

CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES FOR ENERGY SUPPLY

The application of competition principles and the creation of markets for electricity and gas have reshaped these industries, especially their relationships with governments and consumers.

When beginning these processes of change, federal, state and territory governments mandated the following:

“The national electricity market objective is to promote efficient investment in, and efficient operation and use of, electricity services for the long term interests of consumers of electricity with respect to price, quality, reliability and security of supply of electricity and the reliability, safety and security of the national electricity system.”

The roundtable supports this objective but to recognise the industry’s importance and complexity suggests the use of the following caveat:

1. In meeting the objective of the national electricity market, all market participants (including governments and regulators) shall have regard to the essential nature of the service, the pecuniary interests of industry, diversity amongst consumers, and long-term environmental sustainability.
2. Energy should be generated, distributed and consumed in a sustainable manner, to meet the needs of consumers whilst affording effective protection of the environment and the prudent use of natural resources. Demand should be minimised and the use of renewable energy maximised to conserve and enhance environmental and social assets.

What is the Roundtable?

The National Consumers Roundtable on Energy is an informal coalition of advocates for energy consumers. The Roundtable is interested mostly in households and small business.

We consider that the supply of electricity should be regarded as an essential service, on par with water supply and emergency services such as police and ambulance.

We aim to engage with energy market reform and to ensure as far as possible that it does not produce deleterious results for consumers.

Electricity is an essential domestic service

Electricity supports fundamental human needs including safe food (storage, preparation) and safe shelter (hygiene, lighting, temperature control).

Electricity supports equipment that is critical to wellbeing and independence (health, communication). Beyond these fundamentals, electricity supports community engagement and family life (social interactions, employment, education).

Except in rare and exceptional circumstances, a regular connection to electricity supply is not discretionary or optional. In most instances there is no alternative to electricity.

A reliable, safe, affordable supply of electricity is a right rather than privilege and access must be guaranteed as far as reasonably possible.

This document is specific to electricity, but much of its content is applicable to gas, and some to the provision of water.

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Energy supply should be:

SUSTAINABLE

Sustainability - Energy supplies should be derived from a secure mix of sources, including renewable energy sources. Energy should be produced, distributed and consumed in an efficient manner so that energy demand is minimised and energy supply provides beneficial social and environmental outcomes.

ACCESSIBLE

Equity – Energy services should be provided to all people equitably so that pricing and service standards do not discriminate against people according to their geographic location.

AFFORDABLE

Affordability - Energy should be affordable for all consumers. Energy supply should not be denied to any consumer on the basis of financial hardship or other circumstances of vulnerability.

APPROPRIATE

Quality - Energy supply should be of a high quality appropriate to the intended purpose at its point of consumption.

Safety – Energy consumers should be protected from any dangers in the provision of energy services.

Reliability - Energy supply should be reliable and aim to ensure an uninterrupted delivery of supply, as far as practicably possible.

ACCOUNTABLE

Respect – Energy services should be delivered in a way that respects all consumers and their diversity of needs and capacity to participate in an energy market.

Information – Energy consumers should have access to information about energy services that empowers them to make informed choices and to negotiate their interests with service providers.

Rights – Energy consumers have rights to use energy for ensuring adequate standards of living and social participation. These rights are recognised in international human rights standards.

Privacy – Information about consumers held by service providers should be treated with care and shared only with prior permission.

Redress – Energy consumers should have access to free, fair and independent services for complaints resolution.

Representation – Energy consumers ought to be supported to have their interests represented and be able to participate in consultation and decision-making processes.