

This is the second edition of our e-newsletter designed to keep you updated on our inquiry into how energy companies assist customers facing financial difficulties to pay for their energy while remaining connected.



Chairperson's update

Over July, the Commission has continued to collect and analyse information that will inform the draft recommendations in our draft report, due to be published in late August.

While an important part of the inquiry is examining how retailers assist customers to remain connected to their energy supply, the inquiry is also looking more broadly at how retailers assist customers experiencing or likely to experience payment difficulties.

The information collected so far, both through submissions and investigations conducted by independent experts, has resulted in an emerging clarity about the issues that need to be addressed.

Our analysis is showing that there is significant variation in the assistance customers experiencing payment difficulties can expect, depending on their retailer.

Some of the key differences include:

- › How much debt customers accrue before they are offered assistance
- › The nature and the form of payment plans offered
- › The assistance customers are provided to reduce their energy consumption
- › The eligibility criteria for entry to hardship programs

It has also become apparent that the policies, practices and procedures of retailers require customers to subject themselves to assessment, evaluation and labelling in order to access the assistance they need.

The Commission is continuing to investigate and analyse these issues, which will be presented in full in the draft report published at the end of August.

The Commission has scheduled a series of public forums in September to communicate the draft recommendations from our Inquiry. These forums, details of which are outlined later in this newsletter, will be an opportunity for us to discuss with stakeholders the rationale behind these draft recommendations and receive feedback, which will inform the final report.

Thank you for your ongoing participation and cooperation with this inquiry. We will actively continue to engage with you over the coming months.

Dr Ron Ben-David

Chairperson

Consultation

Consultation with stakeholders has made an important contribution to our inquiry so far. To recap, we received **22 submissions** to the issues paper from retailers, consumer groups and regulators. We have contacted more than **40 organisations** around the State and have met with nearly 25 of these one-on-one to discuss the issues.

The next phase of our consultation will involve a series of public forums to discuss the draft recommendations.

Public Forums

The following public forums to discuss the draft report, which will be published at the end of August, have been scheduled around the State over September. Forums will be attended by Commission staff and Dr Ron Ben-David or the Commission CEO David Heeps. Venues will be confirmed on the Essential Services Commission website and in the August edition of this newsletter.

Date	Location
September 9	Moonee Ponds
September 10	Dandenong
September 15	Wangaratta
September 17	Horsham
September 18	Bendigo
September 22	Traralgon

Thank you for your contributions so far. If you have any queries regarding this inquiry please visit our website at www.esc.vic.gov.au/Energy/Energy-Hardship-Review or contact Celine Grant at energyhardshipreview@esc.vic.gov.au.

