



Water



Energy

Factsheet



Review of small-scale network reporting requirements and prescribed customer consumer protections

The Commission is seeking feedback on the current reporting obligations contained in Small-scale Regulatory Reporting Requirements Guideline No. 5 (**Guideline 5**).

The Commission is also seeking feedback on the current consumer protections in place for mandatory prepayment customers (**prescribed customers**).

Written submissions are invited by 2 February 2024 and the Commission welcomes meetings with stakeholders regarding this review.

Guideline 5

[Regulatory Reporting Requirements for Small-scale Networks - Guideline No. 5 \(Guideline 5\)](#) was developed to consolidate all annual reporting requirements for small-scale networks licenced by the Commission, including: water, sewerage and community wastewater management system, electricity and gas operations.

The Commission committed to begin a review of the reporting requirements contained in Guideline 5 during 2023. Early stakeholder feedback has identified the following potential amendments:

- ▶ an additional reporting requirement for all retailers – ‘number and average duration of supply interruptions’

- ▶ an additional reporting requirement on hardship for all retailers – ‘average amount of bill debt for customers participating in a financial hardship program’
- ▶ an additional reporting requirement on hardship for energy retailers – ‘number of customers disconnected for failure to pay a bill’
- ▶ an additional reporting requirement on hardship for water retailers – ‘number of customers whose water supply is restricted for failure to pay a bill’
- ▶ a change to the timeframe for all retailers to provide information in relation to any material service issues from ‘as soon as reasonably practicably’, to within 3 business days, and
- ▶ the removal of the following reporting metric for all retailers - ‘number of customers receiving a concession’.¹

The Commission seeks feedback on these, and any other, potential amendments and invites input on the existing reporting requirements in Guideline 5.

In accordance with the Commission’s [Small-scale energy networks consumer protection framework review](#) final decision on amendments to the [Prepayment Meter System Code](#), the Commission will also include the following prepayment metering public reporting requirements in Guideline 5:²

- ▶ total number of prepayment customers

¹ Small-scale networks do not have access to concession data and therefore cannot report on this metric.

² The Commission’s Small-scale energy networks consumer protection framework review final decision, 2023, available here: <https://www.escosa.sa.gov.au/projects-and-publications/projects/energy/off-grid-energy-consumer->

[protection-framework-review/off-grid-energy-consumer-protection-framework-review](#)

- ▶ number of times emergency credit was accessed
- ▶ number and duration of self-disconnections
- ▶ number of times the minimum requirements for retailer follow-up were met³
- ▶ where follow-up is undertaken by the retailer, the reasons for disconnection by the customer, and
- ▶ number of prepayment customers reverted to post pay.

In addition, Cowell Electric Supply Pty Ltd's (**Cowell Electric**) prescribed customer reporting obligations will be included in the revised Guideline 5 – these amendments are explained further below.

Prescribed customer consumer protections

Prescribed customers are residential customers in the remote Aboriginal communities and associated homelands in Pukatja (formerly Ernabella), Mimili, Pipalyatjara, Amata, Indulkana (also known as Iwantja), Yalata, Oak Valley and Kaltjiti (formerly Fregon) communities. These customers are currently provided with electricity by Cowell Electric via mandatory prepayment in accordance with the [Electricity \(General\) \(Payment Condition\) Variation Regulations 2021](#) (**Variation Regulations**).

The Commission regulates the use of prepayment metering in South Australia through the Prepayment Metering System Code. However, due to the prescriptive nature of the Variation Regulations, many of the key consumer protections contained in the Code do not apply to prescribed customers.⁴

In response, the Commission undertook a [review](#) to establish a range of minimum terms and conditions for the sale of electricity via prepayment to these prescribed customers.

