs onto ill prepared customers with the result being increased revenue to retailers.

As we have noted in our previous submissions to the AEMC, it is illogical to propose that consumers will adjust the level and time of their electricity demand due to cost-reflective tariffs but then deny them access or place paywalls on the data needed to inform their consumption decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> [AEMC - Review of the Regulatory Framework for Metering Services](#)

<sup>2</sup> [National Seniors Australia - Accelerated Smart Meter Deployment](#)

<sup>3</sup> [National Seniors Australia - AEMC Smart Meter Protections](#)

It is the intention of the AEMC and electricity industry to install smart meters in people's homes that record electricity usage over very short intervals. While retailers may only collect the data once a day, this is no reason that consumers shouldn't have free access to their usage data. If consumers are to be charged on a 30-minute basis and are meant to respond to price changes throughout the day, as is the case with cost-reflective tariffs, then they need live data to inform their decision making. It is not sufficient or practical for people to find out about their electricity use the next day, or more likely three days in arrears.<sup>4</sup>

As the ECA consultation paper states, the ECA is not aware of any retailer providing data the same day. In a report in 2021, AGL stated that the smart meters installed in New South Wales were "anything but smart" by standards of the time and collecting metering data once a day was "an outdated model developed at the time of dial-up modems and has been rendered obsolete by technological developments".<sup>5</sup>

Giving people access to their real time data will likely involve direct access to the smart meter, which is our preferred option. This would require updating the National Electricity Rules to remove the restriction on access to the smart meter communication port.

Australia could well learn from overseas examples.

- While the rollout of smart meters in the United Kingdom has had issues, they come with an "In-Home Display (IHD) which shows households their energy use in near-real time, expressed in pounds and pence".<sup>6</sup>
- Following government action in the USA, consumers there now have access to download their own electricity data.<sup>7</sup>

Similar regulatory action is likely required in Australia to provide consumers with access to their data. We reject arguments the market should determine the level and costs for these services, as some have put forward, given the significant power imbalance between consumers and the electricity industry. Electricity retailers seem unwilling to provide wide access to the data they hold if they can instead provide limited and out-of-date data.

**NSA continues to argue now is not the time to engage in the accelerated rollout of smart meters. If it is to proceed, given the complicated tariffs smart meters allow, the rollout should not come before consumer protections are in place, including a right to access usage data in real time.**

<sup>4</sup> [Rheem Australia Pty Ltd - Re: Review of the Regulatory Framework for Metering Services \(project reference code EMO0040.\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [AGL NSW Demand Response Final ARENA Knowledge Sharing Report May 2021](#)

<sup>6</sup> [GOV.UK - Smart meters: a guide for households](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Green Button Data - Green Button for My Home](#)

With regards to the questions raised by the consultation paper, we provide the following responses:

## **A definition of real-time data:**

- NSA supports the proposal that data is received either instantaneously (or at the very least within 5 minutes). Real-time data needs to be received quickly enough for consumers to respond, and so the data should be received shorter than the time period used for billing.
- The information provided should be sufficient to allow consumers to calculate their bills.

## **Data sharing arrangements or expectations:**

- There should be a range of data access methods available. The data should not be confined to the app of a retailer, but following the overseas examples be interoperable including via download and IHDs.

## **Recovery of data sharing costs:**

- Consumers should not pay for access to their data. The energy market is set to benefit from access to the consumer data, and consumers should not be charged to access their own data which they need to respond to industry pricing.

## **Real-time data interoperability:**

- Standards should allow for consumers to use their data on as wide a variety of apps and devices and platforms as practicable. The data should not be confined to an app provided by a retailer. Additionally, the data should be provided in a way that is understandable to consumers.

## **Privacy and cyber security safeguards:**

- Security and privacy of consumer data is important. However, we do not foresee additional risks from allowing consumers access to their data than those which already exist from the collection and holding of this data by industry.

## Other considerations:

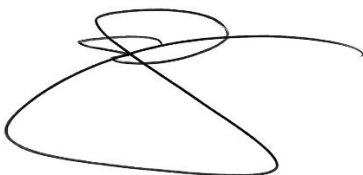
- As raised in the discussion paper, many smart meters without suitable communication ports may have already been purchased by metering parties. Additionally, there is a wide range of capability for already installed smart meters and so they may not be able to support local real time data<sup>8</sup>.

As discussed above, AGL has noted that the smart meters used as part of the current roll out are based on outdated technology. This is incredibly disappointing given that Victorian smart meters have a local access interface card despite being subject to an earlier rollout.<sup>9</sup>

Given the use of smart meters lacking this feature was a decision of industry and regulators, not consumers, the cost of this rectification should be borne by industry. Delaying until appropriate smart meters are available in sufficient quantities is yet one more reason not to proceed with an accelerated rollout.

- The AEMC should take the examples of the UK and USA, and other relevant experiences, into account as part of the rule-setting.

Yours Sincerely



Chris Grice  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>8</sup> [Energy Queensland - Draft Report: Review of the Regulatory Framework for Metering Services \(EMo0040\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Telstra Limited - Submission in response to the Review of the Regulatory Framework for Metering Services, Draft Report](#)