The minimum terms and conditions that have been included in [Cowell Electric's licence](#) include:

- ▶ Accessible communications – Cowell Electric must provide prescribed customers with information on their rights in a language and manner that meet their needs.
- ▶ Protected periods - prepayment meters will not disconnect, even where emergency credit is exhausted, on weekends or between 3:01pm and 9:59am on weekdays.
- ▶ Provision of emergency and friendly credit – to help avoid customers being disconnected while they arrange to top-up their account.
- ▶ Payment splitting arrangements for emergency and friendly credit debts – this enables prescribed customers to remain connected while paying down the debt.
- ▶ Flexible payment arrangements – where a customer has a debt that is not an emergency or friendly credit debt, Cowell Electric must offer an instalment plan that considers the customer's energy use and capacity to pay.
- ▶ Life support provisions – these protect prescribed customers who require life support systems from being disconnected.

A key aspect of the protections that apply to prescribed customers is public reporting that is intended to highlight any systemic issues or gaps in the consumer protection framework. Currently, Cowell Electric must provide the following data to the Commission on a quarterly basis:

- ▶ number of prescribed customers
- ▶ number of prescribed customers on payment splitting arrangements
- ▶ number of times emergency credit was used
- ▶ number of times friendly credit was used
- ▶ number of self-disconnections
- ▶ average duration of self-disconnection
- ▶ number of times the minimum requirement for retailer follow-up was met
- ▶ the reason for self- disconnection in those instances where retailer follow-up was undertaken
- ▶ number of life support customers notified to Cowell Electric, and

³ Where a customer has disconnected for three or more times in any three-month period for longer than 240 minutes on each occasion the retailer must follow-up with the customer to identify if the customer is experiencing financial hardship

⁴ For further information see the Commission's [Factsheet on protections for Cowell Electric's Community Prepayment Customers](#), 2022, and the Commission's [Quick Guide to customer protections for Cowell's Community Prepay Customers](#), 2022.

- ▶ number of life support customers registered with Cowell Electric

In addition to these metrics, the Commission has also sought prescribed customer consumption data from Cowell Electric and proposes to continuing obtaining this information, using the following metric:

- ▶ total electricity consumption (in kWh) of prescribed customers per community.

Data on these metrics are published on the Commission's website annually. The Commission committed to including these metrics in Guideline 5 after the publication of the first 12 months of data. Those data have now [been published](#), which offers stakeholders an opportunity to:

- ▶ assess the sufficiency of the current reporting metrics in capturing any systemic issues, and
- ▶ identify any potential improvements to the current consumer protections.

The Commission seeks feedback from stakeholders on the metrics that Cowell Electric must report on in relation to its prescribed customers, including whether any changes are required to better identify the drivers for prescribed customer self-disconnections. The Commission is also seeking feedback on the effectiveness of the existing consumer protection framework.

In requesting this input, the Commission notes that it has a narrow remit in relation to the consumer protections it can enact for prescribed customers due to the prescriptive nature of the Variation Regulations. The Commission has no role in setting the policy or statutory regime which underpins the scheme: under the Variation Regulations, the Commission's role is limited to ensuring that Cowell Electric operate in accordance with its electricity retail licence and *only* sells electricity to prescribed customers using prepayment metering.

Making a submission

Written submissions are invited by 2 February 2024, and the Commission welcomes meetings with stakeholders regarding this review.

Responses to this paper should be directed to:

- ▶ Review of small-scale reporting requirements and prescribed customer consumer protections

It is preferred that submissions and requests for stakeholder meetings are sent electronically to:

- ▶ reviews@escosa.sa.gov.au.

Please refer to the [Submission Policy](#) on the Commission's website, for further information about making a submission.

Next steps

Stage	Timing
Initial consultation	Until 2 February 2024
Draft decision published	April 2024
Consultation on draft decision	May 2024
Final decision published	October 2024
New reporting and regulatory obligations commence (as required)	1 January 2025

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The Essential Services Commission is an independent statutory authority with functions in a range of essential services including water, sewerage, electricity, gas, rail and maritime services, and also has a general advisory function on economic matters. For more information, visit www.escosa.sa.gov.au.

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